

Healthier hybrid working

© Training Journal 30 September 2022 in Business And Industry, Education And Skills Tagged Business, Change, CPD, Culture, Engagement, Leadership, Management, Organisational development, Research, Talent and apprenticeships, Wellbeing - 5 Minutes

Cass Coulston explores recent research into ways of leading and thriving in a hybrid work environment

Hybrid working creates an opportunity to redesign how we work together, in a way that does not compromise, but enhances our levels of collective well-being and performance.

This was clear in recent research at King's College London, where 150 participants from industries across the globe, both leading and working within remote and hybrid teams, were interviewed to understand which factors helped or hindered their levels of well-being. What became clear was the integral role that leaders play in any redesign.

Leaders as social influencers

Leaders play a pivotal [social and emotional role](#) in influencing their team through role modelling either well-being enhancing, or well-being depleting behaviours, like having healthy boundaries for avoiding out-of-hours communication. If the leader is role modelling effective and healthy norms, teams are more likely to do the same. Leaders must therefore consider whether they are harnessing and creating energy within their ecosystem or depleting it.

Creating an embedded well-being strategy

Decades of research demonstrates that the creation of sustainable [work-related wellbeing](#) in organisations is not about one-off interventions, but requires a systems approach, at an individual, team and a workplace level. It is not simply the absence of stress or fatigue or the presence of job satisfaction, but encompasses the enhancement of employee functioning, mood, emotion, motivation, cognition, and physical health as well.

Facing new demands

Blog Collections

Our research illuminated several common demands that leaders across the globe are facing, that impact is not only about how they foster their own well-being but also how they empower it at a team level. 'Intentionality' and 'planning' are words frequently used by leaders that are thriving from a well-being perspective within this context. Yet, for many hybrid leaders, this requires a new set of capabilities and practices and consequently, it is not surprising that several tensions and paradoxes prevail.

Features

Value a more holistic life that enables professional and personal life integration with flexibility and control

The five most salient demands that can lead to cognitive weariness, greater anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and reduced levels of satisfaction appear to be:

Opinion

- **Weight of team wellbeing:** weighing heavily as a new pressure that leaders feel less control over or ability to support, resulting for some in feelings of powerlessness and less social support.
- **Communication intensification:** driven by a natural move towards more synchronous, that is live 'back-to-back' video communication, leading to communication fatigue and less purposeful interactions.
- **Interruptions and time fragmentation:** leading to unproductive multitasking and task switching, and ultimately less fulfilment and productivity by the end of the day.
- **A depleted sense of team identity:** resulting in a concern that relationships are becoming more transactional, with less personal connection and camaraderie, despite an increased level of communication.
- **Less able to disconnect:** driven by a lack of management of home-work boundaries, which can create an 'always on' sense of expectation and home-life conflict.

Magazine Library

Spur

Partner Content

Services Library

Video

Embracing new opportunities

TECH...

The promising news is that there is an antidote to these demands, that can be learned and practiced with some intentionality. A leader who thrives in this context is learning to embrace a wide range of behavioral repertoires and adapt to a new approach of leading themselves and others.

They value a more holistic life that enables professional and personal life integration with flexibility and control. They let go of top-down monitoring and recognise the importance of empowering others, enabling team members to problem solve and co-ordinate actions, with a sense of purpose and engagement. They also find more creative ways to create personal connections, both in and outside of the office, prioritising a deep sense of empathy and curiosity.

The following six behaviours are central to thriving hybrid leadership, evidenced by both leaders and team members themselves, who shared what effective hybrid leadership looks like to them.

- **Managing focus to achieve flow:** a pacing of more intentional, purpose driven work, choosing what work to do where to get the best outcomes; the scheduling of 'quiet time' and deeper work to be done in the most conducive setting, usually at home vs the office.
- **Creating healthy boundaries:** embracing rituals that enable an identity switch. If working from home, using the commute time to enhance their levels of wellbeing. e.g., going for a walk, locking laptop away, thereby reducing emotional drain and depletion at end of the day.
- **Empowering their team:** actively focussing performance management on agreed outcomes, clarity of decision-making and agreed updates not presenteeism, thereby enabling team autonomy and higher levels of trust.
- **Creating new communication norms:** Agreeing the best ways to communicate, both synchronously (i.e., live) and asynchronously (i.e., not live), honouring quality over quantity of technology utilised. For example, some teams are experimenting with no meeting Wednesdays, no afternoon meetings, the use of shared docs instead of e-mails.
- **Intentionally creating a team sense of belonging and connection:** learning to be more courageous in building new team rituals that enhance trust, personal connection, and psychological safety, both in and outside of the office, as well as purposefully ensuring more meaningful social interactions and collaborations in the office.
- **Demonstrating more care with their team:** demonstrating a sense of gratitude, empathy and learning to get more comfortable in showing vulnerability in what they share with humanity, making it safer for others to do the same.

Navigating a healthier normal

Just as organisations create strategies around building profit and growth, there is an opportunity to cement well-being as the foundation of the entire employee experience. This requires new capabilities and practices to be developed into organisational roles to provide all employees the opportunity to thrive, feeling their most energised and productive.

The opportunity to create a shared sense of responsibility for enabling thriving organisations and thriving humans to become 'the new norm' is in our hands.

How to start? Think of the smallest change that you can take today that would make a positive difference in your life and in the lives of those you lead. Write down your commitment, share it with others and start to create a healthier normal.

[Cass Coulston](#) is a leadership and team coach, organisational psychologist and PhD researcher and guest lecturer for BSc Organisational Psychology at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience (IoPPN), King's College London. Find out more at [Beacon Consulting](#)