



<https://www.cipd.co.uk>

- [Home \(/\)](#)
- [Knowledge hub \(/knowledge\)](#)
- [People management fundamentals \(/knowledge/fundamentals\)](#)
- [Managing the employment relationship \(/knowledge/fundamentals/relations\)](#)
- [Inclusion and diversity \(/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity\)](#)
- Inclusion top tips for hybrid working

28 Jun 2021

Inclusion top tips for hybrid working

Make use of our top tips on inclusion for hybrid working

As many businesses transition out of the COVID bubble to a hybrid work model, businesses will face the challenge of changing aspects of work design and adapting to new work norms. As cohorts of employees will, in parallel, be transitioning to a new work model, the impact on the business could be significant. As well as considering and planning for the impact on policies and processes, financial targets, cash flow, customer service, business marketing and sales and so on, HR must also ensure that measures to support inclusion occupy a central place in these plans.

Make use of these top tips to ensure that fairness, inclusiveness and trust are at the heart of any transition to a hybrid work model.

1. Understand the importance of fairness

Transition to a hybrid work model will impact the whole organization (in one form or another), and requirement for “fairness” is critical, specifically at the early stages of transformation. As employers and employees consider, discuss,

engage, and ultimately agree to new work arrangements, individuals will observe how they are treated, relative to other individuals or employee groups within their organisation, or even employees within other organisations. This places a high bar for leaders and HR to address employee concerns, needs and desires. Failure to apply or communicate the concept of fairness will lead to divisiveness and potential unrest amongst employees who may feel isolated, frustrated, and even discriminated against.

2. Keep inclusion at the heart of all planning

In addition to fairness, the principle of 'inclusiveness' is paramount. A sustainable and effective business strategy, in this case for the hybrid work model, requires involvement from as many diverse employee groups as possible. Different groups will have different challenges, and all should be included and considered. The transformation process must include dialogue and partnership, with the outcome being positive for all employee groups, as well as for the business. Engaging with employee groups will enable understanding of the specific challenges and development of appropriate solutions.

3. Ensure trust underpins new ways of working

In addition to fairness and inclusiveness, 'trust' is critical. Micromanagement or excessive control will be counterproductive. Within a high trust environment, leaders can manage their teams in a manner that promotes a 'one team' approach, irrespective of where and when work is delivered. Transforming from a co-location culture to incorporate hybrid working will challenge leaders and managers, particularly when dealing with specific activities, i.e. promotion opportunities, training, incentive plans, career development, mentoring, creativity, and innovation. The degree of trust within the organization will be the basis for resolution of any challenges posed. Trust will be the key pillar for a positive work culture; when trust levels are high, transformation and change occur at a fast and sustainable pace. Lack of trust will cause delays, confusion, duplication, and general unease. Trust, combined with fairness and an inclusive approach, present a potent mix that will ensure organizational success.

4. Clarify the role of HR

From the outset it is imperative that the role and responsibility of HR is defined and communicated. There needs to be an open dialogue with employees in relation to critical organisation design strategy. The organisation design work and the development of new work methods place a heightened requirement for organisational (not just HR) agility. This is best done through co-operation, involving different work groups, where co-learning and co-education are at the heart of the transformation process. To assist in clarifying roles, responsibilities, and outputs, consider the following:

- HR should play a key role within this work; however, this is not another 'HR' project

- The work should be business led with HR acting as the 'subject matter expert and thought leader'
- HR is pivotal to potential solutions, however, HR should not provide recommendations
- Organisation-wide engagement, inclusiveness and ongoing communication is critical
- This transformation process will require a 'test and consolidation period' and feedback from all employee groups will be important as leaders assess progress, identify challenges, and remove roadblocks.

5. Establish a diverse and inclusive work group

A well-structured, representative, inclusive, and diverse work group should complete the initial work. The group needs to focus on analysis, assessment and preparing recommendations for leadership review. This approach demonstrates that this is not a 'top down' HR project.

- The work group should be cross functional and include people from all levels of the organisation
- Representatives from protected characteristic groups such as disabled workers, LGBTQ+, people from ethnic minority backgrounds and so on must be included
- The work group assesses challenges, specific to the hybrid work model, such as ensuring innovation and creativity, the potential impact to organisational culture, the effect on coaching and mentoring and internal opportunities and promotions, and, critically, how to ensure solutions to these challenges are as inclusive as possible. This is where the representation from different groups is vital.

6. Agree core design principles (CDPs)

Discussion and agreement on core design principles will help the work group develop proposals. At the outset it is important to gain alignment across the work group on agreed principles, as this will greatly assist with implementation.

- Establish core design principles that will guide the path forward e.g. promote inclusiveness, build trust, foster engagement, apply flexible implementation, ensure openness and dialogue, promote equity and equality and be cognizant of employee needs
- Align CDPs with the company culture
- Promote a principles-based approach, with supporting policy formulation and guidelines to follow. At a recent CIPD HR Conference, the CEO of Virgin Media Ireland, Tony Hanaway, was interviewed by Peter Cheese, CIPD, and he urged HR practitioners to scope out the principles and not spend valuable time crafting policies. The point being there is an opportunity for organization-wide engagement, regarding core delivery aspects for the hybrid work model. Focusing on detailed policies and procedures should come after.

For more information on transformation approaches and opportunities please refer to the [Inclusive cultures: facilitating hybrid working webinar \(/knowledge/coronavirus/webinars/inclusive-cultures-facilitating-hybrid-working-24-september-2020/\)](https://knowledge.coronavirus.webinars/inclusive-cultures-facilitating-hybrid-working-24-september-2020/).

7. Present findings and recommendations to leadership

The recommendations from the work group will be the time for discussions with the leadership team. Importantly, the work group, with support from HR, will have assessed, analysed, and considered the key challenges posed. This enables the leadership team to base decisions on high value and up to date insights from within their teams. The work group then:

- presents findings and recommendations to the leadership team
- proposes options and alternatives that are inclusive and achievable
- ensures that recommendations are viable for business success
- utilises internal and external data (e.g. survey data) to support their case. This provides leadership with rich and relevant data from employees across all groups.

8. Assess and review findings and recommendations

Review and assess the viability of proposals from the work group with senior leaders, whilst keeping inclusion high on the agenda. The interaction between the work group and leadership is critical and a true test of the ability of the organisation to engage positively, even when there may be divergent views and opinions. Following this review, leaders should:

- Share results with relevant groups and/or functional leaders
- Facilitate and discuss the detailed feedback
- Supported by HR, engage with line managers on timing, format, and flexibility of approach. This presents an opportunity to have focused engagement with line managers, to consider feedback provided and ensure solutions are consistent across the diversity of the workforce.

9. Agree an implementation and communication plan

Effective organisational work design models require high levels of engagement, enablement, and empowerment. Commence engagement with employees as soon as possible and design communications and interaction based on a partnership approach. This will enable practical and tailored solutions that support the evolution of organisational culture to incorporate new ways of working and new work design models.

A focused and detailed implementation and communications plan should be prepared to cover decisions made, communications, timelines, and ongoing review. The ability to re-engage and re-purpose as required should also be covered. Clear communication is essential. It should be made clear that there will be a “transition period” and all stakeholders should be aligned to the possibility of changes and alterations, if required. Ensure you cover the following:

- Implementation of this work will not be a replication of previous 'projects'
- An explanation of what is meant by 'the hybrid work model'
- Clarity regarding future organisation state
- Adequate notice regarding changes to work routine to allow enough time for employees to make suitable personal and family arrangements.

10. Plan your next steps

Ideally, the organization should enable employees to work within a transition period of 6 to 12 months, as employees get used to the new routine. Keep reviewing arrangements and seeking input from the work group to see how plans are working in practice and where adjustments need to be made. Build in a review of key learnings. This review process will enable employees to provide ongoing feedback to leadership as the process of formulating policy is taking place. There may be divergent views and opinions and leadership can reflect and assess all to ensure decisions made are based on the composite view of the organization.

The hybrid work model is the desired work model for most organizations and employees, post pandemic. Mounting evidence is pointing to the hybrid work model being the longer-term solution for many industries and businesses. In this context business leaders are on a journey of acceptance and HR leaders are supporting the transition within the new working world. The future of work is here now, so we should, collectively, lead from the front and design the fair and inclusive workforce and workplace that we need.

Written by Niall Eyre, MBA, FCIPD, Managing Consultant of [TransFormHR Consultants](https://transformhr.ie/)
(<https://transformhr.ie/>)