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## [Seven ways leaders can develop their hybrid skills](#)

Hybrid working might be here to stay for many organisations, say Karlien Vanderheyden and Katleen De Stobbeleir, but making it successful requires extra development for managers

Working wherever and whenever you want is a dream that is now beginning to become the new reality. However, though the increased flexibility and decreased commute times are certainly a positive for most employees, many organisations are still getting used to a hybrid working model. There are numerous variations in the extent to which people alternate between the office and home workplace. How can you ensure that employees feel supported by management to make their own choices, while at the same time ensuring effective cooperation and the desired results?

Now that both employees and employers are benefiting from (partial) remote working, many organisations are setting up a structured hybrid working environment. In order to take full advantage of all the opportunities offered by hybrid working, it is important to establish suitable frameworks and guidelines for employees.

Functioning optimally in a hybrid working environment requires more than just good WiFi and an ergonomic office chair at home. As a manager, the extent to which you facilitate your employees in making choices is just as important. After all, hybrid working requires different skills and mutual agreements from employees and managers alike.

However, though much of the focus of hybrid working has been on the employees, managers are still grappling with this method of working, and arguably it has made being a manager harder. So, how can managers develop their hybrid management models further and ensure they are getting the best out of their teams?

Through research, and our own expertise, we've identified seven ways leaders can develop their hybrid skills and ensure that they manage successfully in this format.

### **Increase your power to connect**

Empathy is essential for connecting with employees and enabling them to perform to the best of their abilities. An expert leader who shows little empathy evokes envy and fear. A warm, compassionate leader with little expertise evokes pity and disrespect. Try to find a good balance between both factors.

Non-verbal attitudes are especially important. Eye contact, nodding in understanding, a smile: it literally shows that you are attentive. If you are participating in a hybrid meeting, you will have to pay extra attention to bridge the distance. During the meeting, consciously look into the camera. Show clearly that

you are really listening by repeating information now and then, by asking questions or nodding in agreement.

Managers should also give employees the space to make their own decisions and plan their own agenda (appreciative leadership). This increases the development, creativity and job satisfaction of the employee and benefits the organisation.

It is also good for a manager to exude power, but don't be stubborn. Sometimes it's better to sit back and count to 10 instead of reacting emotionally. Try not to lose yourself in unrealistic goals, in lack of attention to detail or in hasty decisions. This is particularly important when working remotely, as it is more difficult to nuance an emotional statement due to a lack of non-verbal information.

### **Work on your listening skills**

Not listening well is one of the most heard complaints about managers. In order to connect with the team, a manager has to understand the employees well and be able to take their input into account.

### **Communicate effectively**

Good communication is always important, but even more so in a hybrid work environment. In online meetings, where the line is often faltering and many non-verbal signals are missed, it is useful to respond more slowly. Do not be afraid of silences; they can often be very useful.

To do so, managers must be clear about the purpose of the meeting, but also about the how and why of certain statements. If there is a difficult situation (such as a crisis or reorganisation), do not gloss over it: state what you feel or see in your employees.

If the conversation gets out of hand, if people get bogged down in details or if the participants get caught in a downward spiral, stop the meeting for a moment and name what you see. Agree on action points, and end every meeting with a summary and a clear action list.

### **Have an open mindset**

Successful hybrid working requires the right mindset within the organisation. The fact that production in many companies skyrocketed when people worked from home may have opened many eyes, but that does not mean that working from home and partly at the office, without any direction, will automatically go well.

Clear guidelines are needed from within the organisation in order to take full advantage of the benefits of hybrid working. Think about how many days a week you are at the office, which appointments you would rather not attend virtually, what hours you are available and reachable. However, it makes sense not to make these rules too rigid, so that the task and location can be adapted to personal preferences.

### **From control to context**

A focus on planning rather than results and hierarchy do not match the flexibility of a hybrid work environment. The secret lies in the shift from control to context in the organisation. Context means making strategic choices, but also a clear division of roles, transparent decision making and offering more control. One example is Netflix, which has a 'no vacation' policy, for example. Employees decide for themselves when and for how long they take leave. It may seem like a very ambitious step, but it works.

### **Give the organisations space and time to learn**

Hybrid working is a new reality that the organisation will have to get used to, despite our experiences during the lock-down period. Optimal deployment of collaboration tools (such as Teams or Zoom) is a challenge. Offer each other space in a respectful way to get better adjusted to each other in this hybrid work form.

### **Make hybrid working physically possible**

The physical layout of the hybrid working environment must be well organised in order to optimally support the new way of working.

Fast internet, both at home and at the office, is even more essential than before. Communication tools are useful for virtual meetings, chats or presentations. In addition, online collaboration platforms play a more important role as a virtual "walkway" where you can meet colleagues and easily exchange information.

The meeting rooms in the office should be optimally equipped for hybrid working. Give enough room to remote meeting participants, such as a large screen on which the callers are clearly visible and audible, or solutions where half the table is in the office and the other half is a separate screen at eye level so that everyone has a full place at the meeting table.

With the advent of hybrid working, the function of many company buildings is changing. Whereas they used to be primarily the location of your workplace, they are now primarily the place where you can meet your colleagues, co-create or brainstorm. Take this into account when designing the building. Fewer desks and fewer screens will be needed, but all the more meeting spaces.

Hybrid working is here to stay, and it's certainly a positive for organisations. However, managers must get to grips with this type of leadership to ensure their teams are productive and as effective as possible.

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