

Preventing social isolation in hybrid and remote work

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Introduction

Hybrid and remote work offer flexibility and convenience, but they also present the risk of social isolation for employees. The lack of in-person interactions can lead to loneliness, reduced engagement, and even mental health challenges. Preventing social isolation is essential for fostering a connected and motivated workforce. This fact sheet explores strategies to address social isolation and build stronger relationships in hybrid and remote work settings.

Understanding the issue

Social isolation in the workplace occurs when employees feel disconnected from their team, manager, or organisation. Hybrid and remote work amplify this risk due to physical distance, fewer casual interactions, and reliance on virtual communication.

The effects of social isolation include:

- 1 Declining mental health and well-being.**
- 2 Lower job satisfaction and engagement.**
- 3 Increased turnover and burnout.**
- 4 Communication silos and reduced collaboration.**

Organisations must address these challenges proactively to ensure employees feel supported and valued, regardless of where they work.

How can we mitigate these risks ?

Encouraging regular connection points is essential to combating social isolation. Organisations should schedule regular team meetings, one-on-ones, and informal check-ins to maintain engagement. Additionally, implementing virtual coffee chats, team-building activities, or “watercooler” sessions can create opportunities for casual interactions and foster a sense of community.

Fostering a sense of belonging is another key strategy. This can be achieved by celebrating team milestones, birthdays, and achievements, which helps build employee camaraderie. Promoting employee resource groups (ERGs) or social clubs enables individuals to connect with others who share similar interests, further strengthening organisational relationships.

Leveraging technology for collaboration is vital in hybrid and remote work settings. Tools like Slack, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom can facilitate both work-related and casual communication. Organisations should also create dedicated channels for non-work conversations, such as hobbies, pets, or wellness tips, to encourage informal interactions.

Promoting hybrid team events provides opportunities for employees to connect beyond their screens. Organisations should encourage periodic in-person gatherings for hybrid teams, such as retreats or collaborative workdays. Hosting hybrid-friendly events that include both on-site and virtual participants ensures inclusivity and reinforces team bonds.

Providing mental health resources is crucial to supporting employees in managing isolation and its effects. Sharing access to employee assistance programs (EAPs) or mental health apps can offer valuable support. Hosting webinars or workshops on topics such as managing loneliness, stress, and work-life balance also equips employees with tools to prioritise their well-being.

Building a culture of inclusion requires an ongoing effort from organisations. Managers should be trained to recognise signs of social isolation, such as lack of interaction with colleagues, feeling disconnected from the team, or having limited access to support and being overlooked in communications, and take proactive steps to address them. Encouraging open communication about employees' challenges when working remotely can help create a supportive environment where individuals feel heard and valued.

What is the role of Managers and Human Resources ?

Managers



- Create a safe space for employees to share feelings of isolation or loneliness.
- Balance workload distribution to prevent burnout and ensure team members have opportunities to connect.
- Actively involve remote employees in discussions, decision-making, and celebrations.

Human resources



- Establish policies that prioritise social connection, such as hybrid-friendly event planning.
- Develop training programs to help managers support remote employees.
- Provide tools, platforms, and resources to facilitate team connection and collaboration.

Conclusion

By fostering connection, promoting inclusion, and equipping managers with the right tools, organisations can create a culture where employees feel supported and engaged, no matter where they work. Building relationships and prioritising well-being are key to ensuring long-term success in the evolving workplace.



Further Reading

- Perry, R. (2018). *Belonging at work: Everyday actions you can take to cultivate an inclusive organization*. PYP Academy Press.
- Greenblatt, A. (2023). *Loneliness Epidemic*. CQ Researcher. CQ Press
<https://doi.org/10.4135/cqresrre20230505>. Available at:
https://www.woodhullfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Loneliness-Epidemic_-CQR.pdf(January 2025).
- Ha, N. T. T. (2021). *Workplace isolation in the growth trend of remote working: a literature review*. Review of Economic and Business Studies (REBS), (27), 97-113. Available at: <https://rebs.feaa.uaic.ro/issues/pdfs/27.pdf#page=97> (January 2025).