Real World Group Leadership Guide Series

# The Top 5 Leadership guiding principles that enable high performance in hybrid teams through positive attitudes to work and wellbeing at work.

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# Introduction to Hybrid Working

Since COVID, we have learned that leaders typically need significant support to be able to adapt to leading hybrid teams, compared with in-person, which they are normally more used to.

Employees talk about how a lack of leadership confidence has led to managers trying to grab greater control, such as by micro-managing employees even more strongly, rather than trusting them to get the work done.

The effect of this increased control and reduced trust is more stress and anxiety among those employees, leading to increased distraction and reduced performance. Which creates a perfectly reinforcing loop back to managers not trusting their people in the first place.

The wider context is that the rapid move towards more hybrid working is just another part of the ongoing huge volatility in the world, with seismic change just around the corner at any given moment, and the ability for global changes that seem remote to affect us all. This means there is a greater need than ever for employees to be resilient, self-confident, able to handle change, and mentally and physically well. The need to up our leadership game is urgent and bearing down upon us.

# So what does effective leadership of hybrid teams look like?

This is the subject of in-depth research at Real World Group, building on our previous two decades of leadership and teamworking studies. While we are busy establishing through large-scale study what are the day-to-day leadership behaviours that enable hybrid working to produce the highest quality outcomes, here is what we have learned so far are the key guiding principles.

First of all, effective leaders of hybrid teams provide structure and direction about the future, as far as they are able to. None can truly know the future, but they avoid leaving people guessing where this is unnecessary. At the same time, they ensure that others are involved in shaping how the organisation or team should respond to the planned future – whether the overarching vision or a new target or goal. They involve them, consult with them and work to build a shared vision of how to get there.

They distribute leadership, coaching and supporting their team members to take on more responsibility, and to have greater oversight of activities and decision-making. Then they let go and trust them to succeed.

At the same time they provide appropriate levels of supervision and are proactive in ensuring their team is clear about the nature of their own and each other's roles and responsibilities. They show appreciation for what their team members generate.

They encourage and facilitate collaboration between team members. They help to ensure that who is in the office when has a degree of coordination to it, so that the experience can be valuable, rather than a waste of time or a disheartening experience. While providing support to team members themselves, successful leaders also encourage a culture of social support towards each other in the team.

They make sure that the team is a psychologically safe environment in which people can share ideas, and admit when they don't know how to do something, without fear of ridicule or shame. They do this through role-modelling their own infallibility, but also taking a tough stance on inappropriate and unsupportive or disrespectful behaviour within the team towards others.

Finally, and something often less attended to, but which has been found in research, is that the leaders of teams that successfully work remotely demonstrate a genuine belief in hybrid working as the way things should be. Doing this or not doing this can make a significant difference to team members' job satisfaction.

Of course these principles are largely the same as the ones we already knew about from years of research on in-person teams. Nonetheless, the greatest contribution that the move to hybrid working has made is the exposure of sub-standard leadership that we have been putting up with in organisations for far too long.

Now that the fissures, cracks and chasms have finally become unavoidable, let's harness this burning platform, maximise whatever resources we can get hold of and finally create organisations that thrive because their people do.

(HR Magazine)

# So what is Hybrid working?

**"** *Hybrid working is a form of flexible working where workers spend some of their time working remotely (usually, but not necessarily, from home) and some in the employer's workspace"*

Chartered Institute for Personnel & Development, 2021

Working predominantly remotely with occasional time spent co-located with colleagues

A 50/50 remote workspace blend

Variable levels of hybrid work depending on the time of year or seasonal fluctuations

Working predominantly from the workspace with occasional days spent working remotely

Flexible Working Taskforce. (2021) Hybrid working: practical guidance Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development on behalf on the Taskforce.

# How prevalent hybrid working is likely to be

**1970s**

WFH has been around since 1970s

**86%**

50 biggest employers in UK will encourage home working 2-3 days per week
(BBC, 2021; Grant Thornton, 2021)

**89%**

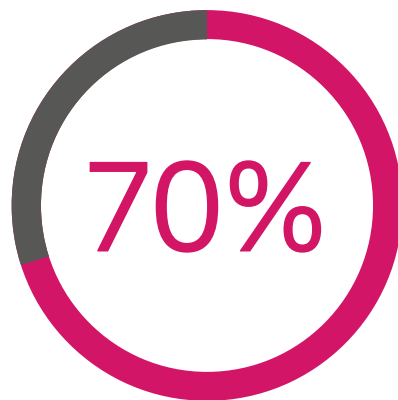UK businesses hybrid working will be permanent
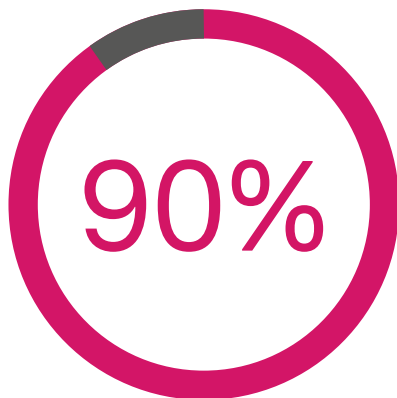(Robert Half, 2021)

**USA**

Similar findings in the US
(Bloom, 2021)

# The Facts and current Sentiment
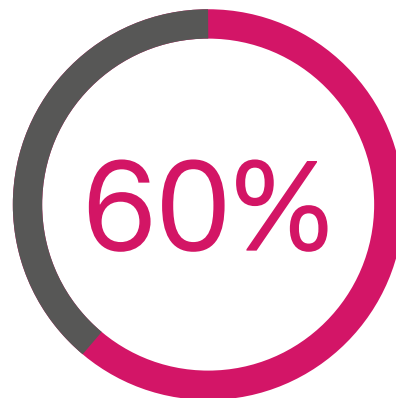
## Employees' desire to remain out of the office

'Work After Lockdown' study (Parry et al, 2021)

**70%**

In no rush to return to
the workplace

**90%**

Feel more productive
at home

**60%**

Enjoy the flexibility of
working from home

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# Introducing the Top 5 principles

## 1. Nurture Trust & Psychological Safety 2021

**60% leaders agree or unsure - people work less well outside office** (Parker et al, 2020)

**Exposing weaker "leadership" & lack of confidence**

**Micro-management; lack of trust; dysfunctional behaviour**

**More stress, anxiety & pressure on mental health**

**Increased distraction; reduced performance**

...and build trust between team members: essential for information & knowledge sharing Flavian et al, 2018

Psychological Safety is essential "The belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes" (Edmondson, 1999)

**Members of Psychologically Safe teams:**

- Respect each other
- Trust each other to experiment without judgement/to want to do their best
- Feel comfortable about asking for help
- Voice opinions without being judged or shamed, and
- Fail without being labelled a failure.

This research demonstrates just how essential it is to success in teams and it is critical in a learning environment such as hybrid working.

## 2. Demonstrate Empathy & Appreciation



- Appreciation of team members' contributions and achievements is essential for motivation and commitment (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2013)

- Empathy enhances trust as well as the belief that the leader is fair (Flavian et al, 2018)

- Demonstrating that you value someone's opinion and contribution enhances their sense of status – switches on reward circuitry (Rock, 2012)

- Building shared vision of success creates a win-win between appreciation and the strongest co-created future

# 3. Actively Develop Your Team



- Distributing leadership is particularly important given lack of in-person contact and potential dispersal (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002)

- Enhances team effectiveness & team member creativity (Han et al, 2017; Wood & Fields, 2007)

- Having trusting relationships helps facilitate the emergence of shared leadership in virtual teams (Liao, 2017)

- Being supportive through coaching and mentoring is particularly important while increasing individuals' capability

# 4. Focus on Performance



- A performance-oriented culture correlated with satisfaction with nature of work (Kwon & Jeon, 2020)

- A lack of goal or role clarity can be a major source of stress in remote working (Nayani et al, 2018)

- Getting the right balance between a relational and task-focused approach is essential (Brown et al, 2021; Eisenburg et al, 2019)

- Relational helps people recognise their value to the team, increases motivation & commitment

- Task-focused helps with clarity of roles, responsibilities & expectations as well as information sharing and coordination

## 5.  Communicate Well & Enable Collaboration



- Effective communication across remote teams improves team functioning & performance ratings by others (Eisenberg et al, 2019)

- Enabling and encouraging collaboration is essential – provide the technologies & use them (Kwon & Jeon, 2020)

- Always be mindful that you are being inclusive (CIPD, 2021)

- Team members need to help team leader manage increased dependencies and coordination requirements as they understand them best (Eisenberg et al, 2016)

- Demonstrating belief in hybrid working enhances satisfaction (Kwon & Jeon, 2020)

# Reflective Practice

## How can you enhance your leadership behaviour?

## Reflections: Which of these am I strongest/weakest in?

1. Nurture Trust & Psychological Safety

- ❑ Genuinely trust people to achieve well
- ❑ Build trust between team members
- ❑ Ensure psychological safety

2. Demonstrate Empathy & Appreciation

- ❑ Show genuine concern for your team
- ❑ Notice and appreciate contributions
- ❑ Actively seek opinions and build a shared vision

3. Actively Develop Your Team

- ❑ Distribute leadership as much as possible
- ❑ Provide support through coaching and mentoring

4. Focus on Performance

- ❑ Manage performance effectively
- ❑ Ensure role & goal clarity at all times
- ❑ Balance relational & task focus

5. Communicate Well & Enable Collaboration

- ❑ Ensure effective communication
- ❑ Enable & encourage collaboration
- ❑ Focus on inclusivity
- ❑ Demonstrate belief in hybrid work

# Real World Group

Organisations worldwide are facing the very real challenge of adapting to the way organisations work now.

Real World Group's Hybrid Team 360® shows you exactly what to focus on in order to create and enhance your hybrid and fully remote teams.

The focus of the Hybrid Team 360 is on behaviours, rather than personality types. These have emerged from cutting-edge research on how effective teams operate in today's transformed workplace. The tool helps your teams reflect on how they are working in a way that helps them become much more effective in their specific context.

You can find out more here: Hybrid Team 360 - Real World Group (realworld-group.com)

For more information of how we can help your Hybrid teams contact us at;

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