



9 ways leaders can power human connection in a hybrid world

A desire for positive connectedness lies deep within our DNA as humans and can empower our health and wellness, as well as work-related success. As part of our collaboration with King's College London, our first blog focuses on Connection in a hybrid world. There's no shortage of research that demonstrates that social connection is a vital human need ([Martino et al. 2017](#)).

Social connection is often described as feeling part of something larger than oneself, to feel close to others and feel welcomed and understood. Recent studies looking at the effects of human interactions on health outcomes, identified that not having meaningful connections can be worse for our health than smoking [15 cigarettes a day](#) and is twice as dangerous to our health than obesity. Who'd have thought our physical health would be at such risk? In contrast, meaningful social connections correlate with our levels of happiness and serve as a buffer to stress. They can also help maintain a healthy weight, control blood sugar levels, and improve our overall mental health.

One of the top priorities for leaders today must be to help promote and grow social connection for those they are leading. Connectedness not only has great benefits at an individual level, but also for teams and the wider organisation.

Connection empowers innovation and creativity

Connection with others in the workplace who lift you up and genuinely care about you powers collaboration, innovation, and creativity, particularly if we can be vulnerable and authentic.

According to recent research from [Betterup \(2022\)](#), people who feel a stronger sense of connection at work, benefit from:

- 34% higher strategic planning skills
- 34% greater goal attainment
- 23% boost in growth mindset

In contrast, people who feel less connected with those at work are more likely to experience anxiety, [stress and even burnout](#) (Baumeister et al. 1995). Unsurprisingly remote working can exacerbate this, and teams who work remotely are more likely to experience higher degrees

of social isolation, loneliness, and concerns that one's [performance](#) is not visible (Bloom et al. 2015). The recent shift to hybrid working for many organizations has left leaders with this challenge to navigate and overcome not just for themselves, but for their teams. Such a challenge may initially fall low down on the list of leaders' priorities but without a healthy, happy, and fully functioning team over time leaders could find themselves with a whole host of new problems.

The Connection Paradox

So why are teams telling us that they feel more isolated, more transactional, despite spending more time than ever communicating in virtual meetings via the functionality offered? This paradox was clear in our recent research with King's College London, who interviewed 150 participants from industries across the globe, working in remote and hybrid teams.

The research identified that 'flexibility stigma' is still alive for many and manifesting itself in virtual presenteeism, the unhealthy belief that one must be always available ('always on') and contactable when working remotely. This is driving 'stolen attention', whereby people are attending but are not truly present in meetings, leading to unproductive multi-tasking and lack of boundary management. Collaboration fatigue and exhaustion are commonplace at the end of the day.

If you relate to any of these challenges, now is a great time to experiment with evidence-based practices for yourself and your team, to enable you to become more intentional and purposeful in how you connect.

Whilst there can never be a one-size-fits-all approach, as we all have different motivations and preferences, the power lies in finding both the connection and the differences in others and honoring those to work better together. As a leader, some of this responsibility lies with you, and there are approaches you can take to help strengthen the connection within your team and cultivate a culture of belonging for those you lead.

A more holistic connection with others

As a leader you can create greater connection across your team through the following:

1. Create new team rituals to build a shared understanding and a shared identity as a team; it is the 'why' you do what you do as a team, who you are and how you can best work together to achieve what matters. Consider creating a collective gratitude practice or strengths check-in.
2. Identify how best to use technology and tools for intentional team and individual working e.g., create workflows to see interdependent work, encourage your team to use shared documents instead of email.
3. Challenge every video meeting to ensure that it is the best way to collaborate. When is the phone more appropriate? Which meetings can you cut?
4. Use chat groups to create micro moments of connection online, that people don't feel pressured to use, but can be fun! Have you considered creating your own music channel, or pet channel?
5. Make 'moments that matter' in and outside of the office; meet in-person to co-create with others, encourage a sense of unity and collegiality through in-person connections.
6. Have unstructured moments of time with people within your wider team to learn about your colleagues more e.g., how might you create serendipitous 'coffee connections'?
7. Consider your team members' work preferences for hybrid working success as exemplified by the latest [Deloitte Business Chemistry research](#), e.g. introverts are less likely to speak up in comparison to extroverts in hybrid meetings, however they prefer working in person for the purpose of connecting with others.

A deeper connection with ourselves

To enable you to bring your best selves to others as a leader, you need to look after your wellbeing and protect your own ROEI (Return on energy investment).

8. Start by incorporating blocks of time into your diary for undisturbed periods of 'focus' and 'flow' into your day – at times that work best for you.
9. Make sure you allow enough rest time – neuroscience research shows that taking rests away from the screen is vital to allow you to bring your best, so try to take technology breaks every 90 minutes for at least 10-15 minutes.

As a leader, you can begin enhancing connection within your teams immediately. Think of the smallest step you can take today that will make a positive difference. Write down your commitment, share it with others, encourage others to do the same and start building connection across your teams.

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