



Future of Work Advisory Group Innovative Ideas for Building Intentionally Inclusive Relationships in a Hybrid Workplace

January 2023

Based on the recent pulse survey responses, we know the overwhelming majority of our members are looking for ways to thrive in a hybrid environment — ways that capitalize on the benefits that remote work offers while mitigating some of the social and cultural impact that being remote has on the workplace. Doing so will require us to be intentional and strategic in ways we’ve never been before with our communication, consistency, boundaries, and inclusivity. Here are some ideas to bring to your organization to continue on the path of relationship building in a hybrid workplace.

Communication

- Employ closed-loop communication strategies as a norm. In closed-loop communications, the receiver of the information or task repeats it back to ensure the message is understood. In turn, the sender confirms the accuracy of the receiver’s understanding.
- Create clear project management systems to allow the tracking of progress and responsibility for action items across teams, reducing in-person check-ins.
- Schedule individual weekly check-ins either by topic, matter, or individual team member. Consider offering some in-person check-ins, if possible and appropriate.
- Create recurring weekly appointments for “office hours” to allow members of your team the ability to “pop in” to ask questions or address issues in a way that respects your schedule and availability. Of course, personal or work related emergencies are not subject to office hours.
- Understand your team’s individual preferences. Ask each team member about their communication preferences (e.g., instant message, email, scheduled meetings, etc.) and make every effort to communicate that way whenever possible. Consider a communication preferences survey with compiled results available to all team members. Be sure to update as members join and leave the team.

- Utilize an instant messaging system to facilitate more spontaneous communications with those who are working remotely. Use the system to “walk the halls” and greet people who are also online. Extra credit for branching out to greet those outside of your direct team or daily work — be intentional and inclusive when you “walk the halls” by making a checklist of all the individuals in your department, group, category, etc.

Consistency/Inclusivity

- Be consistent and intentional about when you are going to have certain types of meetings. Create more standing meetings and fewer ad hoc meetings. Standing meetings help to ensure all relevant parties are included, while ad hoc meetings do not. Rotate the day of week and timing of standing meetings to ensure that you are accommodating the convenience of all team members and not specific ones.
- Be disciplined about your communication channels. As a team, agree how certain types of communications will be handled (e.g., scheduling matters shared via instant messaging; assignments shared via email; non-emergency inquiries handled via “office hours” or virtual meetings).
- Schedule standing check-in meetings to track project progress.
- Use customized signature blocks for everyone to share name pronunciation and pronouns. Also update your name in Zoom or other virtual platforms to include this information.
- Develop a uniform remote/hybrid working policy that offers all employees the same access to remote/hybrid policies. If this is not possible, make sure there is a clear business purpose for the distinction and transparently communicate the policy and exceptions.
- Communicate expectations in a hybrid workplace and apply them consistently. Consider addressing topics like responsiveness, virtual meeting etiquette, in-person vs. remote work days/times, etc.
- Rotate responsibility for leading team meetings to ensure all levels and personality types have an opportunity to be recognized and develop leadership skills. Additionally, rotate team clerical tasks like note taking, head counts, etc.
- Utilize “ice breakers” with a cultural component. Ask team members to share something culturally significant to them, featuring a different team member at each meeting.
- Include remote participants in hybrid meetings by having the in-person participants log on to their video so the remote attendees can clearly see all the individuals in attendance.

Boundaries

- Be mindful of schedules across multiple time zones. If your team spans time zones, consider making a chart and distributing it to the whole team for ease of reference.
- Communicate your availability and utilize the Do Not Disturb feature. Use email or instant message to advise your team when you are taking a break or logging off for the day. Update email signature blocks with your availability.
- Establish periodic meeting vacations. Consider setting up periodic days (weekly, biweekly, monthly, etc.) in which your team agrees to hold no internal meetings.
- Utilize the time delayed send features and encourage others to do the same for emails that are sent after hours or on the weekends.
- Respect others' inboxes. Be mindful of the volume of incoming and outgoing communication and seek to moderate your communication to focus on substantive matters.

Culture Building

- Leverage the times you are in person. When you are in the office with others, make an effort to develop personal connections and discuss topics that are unrelated to work. Consider holding occasional team retreats, brainstorm sessions, potlucks, etc. If your organization has “anchor” days, consider creating choreographed connections by prescheduling meetings or lunches between the senior members of the team and the most junior members so that they benefit from in person and individualized mentoring.
- Develop relationships whether in person or remote by scheduling weekly check-in with others on your team to have conversations that are not work related.
- Know the market. In today's environment of fierce competition to attract and retain talent, be sure your organization offers remote policies that are on the leading edge, or at least comparable, to other organizations.