



# HYBRID WORKING

Delivering remote working  
through technology.



# INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught many lessons. Major ones include how far technology has progressed, and how quickly we can adapt when we have to.

According to research by Deloitte<sup>i</sup>, more than 100 million people in Europe alone shifted to remote working in a matter of weeks when the pandemic hit.

The impact of this has been nothing less than seismic. Expertise from McKinsey suggests that business digital adoption has leapt forward by at least five years.<sup>ii</sup> This means that going forward, the ability to work remotely will only become easier.

While the long-term impact on working habits are still yet to be fully understood, some organisations are already looking to offer a radically different work-life balance.



# A FUTURE OF HYBRID WORKING

Given the radical changes, there may no longer be a need for staff to return to the workplace.

Many have realised they can achieve much of what they do remotely. And for some, the time and cost-savings of not commuting may appeal more than what their role currently holds. This may result in them looking for jobs that offer this, and trends suggest many organisations are already shifting their hiring to offer this.

Full-time remote working won't suit every business, and many employees will also likely prefer a more blended approach to work. By combining on-site hours with remote hours, hybrid working can help achieve a better work-life balance for these employees.

Businesses too are understanding the benefits of working in this way. Some have already begun downsizing their premises to meet lower numbers of permanent workplace-based staff. Some have already begun downsizing their premises to meet lower numbers of permanent workplace-based staff, the resulting rent savings are also hard to ignore. A non-centralised workforce also means other resources can be decentralised or outsourced (such as IT support services) offering further tantalising cost-savings.

However, there are still barriers that organisations will need to overcome to make hybrid working successful long-term. In this guide we'll take a look at hybrid working in detail; from the management and cultural changes through to the technology recommended to support a more flexible way of working.

# OVERCOMING THE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES OF HYBRID WORKING

Any change to established working patterns will naturally bring new challenges. Questions around productivity and accountability in particular sat heavy with many organisations during enforced remote working.

So it's unsurprising that some are hesitant to adopt remote working going forward.

Yet with so many employees working remotely, many have already adapted to this new working style and the benefits it holds, and there are already signs it's becoming a consideration of where employees choose to work.

Organisations, therefore, may choose to embrace hybrid working to retain staff. Making such a significant change will require managers and organisations to adapt and learn new skills.

The following are just some of the management techniques which can be used effectively when switching to hybrid working, and how technology can support that.



# MONITORING OUTCOMES

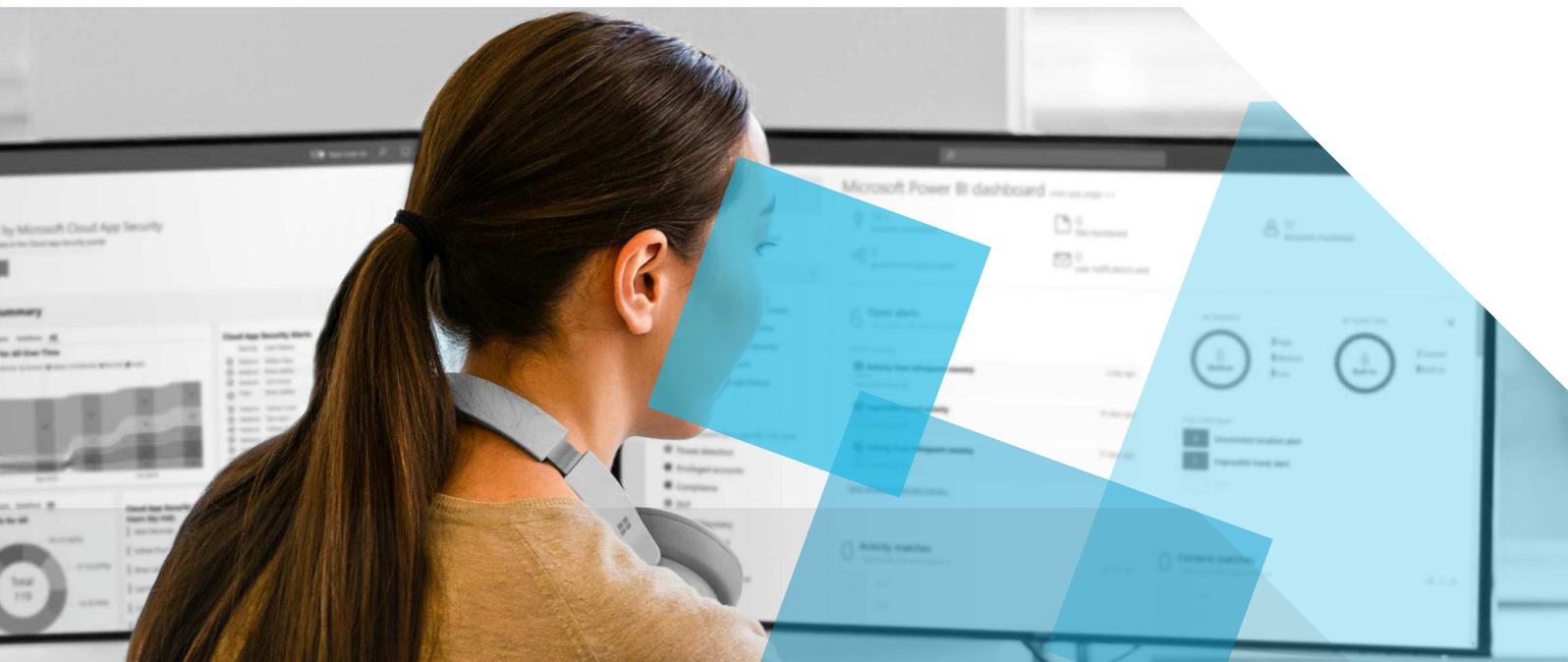
Allowing employees to work more flexibly allows them to balance their own schedules around commitments outside the workplace.

Certainly it keeps staff happier. When the UK was full time working from home, data from the ONS suggests 34.4% of workers thought they were working fewer hours when working from home, compared to 30% who thought they were working more and 35.2% who believed they were working the same hours.<sup>iii</sup>

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But hours worked doesn't necessarily correlate to getting a job done. Instead of measuring productivity based on hours worked, managers can switch to setting targets and monitoring outcomes to ensure performance remains consistent.

Tracking this as transparently as possible (using solutions such as **Microsoft Power BI** reports that everyone can see) ensures everyone is clear about what is expected. And the results can be suitably rewarded or scrutinised.



## BUILD TRUST

Many employers feared that their workforce productivity would fall as a result of fulltime remote working. They therefore might be hesitant to offer hybrid working.

The difference with hybrid working though is that it's not fully remote. This reintroduces more accountability (bosses can see what staff are doing when in the office) but also gives employees more flexibility to plan their workloads, perhaps taking tasks home where they need to concentrate free of office distractions.

There are plenty of solutions (such as **Microsoft Planner**) that allow managers and employees to collaborate on work schedules and tasks to be achieved, even allocating deadlines and priorities.

By trusting teams to manage workloads and their tasks flexibly, businesses can find that productivity actually increases.

## COST-EFFECTIVE SCHEDULING

To facilitate effective hybrid working, managers need to consider which locations allow their teams to perform to the best of their abilities.

It may be assumed that it's better that all staff are in the workplace all the time so meetings can be called whenever needed. But with the cost per desk in cities like London estimated at over £500 per month<sup>iv</sup>, is convenience worth the outlay?

Being more effective with digital scheduling tools (such as **Microsoft Calendar**) can ensure employees are where they need to be for important meetings. Equally, this can drive more focused working and result in both cost-saving and boosted productivity.

# ADAPTING MINDSET TO HYBRID WORKING

As workplace demands change, so the mindset around working creatively needs to adapt.

Working outside of an office, one might assume that a business will miss out on collaborative discussions that fuel creativity. But having an office for the sake of meeting rooms and water cooler moments is an expensive commodity.

Collaboration is good, but are you more or less likely to achieve a result sat in a meeting room than on a video or conference call? How much chat around the water cooler is actually relevant to getting the job done? And can this not be replaced by other solutions?

Whether management realise it or not, many employees have already adapted to new digital water cooler moments already. Solutions such as **Microsoft Teams** have already proven adept for conferencing, but also hold a value in terms of discussion. Chat functionality allows ideas to develop as much as if in person. Overall, this is often more productive than having staff standing around chatting.

Addressing digital chat openly ensures creativity isn't lost when moving to hybrid working. It also provides an opportunity to explain what is expected or considered reasonable when using this technology.



# THE ROLE OF IT IN HYBRID WORKING

For most organisations, some form of physical office presence will always be required. Networking, attracting employees and completing employee training and onboarding are often more effective when completed onsite. But to say that business culture and success is routed in an office is short sighted.

Every business is different, but the technology now exists to facilitate a range of hybrid working styles. Where many companies were forced to hastily embrace remote working with quick IT solutions, now is the ideal time for businesses to plan how IT solutions can support their growth for the future.

## REMOTE WORKING HAS TO WORK FOR EVERYONE

The first step towards establishing successful hybrid working is a flexible IT setup. This means ensuring IT systems work seamlessly between the home and workplace. Cloud technology will form the backbone of this for many organisations with hosted desktops and cloud servers both supporting a 'work anywhere' culture.

Adopting these technologies will offer wider benefits as well: hosted desktops are easier to manage and require less expensive PCs, while cloud server solutions are far cheaper to own and manage, and can be scaled with ease.

Many organisations will have already adopted some of these measures. Completing a hybrid working setup can benefit a business as much as it does the employee.

# UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS

At the centre of business operations should be a communication platform that can allow employees to answer calls effectively from any location.

An effective VoIP phone solution can achieve this, allowing staff to answer calls from any location either from a desk phone, mobile phone or PC.

But expectations around technology have moved on. Until very recently, video calling was seen as a novelty that many businesses weren't utilising (despite being readily available). Now the use of solutions such as **Zoom** is commonplace. They're also becoming more expected - video calls are more personal and engaging, and free from misinterpretation unlike emails. It's also much easier to hold meetings between multiple participants in various locations.

But at the heart of hybrid working is efficiency – working in a smarter way. Having separate phone and video calling platforms, and also communicating with internal staff via email, creates disconnected chains of communication.

This is where **Microsoft Teams** becomes of benefit. Many businesses will know Teams as a messaging, group chat and video calling platform. But it can also be configured as an outbound calling platform, replacing the need for a business phone system. It can also link to other **Microsoft 365** applications, such as **SharePoint Online**, to further deliver cloud storage, remote collaboration and project support.

Unifying communication in a singular platform ensures that nothing is overlooked. In turn, that platform can support company culture in much the same way as being in an office does.



# ROBUST SECURITY MEASURES

Security is one of the most significant challenges that businesses must overcome when employees are working remotely. From the connections that staff use to access systems, to the devices they are using, a range of new risks become prevalent.

Beyond the basics of IT security (passwords, antivirus, firewalls etc.) organisations adopting a hybrid working style should carefully consider how they manage IT security to minimise risks and ensure staff are well trained to spot potential threats.

## SAFE CONNECTIONS & LAYERED SECURITY

Organisations should be clear about how their IT systems are accessed. A hosted desktop solution is an ideal way for staff to work on an organisation's network. It effectively replaces the local desktop on a PC with a cloud-based desktop hosted by the organisation (or their IT partner).

Remote desktops are easier to manage from an IT security perspective. They can be protected (with antivirus, anti-ransomware etc.) and updated remotely on mass, ensuring everyone in an organisation has the same level of protection.

Access to remote desktops can be further secured by having staff access systems via a Virtual Private Network (or VPN) that masks their traffic identity (in case the connection they're using is not secure). It offers a dedicated IP address, so IT managers can 'whitelist' exact connections that employees use to access IT systems.

Organisations can also utilise multi-factor authentication (MFA) to add another security layer (in the form of a text message code or an app alert) that is required alongside a standard password. MFA can protect most systems and is one of the many built-in security features offered by software such as **Microsoft 365**.

# BRING YOUR OWN DEVICE (BYOD)

If organisations require staff to access IT systems from their own devices (whether a laptop or a mobile phone) then both a BYOD policy and mobile device management solution should be a serious consideration.

There's no guarantee that security on personal devices will be comparable to a work-owned device - staff may be accessing work emails on a device that has no password for example. Should that device be lost or stolen then it represents a huge security risk and a GDPR breach.

Activities on personal devices can also introduce risks to an organisation – malicious downloads for example can jump from private browsing to work emails with ease. If no BYOD policy is in place, this can result in some difficult HR questions.

Mobile device management software can be used to remotely manage any work activities from a personal device. It can do this by creating a 'bubble' within that device where all work systems (emails, storage etc.) can be found. Access to that bubble can then be remotely restricted with appropriate security protection ensuring data is secure. Should a device be lost or stolen, all data held in the bubble can be wiped remotely.



# SECURITY TRAINING

Above all hybrid working security measures, security training remains the most important.

It's estimated that 46% of cybersecurity incidents are a result of human error<sup>1</sup>.

With remote working, phishing attempts in particular are on the rise as cybercriminals try to take advantage of gaps in communication.

Security shouldn't be an obstacle to hybrid working. But staff should be appropriately trained to spot potential cybercrime.

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Procedures should be in place, for example, to confirm if a request to change customer or employee payment details is genuine. It should be part of work culture to always scrutinise the address an email has come from (often a giveaway for cyber fraud). And staff should know not to click on links at random.

As with all aspects of hybrid working, an element of trust is required. In security terms, it's far easier for that trust to be gained if you know that staff should be prepared thanks to the training they've received.



# RETAINING CULTURE

For hybrid working to be successful, it's important that working from home should not alienate staff from workplace culture, perks and support.

To this end the office should no longer be seen as a physical workplace; the 'office' is simply a state of mind which should be adopted during working hours.

Centralising information and resources is a key part of this. Whether it's a centralised cloud file servers to store all company documents, or a intranet to share news and resources, technology can provide the fixed point for all employees to gravitate towards. An intranet in particular offers opportunities for communicating key company message and for storing perks or support.

Using communication technology can also ensure a culture of engagement. Having a short video call is not only more time-efficient than exchanging emails, it ensures that the remote worker feels engaged.

Organisations will also find their own ways to engage via technology. In turn, culture will evolve to meet this.



# A PROFESSIONAL IT SOLUTION FOR HYBRID WORKING

The very concept of hybrid working is still in its infancy. But with such mass exposure to remote working – and the improved work-life balance this can bring – it's certain to become a part of at least some professional industries.

For organisations looking to support hybrid working, it is important to ensure that your business is ready to meet the challenges. There is an excellent opportunity now to review working policies and procedures, in a way that is beneficial to both the business and its employees.

Technology plays a critical role in successful hybrid working. Akita is here to help your business implement a seamless IT experience between the workplace and home environments. We can also guide you on where you may need to look at your internal policies and procedures.

To discuss delivering and supporting hybrid working in your organisation, please get in touch.





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