

Team bonding **for** hybrid teams

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Introduction

Creating strong team bonds in hybrid environments can be challenging, but it's essential for fostering collaboration, engagement, and overall well-being. This factsheet provides practical strategies and activities that can help bridge the gap between remote and in-office team members, ensuring everyone feels connected and valued. From virtual coffee breaks to inclusive team-building events, these ideas are designed to cultivate a sense of belonging and improve communication, regardless of location.

The importance of team cohesion in hybrid and remote work

The significance of team bonding in hybrid teams cannot be overstated, as it directly affects both the psychological well-being of employees and the productivity of the team. When remote team members feel isolated or disconnected from their in-office counterparts, it can lead to disengagement, reduced morale, and a sense of exclusion. These feelings of isolation may cause remote workers to withdraw or become less motivated, ultimately impacting the overall success of the team. On the other hand, in-office team members may not fully understand the challenges faced by their remote peers, leading to a lack of empathy and a divide between the two groups. This misalignment can hinder collaboration and communication, preventing the team from reaching its full potential.

Furthermore, the significance of fostering team bonding in hybrid teams extends to the long-term health of the organisation. Without strong interpersonal connections and an inclusive culture, teams may struggle with innovation, creativity, and problem-solving, as individuals may feel less inclined to share ideas or collaborate effectively. A lack of bonding can also lead to higher turnover rates, as employees may feel unsupported or disconnected from the organisation. In contrast, a cohesive hybrid team is better equipped to adapt to challenges, leverage diverse perspectives, and build a positive work environment where all members feel valued. Therefore, addressing this issue is not just about improving day-to-day dynamics; it's about creating a foundation for sustained growth and success in a hybrid workforce.

Enhancing team bonding in hybrid teams

Encourage open communication

To keep communication flowing and ensure everyone's voice is heard, schedule regular one-on-one or team check-ins, which can be short, informal meetings to maintain connection. Additionally, leaders can offer virtual "open door" hours, allowing team members to join video calls for casual chats or to discuss work-related concerns, helping create an approachable and open atmosphere.

Implement inclusive virtual team building activities

Foster connection through virtual coffee breaks where team members can engage in non-work-related conversations. Show-and-tell sessions, where team members share something personal—like a hobby or favourite book—can help people get to know each other beyond the workplace, strengthening personal connections.

Foster cross-team collaboration

Pairing remote and in-office employees together for projects or tasks fosters teamwork and breaks down divides between the two groups. In addition, mentorship or buddy systems create opportunities for individuals to support one another, promoting a sense of belonging and connection across the team.

Celebrate milestones & successes

Celebrate milestones such as birthdays, work anniversaries, and team accomplishments with virtual cards, shout-outs in meetings, or online parties that include all team members, regardless of location. Use platforms like Slack or Microsoft Teams to recognise achievements and highlight team progress, ensuring everyone's contributions are acknowledged.

Create a sense of belonging with inclusive practices

Ensure that virtual team meetings are inclusive by using collaborative tools such as shared documents or interactive whiteboards so that all voices are heard. Maintain transparent communication by ensuring that all team members, whether remote or in-office, have access to the same information and resources, avoiding any feelings of exclusion or isolation.

Offer flexibility in social activities

Organise hybrid-friendly social events that can include both in-person and remote team members. When scheduling these activities, consider different time zones to ensure everyone has an opportunity to participate, fostering a more inclusive and fairer environment.

Gather feedback and make adjustments

Use quick polls to gather feedback on team bonding activities, inclusivity, and remote work challenges, then adjust future initiatives based on what resonates most with the team. Regularly check in with team members to understand how they feel about team dynamics and make adjustments to continuously improve inclusivity and connection.

Conclusion

Fostering strong team bonds in a hybrid work environment is essential for maintaining a connected, motivated, and high-performing team. By implementing strategies such as encouraging open communication, engaging in inclusive virtual team-building activities, and promoting cross-team collaboration, organisations can bridge the gap between remote and in-office employees. Celebrating milestones, creating a sense of belonging, and offering flexibility in social activities further strengthen relationships and improve morale. Regular feedback and adjustments ensure that the efforts remain relevant and effective. By prioritising team bonding, hybrid teams can overcome isolation and division, leading to a more collaborative, inclusive, and successful work environment for all.



Further reading

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- Lee, C. H., & Kim, Y. J. (2024). Fostering hybrid team performance through inclusive leadership. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 45(2), 305-321.
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<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/646949/boost-productivity-hybrid-teams.aspx>