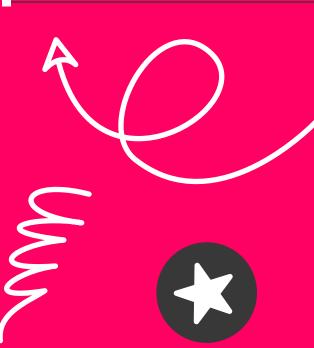
What It Takes to Make Hybrid Work

How to Set Collaboration Free and Solve the

Impossible Problem

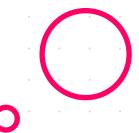


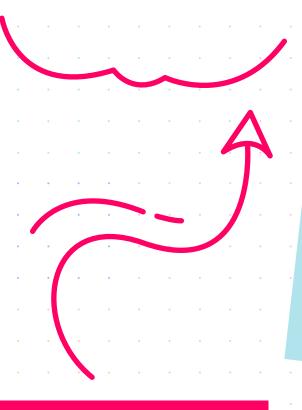


Going back to the office with 100% of the people 100% of the time, I think there is zero chance of that. As for everyone working from home all the time, there is also zero chance of that.

Daniel Pinto, COO of JPMorgan
 Chase & Co.







Success with a remote workforce, hybrid or fully remote, requires operational intentionality.

Unquestioningly sticking to systems and processes that made an office-based model successful will doom any remote model to fail.

-Sid Sijbrandij, CEO & Co-founder of GitLab

The future of work is hybrid.

Sundar Pichai,CEO of Google



The Answer to the Hybrid Question

How to Set Collaboration Free and Solve the Impossible Problem

Welcome to the New Era Of Hybrid Work

9

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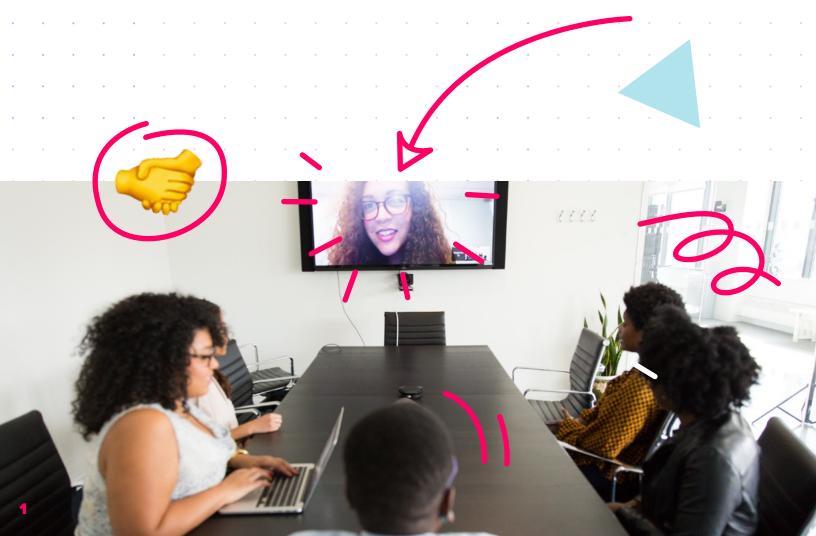


If we had to guess the biggest corporate buzzword of 2021, "hybrid" would be it.

Hybrid is on everyone's lips these days. The word has taken hold with business leaders, tech influencers, politicians, and the everyday employees whose working lives it will impact. And as the quotes above demonstrate, opinions on hybrid work are mixed.

With the end of the COVID-19 pandemic finally on the horizon, businesses around the globe are re-opening their doors. And that means it's time to head back to the office.

But after a year-plus of working from home, many employees have discovered that they like — or even prefer — remote work. **They don't want to go back to the way things were.** Instead, they want the flexibility to work where they're most productive, wherever that may be.

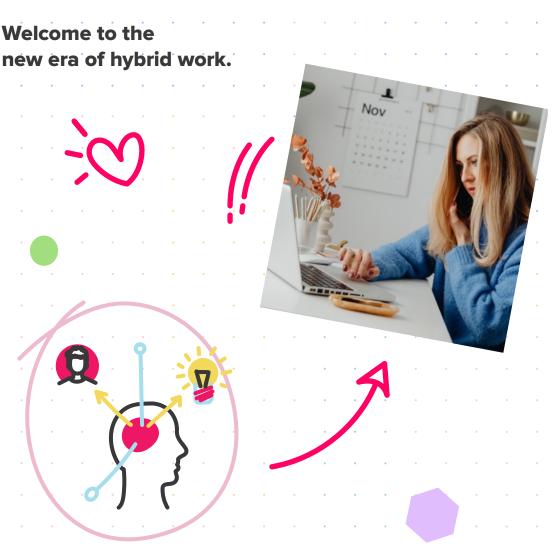


To retain and attract top talent, businesses are now considering hybrid work environments. In other words, they're implementing policies that allow both in-office and remote work.

These arrangements might involve a few days per week working from home, a mixture of fully-remote and fully co-located teams, or a "work-from-anywhere" policy in which employees can work from any location on any given day.

But here's the thing: navigating the new world of hybrid work requires organizations to adapt. It means reexamining expectations and asking how they might set up people and places — as well as digital spaces — so that teams can do their best work.

MURAL has worked with (and employed) hybrid and distributed teams since 2011, and we have learned a few things about effective work-from-anywhere collaboration. And now we're sharing our tried-and-true advice for navigating the challenges it brings.



Lessons From the Pandemic

The pandemic completely changed not only how people work, but general attitudes about where and how work gets done.

As stay-at-home orders went into effect around the world in March of 2020, businesses shuttered their doors and instructed their employees to work from home. Meetings moved to Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, discussions shifted to Slack and other chat platforms. Collaboration changed from in-person brainstorming and feedback sessions to virtual back-and-forth via shared documents.

And the shift from in-person collaboration to remote didn't only affect the tools teams used to do their jobs. It changed just about everything about their working environment. Suddenly, teams had to adjust to days full of video meetings and an increased reliance on asynchronous work. Many struggled through missing social connections with teammates. Others dealt with a sudden lack of trust from managers. Everyone was on the hunt for collaboration that works.

Teams thought this sudden and necessary shift to remote work would last only a few weeks. However, as the pandemic continued for months and then a full year, teams globally adapted to the "new normal."

And some discovered this way of doing things wasn't so bad at all. In many ways, it was even an improvement.



Hybrid is Not New

What is hybrid?

A hybrid organization is one that allows some combination of in-office and remote work. Some employees may be fully remote and others only in-office, or each worker may engage in both in-person and virtual work.

For all of the current discussion around hybrid work, the fact is that it isn't a new way of working at all. In fact, when MURAL was founded ten years ago in 2011, it was to make it easier for teams to work in hybrid circumstances. At the time, it was painful to collaborate and co-create remotely. There was no way to collaborate visually — that is, use drawings and diagrams to share ideas in a very raw format. PowerPoint slides, for example, gave the illusion the ideas presented were "final versions" to be judged, as opposed to possibilities to be explored.



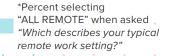
MURAL was born to provide space to imagine together with a team — and do it easily from anywhere. Right away, MURAL was co-located between the United States and Argentina with some employees working remotely. Like so many other organizations that had to find ways to work and collaborate regardless of location, MURAL adopted a hybrid work model.



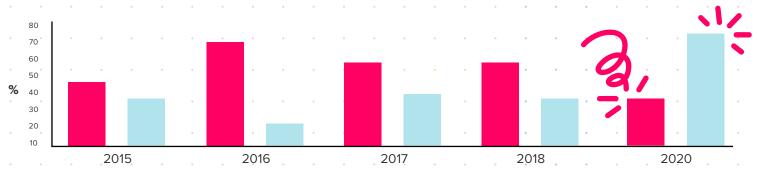
While in many ways MURAL was early to hybrid, from a different perspective, the trend to a hybrid or flexible work arrangement has been ongoing for years. Teams have shifted more and more of their productive work to platforms that could be accessed from anywhere, with or without an office.

Hybrid Workplaces Have Existed for Years

According to our annual customer survey, an average of 60% of teams were hybrid/mixed from 2015 to 2018. In 2020, that percentage dropped to 23.1% as companies went fully remote. In other words, the pandemic was a break from the existing hybrid work paradigm. Only now do we see that the ability to work remotely or in the office is a flexibility that might be embraced — if it's done well.



*Percent selecting
"MIXED" — that is, hybrid — when asked "Which describes your typical remote work setting?"



The Good: The Surprising Benefits of Remote Work

Although hybrid isn't new, the pandemic drove a collective "awakening" to the potential benefits of remote work. Over the course of 2020, many knowledge workers discovered an increase in productivity while working from home, including improved ability to prioritize and more time spent on valuable work. In fact, remote work started to become a preference in addition to a necessity.



64% of workers would forgo a \$30K raise to continue WFH



The hybrid/WFH benefits weren't relegated to the employee side, either. Employers experienced them too, with 94% describing productivity as higher or the same as pre-pandemic levels. And with businesses losing an estimated \$600B to in-office distractions, the switch to remote work came with some real cost savings.

63% of knowledge workers would prefer a hybrid work environment post-pandemic



With both sides seeing the benefits of this work arrangement, distributed or remote workforces suddenly looked like the future.

But this new way of working was not without its challenges.



The Challenging: Communication Breakdown

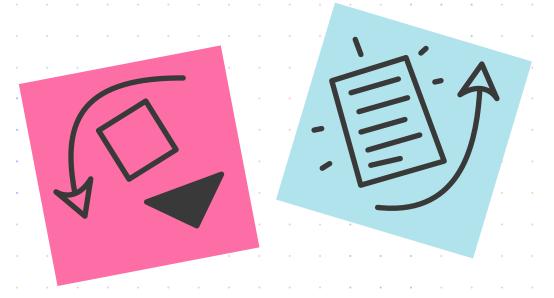
The pandemic also laid bare almost everything about remote work, and not just the good. Hybrid work isn't easy and the crux of the problem is communication — that is, the imbalance and friction in communication caused by hybrid work situations. Let's break this down further into three problem areas:

- 1. Collaboration
- 2. Clarity
- 3. Inclusion and Engagement

Prior to the pandemic, most companies weren't all that great at navigating these challenges. In fact, they sucked at it. But over a year of experience has led to a lot of improvements. Combine these with our own extensive WFA/WFH expertise, and the upcoming "return to normalcy" becomes an unprecedented opportunity to transform the workplace into a workspace.

Now is the time to apply what we've learned about hybrid and remote work to provide teams with the resources they need to do remarkable work together no matter where that work happens.

Solving For .o. Collaboration, Clarity, and Inclusion & Engagement in a Hybrid Work World



Amidst all the negatives of COVID, there were so many positives: creating this level playing field where everyone's remote and we have full inclusivity. There's a lot of really good things about that. So how do we retain some of those things as we get into more of a hybrid situation?

 Rob Dickins, VP & Chief of Staff to the CEO, Autodesk

From Going Hybrid? Addressing the Elephant in the Zoom

Hybrid Problem 1: Collaboration

Teamwork is hard enough when everyone is in the same room. Add in different time zones, spotty Wifi connections, and poor audio, and you've got a recipe for trouble.

In the "before times," remote workers on hybrid teams knew all about the difficulties — technical and otherwise — that WFH can bring. They lost audio at inopportune times, missed out on both personal and professional conversations around the water cooler/coffee machine, and navigated a whole portfolio of tools for virtually collecting feedback and communicating decisions. And, oftentimes the in-person would forget to call on them to speak during the conversation or, worse, might even forget to dial them in at all.

Now, everyone else knows their pain. During the pandemic, we've all experienced issues connecting to Zoom, learning how to use various remote-work solutions, and of course, wondering (and worrying) if we missed something important.

These long-standing problems won't suddenly be wiped out in the post-pandemic working world (bummer, we know), but hybrid teams will be better equipped to manage them with some smart planning, solid advice from companies that have been there and done that, and learnings from the past year.

After all, collaboration is absolutely critical to innovation, so hybrid and work-from-anywhere companies need to get it right. Luckily, we've got some experience in that area.



Solution:

The Digital-First Mindset



If it isn't digital, then it didn't happen.

Truly effective hybrid teamwork requires much more than installing high-quality mics in every conference room or scheduling virtual team building activities. Instead, it involves a complete rethinking of your entire work environment to be digital from start to finish.

The cornerstone?

Think of the digitally-defined workspace (not workplace) as your company's HQ and single source of truth.



How Does This Help?

In many hybrid environments (at least pre-pandemic), the "core" employee group (including company leadership) is co-located in the same physical office. Fully-remote workers typically make up a smaller cohort, and often end up on the wrong end of the "unintended hierarchy" of remote vs. in-person workers. Remote employees are seen as less capable, reliable, and willing to lead than their onsite counterparts, simply due to being less visible.

Post-pandemic, however, a digital-first mindset can level the playing field. If every meeting, every document, and every decision has a digital component, then every team member ends up on equal footing, with equal access to the same resources.

No more here, no more there — you get participative collaboration from anywhere.

Here vs There

The "here vs. there" mindset refers to less-favorable attitudes toward remote workers that can arise in majority-onsite hybrid environments. Typically, the on-site team is considered the "real" or "core" group, while remote workers are seen as outsiders. This issue is compounded when the environment lacks a digital-first mindset and remote team members miss out on key information and important decisions.

Once digital is the default, everyone can finally be on the same (virtual) page.



Defining the Digital Workspace

In order to use WFA as your organizational solution to the hybrid problem, everything must have a digital dimension. This includes aspects of your workspace that don't immediately seem like they need to be digitally-defined, such as your conference rooms, meeting areas, and individual workstations.

An effective digitally-defined workspace encompasses four key components:

- 1. Software
- 2. Hardware
- 3. Environment
- 4. Products



The Digitally-Defined Workspace

Software

Real-Time
Communication (Slack)
Asynchronous
Communication (Email)
Content Sharing and
Storage (Google Drive)
Workflow Management (JIRA)
Visual Collaboration (MURAL)

Hardware

Computers Monitors Touchscreen Displays Tablets

Products

Microphones Cameras Whiteboards Recording Devices

Environment

Desks Layout Meeting Spaces



A Note on Touchscreens

Touchscreen displays play an important role in allowing seamless digital collaboration between onsite and remote team members. However, the touchscreen display market is becoming increasingly crowded with many different brands, screen technologies, sizes, and extras to choose from.

Here's how to make the right pick for your hybrid team.

A New Way of Thinking

A digital-first mindset goes beyond the tools and solutions outlined above. It's about attitudes and habits. Every employee in a WFA or hybrid workplace — and especially the decision-makers — must practice digital discipline. Your methods and your facilitation practices must also adopt a digital-first mindset, often requiring a re-casting of our typical in-person approach.

Digital discipline definition

"The company-wide practices and processes that exist to ensure all ideas, decisions, comments, and feedback are captured digitally and the adherence to them."

In an in-person environment, information is often shared before or after meetings, at the watercooler or coffeemaker, or during casual hallway chats. That leaves your remote colleagues out of the conversation. Making sure all decisions, updates, and new information have a digital record means that all employees, no matter where they are, have access to the same resources. However, that only works if everything is indeed captured digitally.

To establish digital discipline, your hybrid or WFA team needs formal rules of engagement (more on that in the next section) and shared understanding around the importance of virtual teamwork



Hybrid Problem 2: Clarity

When teams are working across time zones and continents, alignment is the name of the game.

Even prior to the pandemic, one piece of advice often given to remote workers was to over-communicate. In other words, make things clear, as frequently as possible. If you're not meeting your coworkers face-to-face in the same environment at the same time day after day, collaboration can suffer. Progress and momentum can stall out. And the lines between who is doing what and when can get fuzzy.

A lack of clarity can have serious negative consequences for your entire organization, ranging from missed goals and underperformance to employee conflict and customer dissatisfaction. This is true even for an entirely remote or fully co-located company.

However, the effects are amplified on hybrid or WFA teams due to the fluidity and flexibility inherent in these modes of working. Take hybrid meetings — the team often needs to deal with two sets of instructions: one for the in-person group and one for the online team. Getting each of the group types to move into breakouts, for instance, requires different coordination and timing.

So, what's a hybrid or WFA team to do? The answer lies in establishing clear rules and expectations for all team members, no matter where they work.





Solution: Written Rules of Engagement



We know, we know. It may seem counterintuitive to be talking about rules when we've touted the importance and benefits of flexible working arrangements.

While the term "work from anywhere" might sound like an "anything goes" situation, the reality is that this and other forms of hybrid work are only effective when clear rules are in place. To lay the foundation for WFA (or hybrid), you need to create (or revamp) explicit rules of engagement. Otherwise, employees will be uncertain at best and completely confused at worst.

Now, what format these rules take is up to you: a team agreement, a WFA contract, a living document, a mural, etc. But they need to be written out and shared with the entire company, as well as easy to access in case of questions.

A hybrid or WFA environment can be described in terms of five key aspects — the 5Ps of hybrid, if you will. These are:

People: Who is on your team, what skills and knowledge they have, how they're trained, and their roles within the organization.

Process: The more informal habits and interactions that describe how the team collaborates, gives feedback, and makes decisions.

Place: The physical areas where your team members work, including home offices, desks, and meeting rooms.

Policy: The formal rules and guidelines that govern how your company is run, from approvals and coordination to travel and visitors.

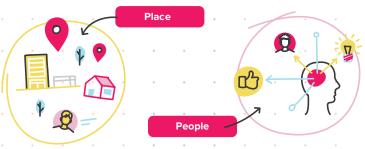
Product: The tools your team uses to get their jobs done, including hardware, software, and devices.

Ideally, your rules of engagement should encompass all five, but if you're looking for a place to start, we recommend Policy and Process.









Policy

These are the parameters and logistics that define what is and isn't allowed on the WFA team. For example, they set specific guidelines for who can work from where (i.e. office, home, somewhere else) and when (i.e. time zones, blocks of time). Can all employees work from anywhere, at any time? If employees are expected to spend some time in the office, how much time is that, exactly? One day per week? Two?

Without clarity and alignment on these basic rules, your employees will feel uncertain or even hesitant about choosing where to work. This is especially true if leadership does not follow these policies. Make sure these rules apply to everyone to ensure an equal playing field.

Another important policy consideration is security.

Workers—your own and your partners'—are far more likely to use their home Wi-Fi and personal devices to access company platforms. Consumer-grade messaging apps are unlikely to provide the kind of security and regulatory compliance that an enterprise needs. Your organization must think through considerations like virtual private networks (VPNs), device management platforms, and enterprise-grade collaboration solutions.



Key Questions: Policy

What is your overarching philosophy with regard to remote and in-office work? (Hybrid, WFA, flexible, etc.)

Will any employees need to be completely office-based?

Will any employees be remote at all times?

Do employees need to be in-office a certain amount of time (1-2 days per week, for example)?

If an employee will be in-office, do they need to notify anyone ahead of time?

What safety protocols will in-office employees need to follow (social distancing, masks, etc)?

Will proof of vaccination be required to work in-office?

Will employees be allowed to use shared equipment (whiteboards, devices, etc.) when in the office?

Does the team have core hours, and if so, what are they?

What security measures will be in place both in-office and with regard to digital and data security?

What's the expected response time to asynchronous communications?







Process

This refers to the team's implicit habits and informal methods — how they interact with one another, run and participate in meetings, and engage with company culture. You probably already have some documentation in this area, especially around onboarding. However, you'll need to update it (or completely rewrite it a lot has changed in the past year!) to reflect new WFA initiatives, programs, and training.

What's in a ritual?

Formalized habits or rituals are useful ways for encouraging equal participation between remote and in-person employees. For example, you might run each brainstorming session using the "ping pong" approach, with each attendee picking the next person to speak who is opposite them (e.g., an in-person attendee picks a remote person to speak next, and vice versa). Over time, these rituals will become second-nature to your team and an ingrained part of your organization's culture.

Thinking through hybrid or WFA is a great opportunity to think through basic assumptions about work — and especially collaborative work. For example, consider meetings. In April 2021, Microsoft reported that time spent in meetings had risen nearly 150% over the prior year. Is your organization setting expectations around when and how to have meetings so that they are an effective use of time?

Asynchronous work is also on the rise as software makes it possible to unbundle the exchange of information from a live setting. Now, teams are able to chat at all hours of the day through platforms like Slack and Microsoft Teams. Asynchronous work can be a powerful way to free teams from working at the same time and place; however, it also requires being thoughtful about how to use this freedom effectively.



Key Questions: Process

How will onboarding for new employees work in your hybrid or WFA environment?

How will leaders be trained to evaluate hybrid/WFA teams effectively and fairly?

Are your current facilitators experienced with running hybrid meetings?

If not, will you provide training?

Will all team members be expected to complete training on effective hybrid collaboration?

Will you offer training on the various tools used to make collaboration easier?

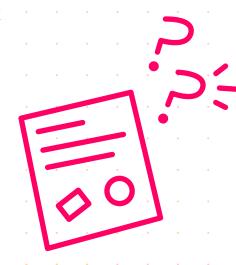
What rituals and habits will you put into place to remove barriers to teamwork?

Will hybrid meetings require two facilitators, one for in-person attendees and one for remote participants?

Which tools or virtual spaces should be used for brainstorming? Critique? Final approval?

Are there any guidelines regarding when to use chat versus email to communicate?

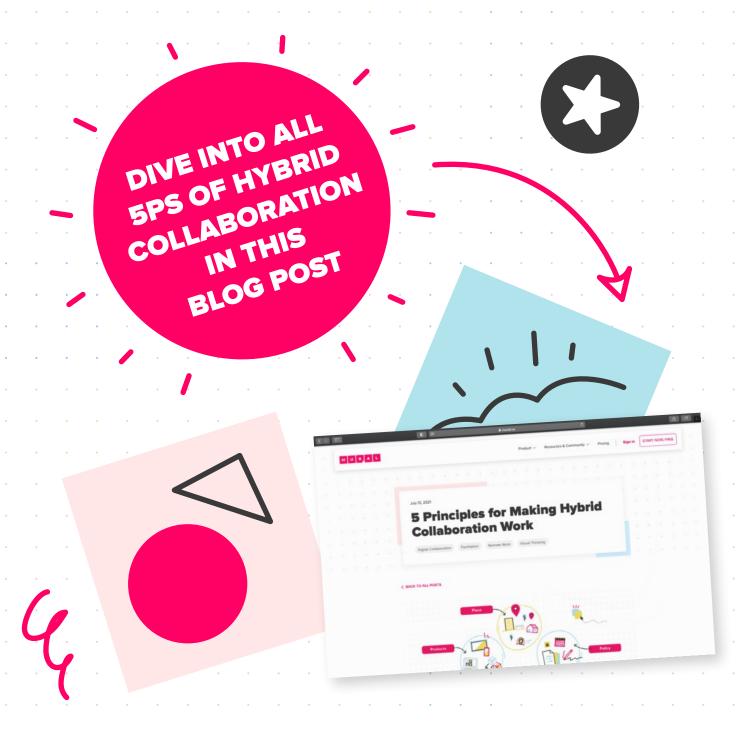
How will final decisions be communicated?



Involving the Team

The success of hybrid collaboration depends on everyone. So, crafting the rules of engagement should involve multiple departments, not just leadership or HR. Gather insights and feedback from across the company before making permanent policy or process arrangements.

Taking a multidisciplinary approach to these decisions will ensure you're meeting each group's needs, as well as those of the organization overall.



Problem 3: Inclusion and Engagement



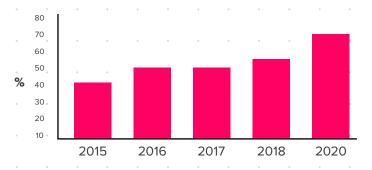
Company culture isn't just a buzzword; it's a way to create belonging and foster effective collaboration.

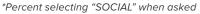
However, it's particularly difficult to build a strong culture when team members are located around the world. Prior to the pandemic, many remote employees felt left out of their organization's culture simply due to lack of proximity and in-person connection.

There's an important social component to how people come together in a physical setting (as the isolation of the pandemic made abundantly clear). Working together in the same space can allow for spontaneous collaboration and interpersonal connection, from hallway hellos to watercooler chats.

In fact, our annual surveys of remote and hybrid teams have shown that missing personal and social components are one of the most — if not the most — frustrating parts of remote collaboration.

"Missed Connections" Are a Real Problem





[&]quot;What frustrates you most when collaborating remotely?"

With so many employees feeling the strain of social isolation, this challenge is an especially important one to solve.



^{*}Source: MURAL survey

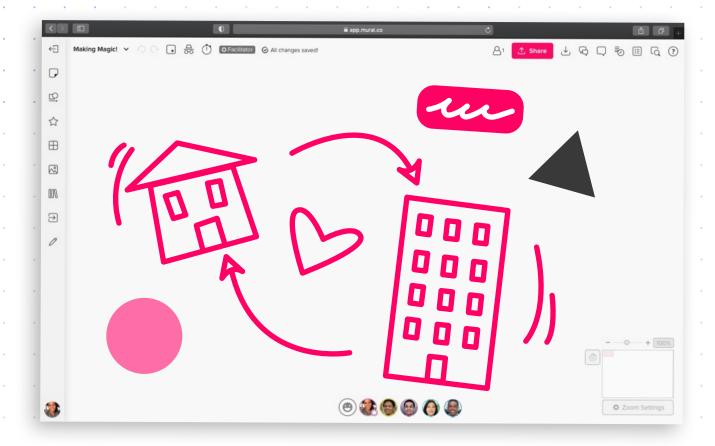
Solution: Mitigate the "Here Vs. There" Mentality

Remote workers default to getting the short end of the social engagement stick. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Earlier, we mentioned the "unintended hierarchies" that hybrid work can create, with remote workers at the bottom and in-person employees at the top. At the core of this issue is the "here versus there" mentality. The "real" team is "here" in the office and remote employees are "there," away from the action. In-person workers get perks like free snacks; remote workers don't. On-site employees get seen by the higher-ups; distributed employees are hidden behind a computer screen.

One benefit of fully distributed teams is that there is no here or there—
everyone is "there." Work-from-anywhere arrangements also address this mindset
by allowing employees to be here, there, or both as they see fit.

Hybrid teams can mitigate this mentality as well with a little effort, planning, and digital-first thinking.

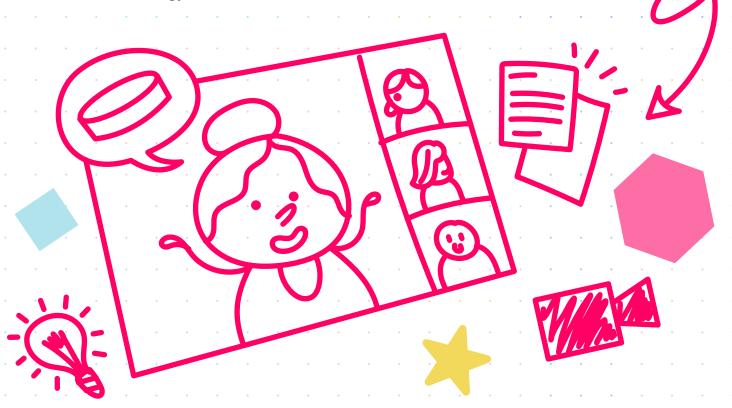


Uplevel Your Meetings and Facilitation

The aim of hybrid meetings is to encourage equal participation between remote and co-located attendees. However, conversing and taking turns is much easier when face-to-face. The pace of an in-person conversation can easily overtake the rate at which remote teammates are able to contribute. What's more, differences in communication patterns (extroverted vs. introverted, for instance) may be exaggerated.

For remote participants, there may even be a heightened gender bias in the conversation. An introverted woman dialed into a room full of extroverted men may not get a chance to speak. To address this, meeting facilitators should use intentionally designed activities to ensure balanced communication and equal participation. This requires being intentional about participating. For example, practice pausing for remote attendees to participate. Consider using "hand raising" to get the floor.

A powerful approach is to add a common, digital space for collaboration. MURAL helps teams collaborate from anywhere easily by providing an always-available visual space to share ideas. By adding a visual collaboration space in MURAL to every meeting and workshop, participants naturally have a common ground — a single source of truth for your team's ideas. This naturally eliminates the "here" vs. "there" mentality because no matter where anyone is working they can always be "there" in the digital space. It also builds alignment and a shared understanding as everyone can take part in the emergent understanding of a problem, idea, solution, or strategy.



Facilitation becomes a critical supporter of hybrid meetings. Think of facilitation as the intentional coordination of teamwork in order to improve participation and the likelihood of successful outcomes.

Facilitation skills are leadership skills that each of us has to have to create the world we want to create.

- Nevada Lane

Founder, Lane Change Consulting

In a hybrid setting with some teammates working face-to-face and others participating remotely, it can be difficult for one person to facilitate both the in-person and remote cohorts. That's why we recommend having two co-facilitators (one for each group). You also might want to have two scribes, two time keepers, and two of any other roles you need for the meeting. Structure the sessions to have a mix of individual contributions and read-outs with group discussions. Collaboration activities that don't give everyone a chance to contribute individually and favor open discussion will naturally exclude people in hybrid contexts.

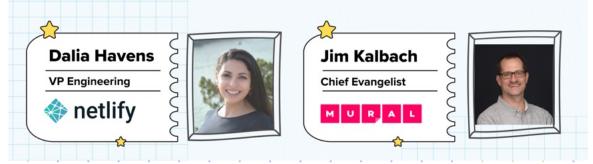
Before every hybrid meeting or collaboration session, come up with a set of goals and a detailed agenda. In other words, get started before you get started. And keep the momentum going afterward. A digital collaboration tool like MURAL is extremely helpful for this. How many times have you ended a great meeting only to forget your action plan? Keep it all in one digital resource for easy access and quick updates.



Leverage Both Asynchronous Communication and Multitasking

Working in different time zones or during non-traditional hours is often thought of as a hurdle. We don't see it that way. In fact, asynchronous communication is a powerful tool that accommodates a variety of workstyles.

Remote Collaboration That Works: Practical Steps for Productive Teamwork



Remote Collaboration That Works

Collaborate effectively, no matter the distance or the time. Get practical tips on productivity across your team from Dalia Havens, VP of Engineering at Netlify, and Jim Kalbach, Chief Evangelist at MURAL

As noted above, meetings can be dominated by stronger personalities, making quieter colleagues hesitant to voice their ideas. However, digital tools like MURAL allow participants to add thoughts, feedback, questions, etc. to a digital canvas at any time and from anywhere. So if one team member prefers to think through a suggestion before mentioning it during a meeting, they can simply share it in the virtual workspace.

Multitasking, which is basically the opposite of asynchronous work, is also easier when using a visual collaboration platform like MURAL. Rather than going around the room and asking everyone to state an idea, allow meeting participants to type them into a shared document, MURAL, etc. You'll get a flood of suggestions in considerably less time.



Break Culture Free From Office Walls

When you picture a team building activity, you might think of coworkers at an offsite retreat, maybe even doing a ropes course or something similar to encourage trust and camaraderie. But team building can happen virtually as well. Colleagues don't need to be in the same room to get to know each other. We've got a few suggestions below to get those creative juices flowing.

Sharing Is Caring	Casual Chat	Ready, Set, Draw	Healthy Competition	Lively Back- and-Forth
Learn something new about your colleagues.	Have a relaxed discussion with your fellow teammates.	Warm up those artistic and visual skills!	Game on!	Bounce between onsite, remote, and everything in
	· · · ·	· · · · ·		between.
Share Your Office	Random 1:1s	Selfie Sketch	Jeopardy!	· Ping-Pong
Show and Tell	<u>Virtual</u> Watercooler	Sketch Your Neighbor	Obstacle Run	Popcorn
Team Bookshelf	Team Slack Channels	Me, in Images	If I Were an Animal	Round Robin



All Together

The age of hybrid and work-from-anywhere is here. After more than a year of practice with all things remote, it's time to apply what we've all learned — the good and the tough — to the post-pandemic working world. In spite of its challenges, hybrid and wfa have the potential to transform your organization for the better.

So, to summarize, keep the following suggestions in mind as you embark on your continuing — or new! — Hybrid journey:

Build a digitally-defined workspace

Your org's software, hardware, environment, and products should all have a digital dimension.

Think digital first

Consider the digitally-defined workspace, not a physical hq, as your company's home base.

Practice digital discipline

Create and adhere to policies that ensure all ideas and decisions are captured digitally.

Create written rules of engagement

Establish clear expectations for both remote and in-person team members.

Take a multidisciplinary approach to policy and process

Involve multiple teams when crafting your hybrid workspace guidelines.

Mitigate the "here vs. there" mentality

Take steps to put both remote and onsite employees on an even playing field.

Invest in hybrid facilitation skills

Encourage all team members to learn best practices for running and participating in hybrid meetings.

Leverage both multitasking and async work

Use the specific benefits of remote work to your team's advantage.



Build culture virtually

Create camaraderie and belonging via digital tools and virtual team building activities.

