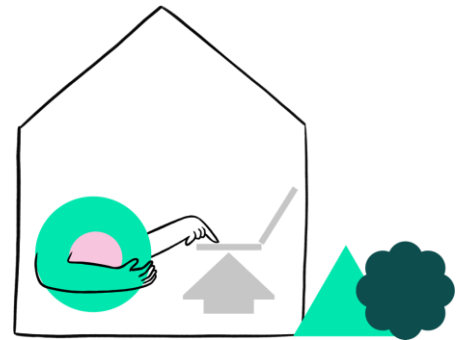


Hybrid working: Four ways to move beyond the tactical

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There's a lot of discussion out there about 'hybrid working', much of which is currently misdirected. Whilst countless organisations are making a commitment to hybrid working in principle, too few are really thinking it through in practice. Anyone who has dialled into a difficult-to-manage hybrid meeting (combining in-person and virtual attendees) might agree. In our experience, organisations who have the edge are taking the notion of hybrid working beyond tactical statements towards a clear vision for a better world of work.

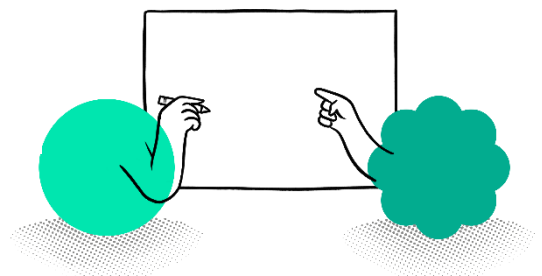
And such vision is sorely needed. As we have shared previously, recent [research](#) suggests that the current patterns of work are unsustainable, and employees are suffering unacceptably high levels of burnout. Compounding this issue, [1 in 2](#) employees report that a lack of clear vision and direction from their employer on their future working arrangements is causing them concern, and less than 1 in 3 feel that their organisation's intentions have been well communicated.

Many employers are working hard to provide clarity but in doing so may be at risk of focusing on the wrong things, namely practical questions such as working from home days or office layouts. These considerations have a place, but they should be viewed as part of a bigger and more important picture. Ultimately, the hybrid working dilemma is not really about space and location. It is about how we can rebuild our organisations and working lives so that they 'work' for everyone.

In our experience, companies who are navigating the hybrid working dilemma well have set out to do some of these four things:

Define the future role of the office

For some, the office is a visible demonstration of power. With its floors, executive offices, sections and desks, the environment can make some people feel big and others feel small. For others, the office is a haven or a community - a place where they can go to put their full selves into work.



It provides a helpful boundary between home and work life, without competing demands. For most, the office is a physical manifestation of corporate 'culture', which can be at best regenerative or at worst tribal.

Instead of starting with decisions on working from home days, companies should instead ask themselves the question: 'what do we want our office to be for the people who come here'? These

valuable assets can play a central role in rebuilding people's sense of connection with their organisations and each other, so that days in the office are not an extractive personal trade-off but a source of energy. The future office should not be somewhere employees go to work from their respective screens or spend days in unproductive hybrid meetings but a place where people feel surrounded by capable and supportive colleagues who have their back. Organisations who take this view do not start with questions of policy and real estate - they begin by defining the sort of environment they want to build and work back from there.

Renew the social contract or 'deal'

The pandemic has fundamentally shifted the social contract of work. For all the talk about performance outcomes, employees have historically been directed, paid, monitored, and measured based on input. Our perceived productivity has been determined by whether we are working 'hard' enough. Where priorities are being missed or deadlines slipping, we bring in more resources or flex other input constraints, like time.



In a hybrid working environment, the opportunity is there to reshape how we plan and manage work to bring greater cohesion and focus on outcomes. We can view work as coming together to develop or deliver something, each taking different pieces according to our own experiences and capabilities. We are all part of a 'deal', which is ultimately: "I won't let you down". Environments where people openly and specifically rely on one another build trust and accountability, increasing an organisation's capacity to deliver outstanding work.

But this means you need clear expectations on how things get done - how you will share information and communicate, the response times you expect, how you'll know what is being worked on, whether people are working simultaneously or asynchronously, how you will give one another feedback. This is a level of specificity that few teams are practiced in and represents a complex negotiation that many leaders and managers tend to duck. The rising trend in self-management through clear working agreements is likely to continue through the next few years, as a necessity for working productively in a hybrid way. Those who master this will likely leave others behind.

Reshape the working week to get 'real' work done

A lot has been shared recently about the [concept of 'languishing'](#) - a state of being between burnout and depression - leaving many with a dulled sense of motivation and focus. We can all accept that the current intensity of our working day is unsustainable, and people need help to regain their 'flow'.



Flow is when the real work gets done - where we are monotasking and working with complete concentration. For many of us, present days are spent crashing from one meeting to the next whilst also fielding emails and instant messages across various platforms and devices. This relentless, always-on working pattern means we no longer have the cognitive space to finish one task before jumping to the next, and it's affecting our ability to retrieve information afterwards.

Peoples' time is the most precious thing they have - they can never make any more. Employers should view their employee's time as something to be used mindfully, as befits the significant financial investment they make in it.

To get out of the cycle of inefficiency, [lightening the load](#) is a critical priority. Many organisations are instigating simple rules around 'quiet periods' (blocks of time with no interruptions or distractions - no meetings, devices and notifications off) which have long been shown to [improve productivity](#). Other tactics include viewing an hour meeting as 50 minutes - giving people space to reflect, make notes, update tools or to-do lists and mentally put it away. This practice improves focus and leaves people less tired and stressed by the end of the day.

Embed self-management practices to manage complexity

The majority of today's organisations are built and run on principles of prediction and control. We have budgets, plans, targets and static job descriptions. We set out to determine what can be done and use a complicated system of updates, meetings, governance bodies and reports to tell us how we are doing.



The groundswell of [research](#) and [practice](#) on evolutionary organisations suggests there is a better way. One that views organisations as complex, living systems that cannot be predicted or controlled but rather guided, steered and stewarded by all the people within them. Self-management practices offer a route out of the productivity gap that many organisations are suffering. These practices allow such organisations to operate at scale with a system based on peer relationships and without the need for bureaucracy, hierarchy, and consensus.

A lot of organisations are at the end of the road for relentlessly chasing cost management and input efficiency. They have chased all that they can - to huge human consequences. The shift to hybrid working offers a window for building kinder, more connected organisations that are fit for the complexity of today's world and will survive well into the future.

About Kindred

Kindred builds better workplaces through organisation design, leadership and organisational agility. Our mission is to create successful, sustainable organisations that make money and make people feel good about work.