



Moving to a hybrid workplace: A practical guide

Discover how to become an effective hybrid business by maintaining an inclusive culture, building remote-friendly communications, and updating your People policies.

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About Learn Amp

Learn Amp is an all-in-one People Development Platform that grows with your business.

With Learn Amp, you get all the flexibility of an LXP and all the functionality of an LMS. We believe that the three pillars of the employee experience – learning, engagement, and performance – are intrinsically linked, and should work together to help your business attract, retain, and develop great talent. Together, they drive our mission to make work life, work better.

Introduction

Giving your employees choice about where they work can improve the overall employee experience and help to attract and retain great talent.

However, getting hybrid work right isn't easy. To build a successful hybrid company, you'll need to re-evaluate your communication, culture, compensation, operations, performance management, and much more.

In this white paper, we'll break down how to transition to hybrid work while avoiding the potential pitfalls. We'll examine the pros and cons of different working structures and explain why we think the hybrid model is the best option for most businesses. Finally, we'll take a look at how some of the world's biggest companies are shifting to hybrid work and show you how your business could benefit from their ideas.



Jasmine Athwal
HR Advisor, Adarma

“After deciding on Learn Amp we got the platform up and running quickly in February 2020. Who knew that lockdown was so close and that we would be relying on this system to keep our people informed, developed and engaged throughout those challenging months!

We were able to curate and create content in double quick time. Along with the overall easy management of the platform it was simple and fast to provide L&D support and communications to our people during this period.”

The new ways of working

COVID-19 forced many companies to switch abruptly to 100% remote work. Now, as lockdowns ease, business leaders must evaluate what happens next. Should you all return to the office? Should you carry on with remote work? Or will you explore a more flexible, hybrid approach?

Every option comes with its pros and cons, but we believe that flexibility is the future for most businesses. Here's why.



The pros and cons of returning to the workplace

For some business leaders, the return to the workplace is an urgent necessity. David Soloman, CEO of Goldman Sachs, calls remote work an “aberration that we are going to correct as quickly as possible.”¹

The advantages of getting back to the office are clear:

You can return to your usual methods of collaborating and communicating.

While remote work has been surprisingly successful as a short-term fix, some worry that over the long term it will damage collaboration and company culture. Research² shows that employees who are “satisfied with social connectivity” are more productive and collaborative – and social connections are more easily built and maintained when we’re sitting together.

You can benefit from the shared energy and motivation of in-person teamwork.

Mary Erdoes, JP Morgan’s head of Wealth Management, worries about the long-term impact of remote work on employee morale. “It takes a lot of inner strength and sustainability without the energy that you get from being around other people.”³

It’s easier to create opportunities for spontaneous learning and mentorship.

Managers longing for offices to reopen aren’t just worried about “butts on seats,” argues Kate Lister, president of Global Workplace Analytics.

Businesses that rely heavily on in-person mentorship, such as the finance sector, may find it harder to replicate virtually. “[When working remotely], it’s very difficult to onboard new employees or cultivate young employees who need mentoring in the hallways and elevators,” comments Lister.⁴

On the other hand, insisting on a complete return to the office has its drawbacks:

Employees may be resistant to going back.

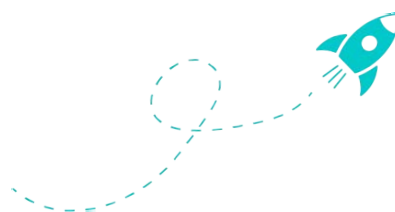
A survey by Harvard Business School found that over 70% of employees who have been working from home during the pandemic would prefer to remain out of the office indefinitely.⁵

Office space is expensive.

Bringing the whole team back to the office means paying the rent – and some businesses are questioning whether they’re getting value for money. A smaller HQ (or HQs) could represent major financial savings, according to Hubble HQ.⁶

Bucking the trend may make it harder to attract top talent.

Flexible working is increasingly becoming the norm, and for many job seekers the choice to work remotely is now a “must have.” 81% of UK employees say that flexible working makes a job more attractive, and 92% of millennials see flexibility as a top priority when job hunting.⁷



The pros and cons of going 100% remote

Gitlab, the world's largest 100% remote company, started with a hybrid model. GitLab co-founder and CEO Sid Sijbrandij remembers:

During Y Combinator, they told us, 'Look, remote work is for engineering, but not finance, marketing, or sales.' So, we got an office. People got hired, they came there, but after a few days they stopped showing up. [Coming to the office] wasn't needed."

If you switch to a 100% remote model, you may find it has significant advantages:

You can expand your hiring pool globally.

Instead of competing for local talent, you can spread your net far wider, opening your company up to the best employees regardless of where they live.

You may make your employees happier and more productive.

77% of employees agree that working from home after COVID-19 would make them happier – in fact, nearly 1 in 5 would take a pay cut to keep working from home.⁸ 3 out of 4 remote workers describe themselves as either as productive or more productive than before they began working from home.⁹ Finally, 72% reported that working from home made them less stressed.

You may well reduce employee turnover.

Employees have fewer reasons to leave their employer if they can move location at will. GitLab, for instance, maintains 85% voluntary retention rates year after year, despite the notoriously high turnover in most technology companies.¹⁰

However, making the move to 100% remote work is simply not a practical option for many businesses, at least in the immediate future.

Some positions are impossible to do from home.

If your people are primarily in customer-facing or hands-on service roles, then it's obvious that working from home can't be a 100% proposition.¹¹ Even digital roles may require access to hardware that can't be taken home or data that is only stored on local servers for security reasons.

Remote work requires a ground-up overhaul of your systems and processes.

For some businesses, developing a remote-friendly communications strategy and rethinking their way of working doesn't align with their corporate culture, or their employees' needs and expectations. They might be open to a few employees working part of the time from home, but a full redesign of their operations may be more than they can contemplate, as they struggle to deal with the fallout from the current financial and health crisis.

Not all employees want to work from home.

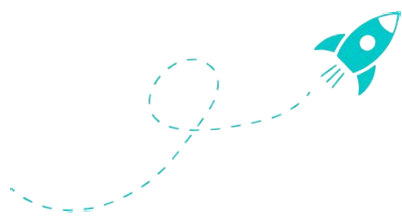
If remote work has been a delight for many employees – no more commutes, no more cubicle lunches – for others, it has been a nightmare. 20% of remote workers struggle with loneliness, burnout and communication issues.¹² And of course, the logistics aren't always easy – over 40% of those working from home during the pandemic don't even have a desk space to work from.¹³

Why hybrid is best for most businesses

The hybrid working model is likely to be the most successful option for most businesses. With a hybrid model, employees have options to work from home, work from the office, or a combination of the two. This approach aligns most closely with what employees prefer. For instance, most British workers have said that they'd prefer a mixture of working remotely and in the office.¹⁴

The flexible approach may well offer the best of both worlds:

- Employees for whom remote work is challenging, lonely or frustrating have the option to work in an office. Employees who would leave if they were forced to return to the workplace have the option to stay home, at least part of the time.
- Businesses can provide a reduced office footprint, thus saving on costs. However, with the option to meet in person, companies can still create opportunities for in-person collaboration, teamwork and socialising to maintain a strong company culture.
- Businesses can develop more efficient onboarding processes using digital technologies, but still allow new hires to benefit from mentorship and learning opportunities by spending at least some time in the office with more experienced staff.

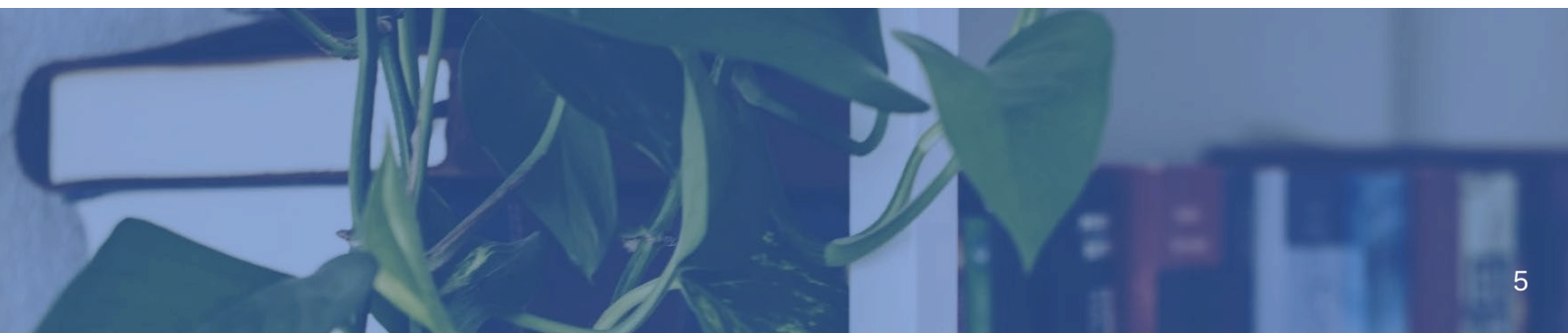


However, it's important to note that the hybrid model is not without its challenges. Research by Buffer found that only 3% of all remote workers would not recommend the experience. However, of those 3%, the majority were working in a hybrid model.¹⁵ Buffer hypothesises, "These folks may be experiencing the communication and collaboration challenges that come with this mix of employee types."



Creating a successful hybrid company requires a careful and mindful approach to creating an inclusive environment, whether your employees are at home or in the office. This thoughtful mindset needs to be coupled with a thorough assessment of the systems, processes, behaviours and technologies that maintain your company culture and support your operations.

Otherwise, you may risk following in the footsteps of Yahoo!, Bank of America, and IBM, and being forced to drag your team back to the office to address slumping productivity and falling profits.¹⁶



How to become an effective hybrid company

To build a thriving hybrid company, business leaders need to make sure that the employee experience is the same, whether you're working at home or in the office. Without the right policies and processes, hybrid companies can develop a fragmented two-tier culture, resulting in falling morale, productivity and retention. At-home workers must feel that their development, their career opportunities, their access to information and their chances to learn on the job are the same as those of their colleagues in the office. In this section, we'll make some suggestions for how to get it right.



Culture and communication

What's the difference between companies that shift easily to flexible work, and those that struggle? We argue that it comes down to one thing – a strong sense of their company culture. Businesses that have articulated who they are, why they do what they do, and “how we do things” find it easier to handle the challenges of hybrid work. Here are our top tips maintaining a strong sense of culture during the shift to flexible work:

1) Start by defining your values, culture, ways of working and priorities. Make sure that everyone in the company knows how to articulate what your business is all about.

This might involve becoming more transparent about how you work and why you work that way. Make sure that the “unspoken” aspects of your company culture have been clearly stated. For instance, Gitlab provides an extensive, publicly available guide to every aspect of their company culture, from why they work remotely to how they handle information communication.¹⁷



2) Then set clear policies on internal communication, to avoid creating a two-tier culture.

One of the biggest risks of offering flexible work is that remote employees can start to feel like second-class citizens. For instance, 43% of remote workers feel that working remotely will impact their career progression.¹⁸

The key to maintaining a cohesive culture is to make sure all employees communicate in the same way and have access to the same information. For instance:

- Document all conversations, including informal chats across the water cooler, and share those notes in your People Development Platform or Slack channels. For example, Learn Amp makes it easy for teams to upload, share and tag content so that it can be easily found and referred to later. That way, all employees have access to the same information without needing to come into the office.
- Where possible, prioritise asynchronous communication over live meetings. That way, even those employees working from other time zones or juggling work around other commitments can still keep on top of workplace communications. For instance, using voicemails, text messages, Slack chats or email can be easier than insisting on phone calls or video conferences.
- Treat every meeting as if it were a remote meeting. Even employees in the same office should be joining a video conference from their desk, rather than having some people in the same room and others joining remotely. Using a technique called “silent meetings” can help – you can find our guide to silent meetings and other remote communication techniques over on our blog [here](#).
- Define expectations around timeframes and responsiveness. Do you expect employees to reply to emails within 24 hours? Or on the same day? How about instant messages? Make sure that all employees are following the same guidelines.



Logistics and workplace

One of the challenges of flexible working is that there are so many possible options available. Implementing a move to a hybrid model involves many practical considerations and lots of decision making.

Where's the best place to start? Ask your employees what they want. For example:

- Set up surveys to get a sense of your employees' overall priorities. What would they most value about the option to work from home? What are they looking forward to about returning to the office? How many of them have a suitable space to use for work at home? Do they need more support to set up a home office?

If you're a Learn Amp customer, your Customer Success Coach can give you a template of this survey to use in your workplace.

- Once you have a strategy in place, use small focus groups to hash out the details. This will help create a sense that you're all working on the future of your company together, and so increase your teams' investment in the success of the initiative. It may also help you identify the best way to communicate the changes to your employees, and the questions they're likely to have about hybrid working.

- As you begin to transition to hybrid working, use quick pulse polls to get a sense of how your employees are adjusting to the change.

- To reduce the complexity of working with different employee needs, it may be helpful to create employee personas. The concept is similar to the user personas used in web design: identify and group together your employees based on shared characteristics, and then develop an overarching persona to describe them. These will often reflect the stages of life most people go through: living in a house share; co-habiting couples; family with young children, family with teenage children and so on. Or they could simply reflect working style preferences.

Once you've created an accurate sense of your employee's needs, preferences and priorities, you can start to work your way through the logistical challenges and decisions that you need to make before you can effectively transition to hybrid working.



Practical considerations

Before you shift to a hybrid model there are lots of practical things to consider: What will the impact be on company office space and working hours, for example? The questions below give you a flavour of key topics to think about.

Working structure

1. Will you allow all employees to choose to work from home? Or are there certain roles that will need to be done from the office?
2. Will you all work from home on a particular day (or days) of the week, and spend the rest of the time in the office? Or will you allow employees to choose between 100% remote, 100% in the office, or a combination of the two options?

Office Space

1. Will you retain your existing offices? If so, do you plan to redesign them for social interaction and collaboration? Or will you keep quiet spaces so that employees have the option to do “deep work” in the office or at home?
2. Would it make more sense to downsize to a smaller office space? Or even rent multiple “hubs” in coworking spaces, so that employees can choose to work in the space nearest their home?
3. If employees can choose to work from home or in the office, does office space become a perk? Will you offer a choice between funds towards a home office or a space in the office?

Compensation and Benefits

1. Will you offer compensation tiered by location – for instance, offering salary weighting for more expensive locations?
2. If an employee moves from a more expensive to a cheaper location, will you cut their pay?

3. How will you make sure that perks and benefits remain equal for all employees? For instance, if you offer free food and drink in the office, will you give food vouchers to remote workers? How about employees who work partly in the office and partly at home?



Geographic Location

1. Will you let employees work from anywhere, or restrict them to a particular location (or locations)?
2. Will you let employees work from overseas? If so, how will you maintain tax compliance? For instance, will you restrict the duration of their stay overseas, so that they do not become a tax resident in a new location? Will you allow overseas work, but restrict it to specific countries? Deloitte has a handy downloadable guide to [compliance for hybrid companies](#) available on their website, if you need more guidance.
3. If you have a large number of employees, how will you ensure that you know where they are at all times? Are you familiar with the legal responsibilities for a company with overseas employees? How will you ensure that all employees complete the requisite paperwork for legal residence in a new country?
4. Do you need to update your contracts to acknowledge remote workers? For instance, working from home, even in the same country, can have implications when it comes to employee redundancy rights, discrimination law, and privacy rights, which you will need to address in advance.¹⁹

Review your People policies

Once you've consulted your team, chosen a working structure, made practical and logistical decisions, and figured out the workspace you need, it's time to review your policies, processes and technologies. A successful hybrid working model depends on a thorough overhaul of the way that your company attracts, develops and retains employees, throughout the end-to-end employee journey.

Recruitment

Hybrid working models can open a much broader and more diverse recruitment pipeline. Instead of competing for local talent, you can cast your net far wider. To create a remote-friendly recruitment process:

- Use asynchronous technology as much as possible during the interview process. For instance, ask candidates to provide a video responding to specific interview questions. Keep video interviewing to a minimum. Too many Zoom calls can cause interviewee/r burnout.
- Hire for values fit. Conscientious, empathetic employees will be easier to manage remotely. Screen for remote skills, such as high levels of autonomy, excellent time management, and strong written communication abilities. Invite short-listed candidates to join a remote team for the day, to make sure they are able to adapt to a remote-friendly environment.

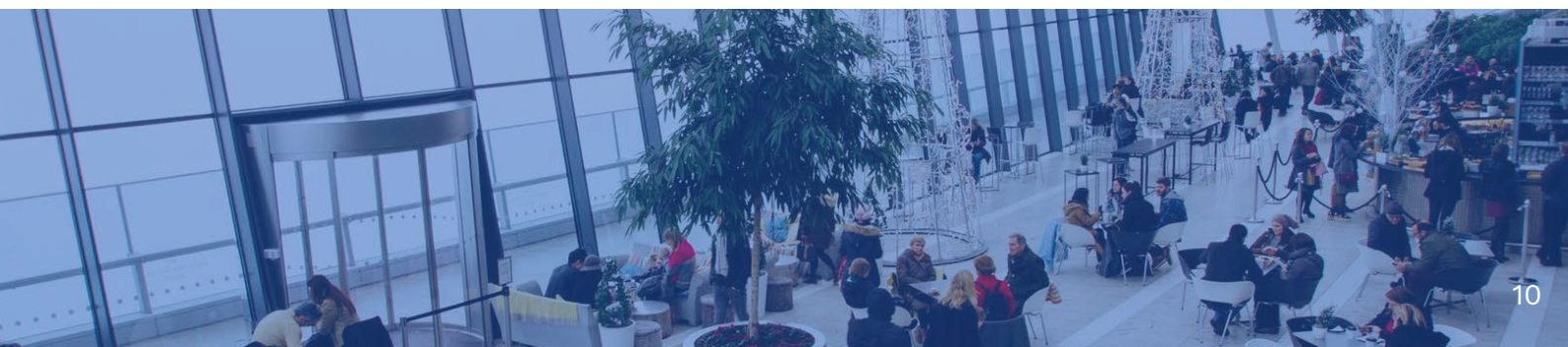
Induction and onboarding

Helping new hires feel like part of the team can be more challenging if most of the team are working from home. To create a remote-friendly onboarding process, consider:

- Creating automated onboarding pathways using a People Development Platform like Learn Amp, with milestones, KPIs and self-serve training content. That way, new hires receive all the necessary, standardised induction content, but can also steer their own onboarding journey at the pace they prefer.



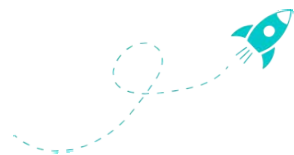
- Fostering relationships by asking all team members to create and upload short "About me" videos, to introduce themselves to new hires. Create online social activities so that all team members can attend regardless of where they're working, to greet the new recruits.



Learning and development

With less time in the office, employees, and especially remote employees, might feel that they are receiving fewer opportunities for learning and career progression. To make sure you create an inclusive, remote-friendly learning program:

- Encourage collaborative learning. For instance, you can use a platform like Learn Amp to allow co-workers to collaborate on learning resources, self-record and share quick tutorials, and comment and ask questions within the learning platform itself.



- Create opportunities for learning on the job, even in a remote context. For example, invite junior staff members to sit in on online customer pitch meetings to see how more experienced team members work.

- Build an internal coaching program to make sure that mentorship occurs without those casual in-person conversations that can happen more easily in person. For instance, transition your employee directory into a learning platform, so that employees can easily find the right person to ask for advice or guidance on a particular professional issue.

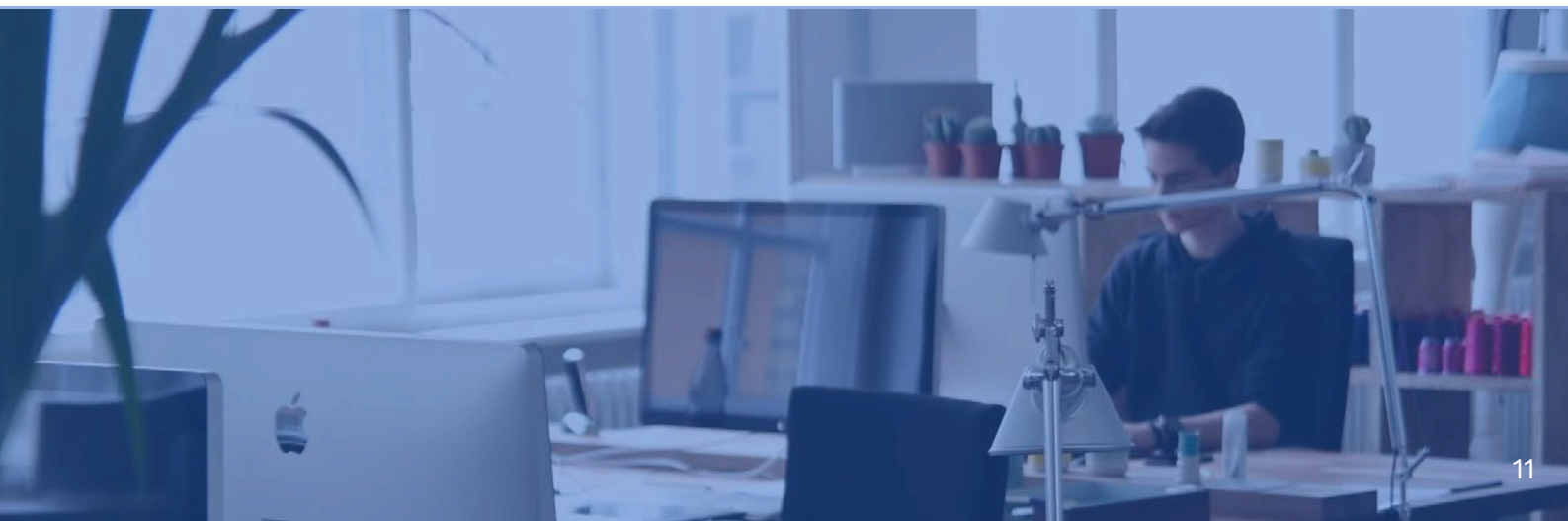
Performance management

There's a risk that managers will unconsciously value in-person workers more highly than those working remotely. After all, it's hard not to assume that those you see working are putting in more effort than those at home. To avoid creating divisions in how performance is perceived and measured in a hybrid working model, try:

- Creating a schedule of regular manager check-ins, goal-setting one-to-ones and quarterly alignment meetings with all team members. Regardless of where the team members are located, these meetings should be handled remotely (such as by video call) to make sure the experience remains the same for both in-office and at-home workers.

- Using a People Development Platform like Learn Amp to allow managers and their direct reports to build customised learning pathways and set personal development goals and milestones.

- Making sure that remote working is actively encouraged by the organisation. Researchers found that when companies fully support remote work (by encouraging employees to work from home if they want to, actively hiring remote employees, etc.), remote workers progressed at the same rate as their in-office colleagues.²⁰



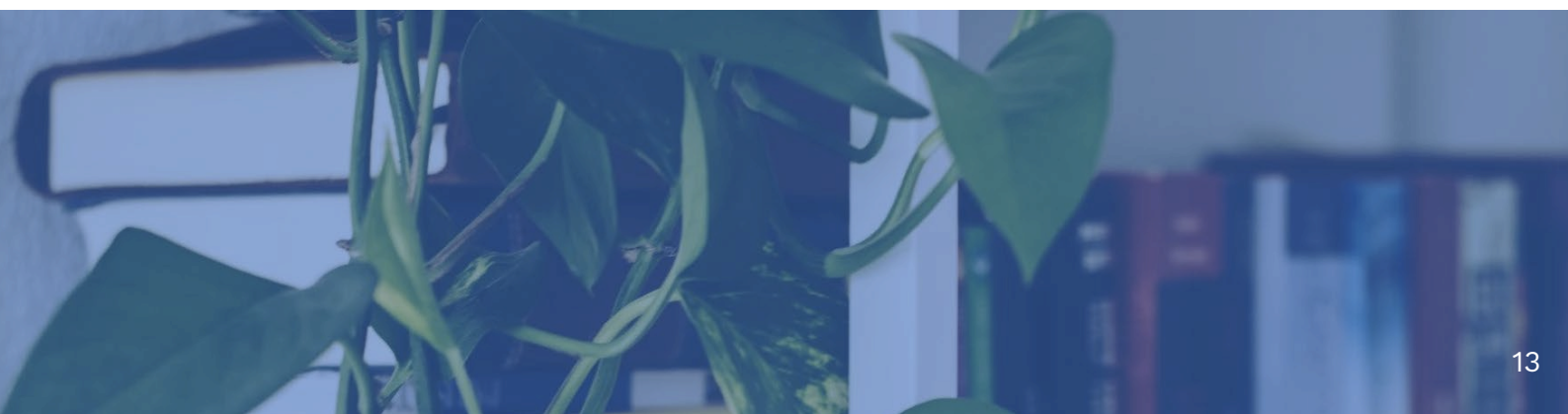
Best practice from hybrid companies

Some of the world's largest businesses have made the transition to a hybrid working model in recent months. Many of them have given detailed explanation of the rationale behind their decision, and how they are planning to manage the many potential hurdles involved in the change.

	Why they're doing it	How they're doing it
Hubspot ²¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase their candidate pool. "Amazing candidates increasingly expect flexible work, and as employers, we'll miss out on great people if we don't adapt." To create a more diverse organisation: "As a company that's dedicated to diversity, inclusion, and belonging, we're actively working on diversifying our candidate community and believe remote work will be fundamental in that." To build a more supportive working environment: "We've always believed that results matter more than when or where they're produced." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowing employees to choose between 3 set-ups: office work, flex work (up to 2 days in the office, with a hot desk), and working from home. Home workers will receive funds to set up their home office. Shifting to remote-first hiring and onboarding, and offering 70% remote job openings Offering "location-agnostic" perks and benefits Developing the ability to manage remote teams in all line managers
Reddit ²²	<p>Because it aligns with their company "mission of creating belonging for everyone in the world."</p> <p>To create a more diverse and inclusive culture: "We want Reddit to be positioned as a workforce that's as diverse as its ecosystem of communities and users."</p> <p>To "drive employee engagement and productivity by meeting our [employees'] needs."</p>	<p>No more geographic compensation in the US, so employees can live where they want to.</p> <p>Permitting existing employees to move, without adjusting their compensation.</p> <p>Redesigning office spaces to allow for casual coffee-shop style seating, private spaces, team "neighborhoods" and bookable meeting rooms, with no more fixed desks.</p>



	Why they're doing it	How they're doing it
Dropbox ²³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because their research shows that workers at home are more focused, just as productive and, also happier.²⁴ • Because they want to give employees “freedom and flexibility”. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote work will be the default option, to avoid creating two tiers of employees. • All employees will have access to either an office or an on-demand space for in-person meetings. • Employees will be allowed to relocate to other locations, within a set of parameters. • They will have “core collaboration hours” that overlap between time zones – beyond that, workers can set their own schedule. • All People processes are moving online.
Spotify ²⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support work life balance: “Work isn’t something you come to the office for, it’s something you do.” • To increase productivity: “Giving people the freedom to choose where they work will boost effectiveness.” • To increase operational efficiency: “Operating as a distributed organisation will product better and more efficient ways of working.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees can choose between working from home, from the office, or a combination. • Employees can decide how they work, but only in collaboration with their line manager. • Employees can choose their country and city of residence – with limitations based on time zones and regional entity laws. • They will provide optional membership to a co-working space for employees who live too far from a Spotify office.



Conclusion



The hybrid model is the future for most businesses.

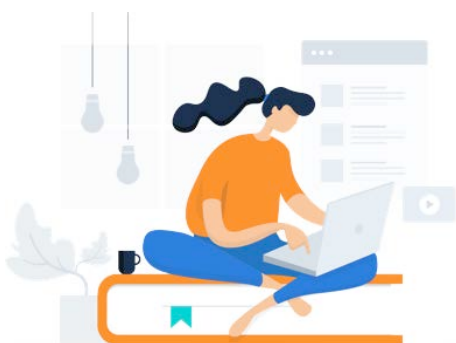
The hybrid model may be the best way for businesses to respond to changing employee expectations.

Hybrid businesses offer employees greater flexibility, while still promoting collaboration and teamwork.

Building an effective hybrid company will take a mindful approach and a clear understanding of the company's values, culture and ways of working. You'll need to consider your communication methods, workplace preferences, legal and regulatory obligations, and People processes.

However, with the right approach, switching to a hybrid model will help you increase employee retention, broaden your talent pool, build a more diverse workforce, boost morale and support productivity.

Learn Amp can help you on your journey to build a thriving hybrid business. Our unique, award-winning People Development Platform balances the flexibility of an LXP with the administrative control of an LMS, so you can provide your team with the best possible employee experience, no matter where they work. To find out more about what makes our platform the "learning and onboarding solution of the year," please click [here](#) to set up a demo.



"Learn Amp have always listened carefully to what is important to us and provided the best possible support to achieve our objectives."

Andrew Long
COO, Ten Group

About the authors

Learn Amp is an all-in-one People Development Platform that grows with your business.

With Learn Amp, you get all the flexibility of an LXP and all the functionality of an LMS. We believe that the three pillars of the employee experience – learning, engagement, and performance – are intrinsically linked, and should work together to help your business attract, retain, and develop great talent. Together, they drive our mission to make work life, work better.



DUNCAN CHEATLE

Aside from founding Learn Amp, Duncan has spent over 20 years championing UK enterprise through The Supper Club. Established in 2003, The Supper Club is now home to around 500 of Britain's most innovative, high growth entrepreneurs.

Duncan sits on the Chartered Management Institute's Board of Companions, was a co-founder of Start Up Britain (launched by the Prime Minister in March 2011) and was a non-exec of the Start Up Loans Company for its first year. He has also sat on a variety of Advisory Boards including the Centre for Entrepreneurs and the Sheffield University Management School.



GABRIELLE CUMMINS

As Head of Operations at Learn Amp, Gabby is driven to help businesses and employees grow together.

A former secondary school teacher turned L&D professional, Gabby draws on a breadth of experience from the Education and EdTech sectors to inform her work at Learn Amp.

Today, she ensures that our operations run efficiently and productively, supporting our hybrid workforce as together we challenge outdated HR industry norms.

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Testimonials



Judges' comments,
Winner of Learning Technology, 2020

“The implementation of this learning platform has clearly raised the bar in this organisation and showed how learning culture can influence business results.”

“The teams have adopted Learn Amp straight away. It’s great to see people motivated to use the platform without the need for encouragement. It is so easy to add content in any format from any source. Dare I say it but uploading materials has actually been easy and enjoyable. And we were up and running in a few weeks from scratch!”

— William Iuliano
Head of Digital Learning at Metro Bank





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of business that everyone wants to work for?

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