



Adapting to hybrid working

Top tips for businesses making the long-term shift to hybrid working

March 2021

Highlights report for members

The case for hybrid working

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed the way we think about work and the workplace, shifting expectations of what's possible for both firms and employees. While some are eager to get back to normal, hybrid working is expected to be popular when workplaces reopen.



47%

of businesses expect most of their workforce to adopt hybrid working beyond 2021.¹

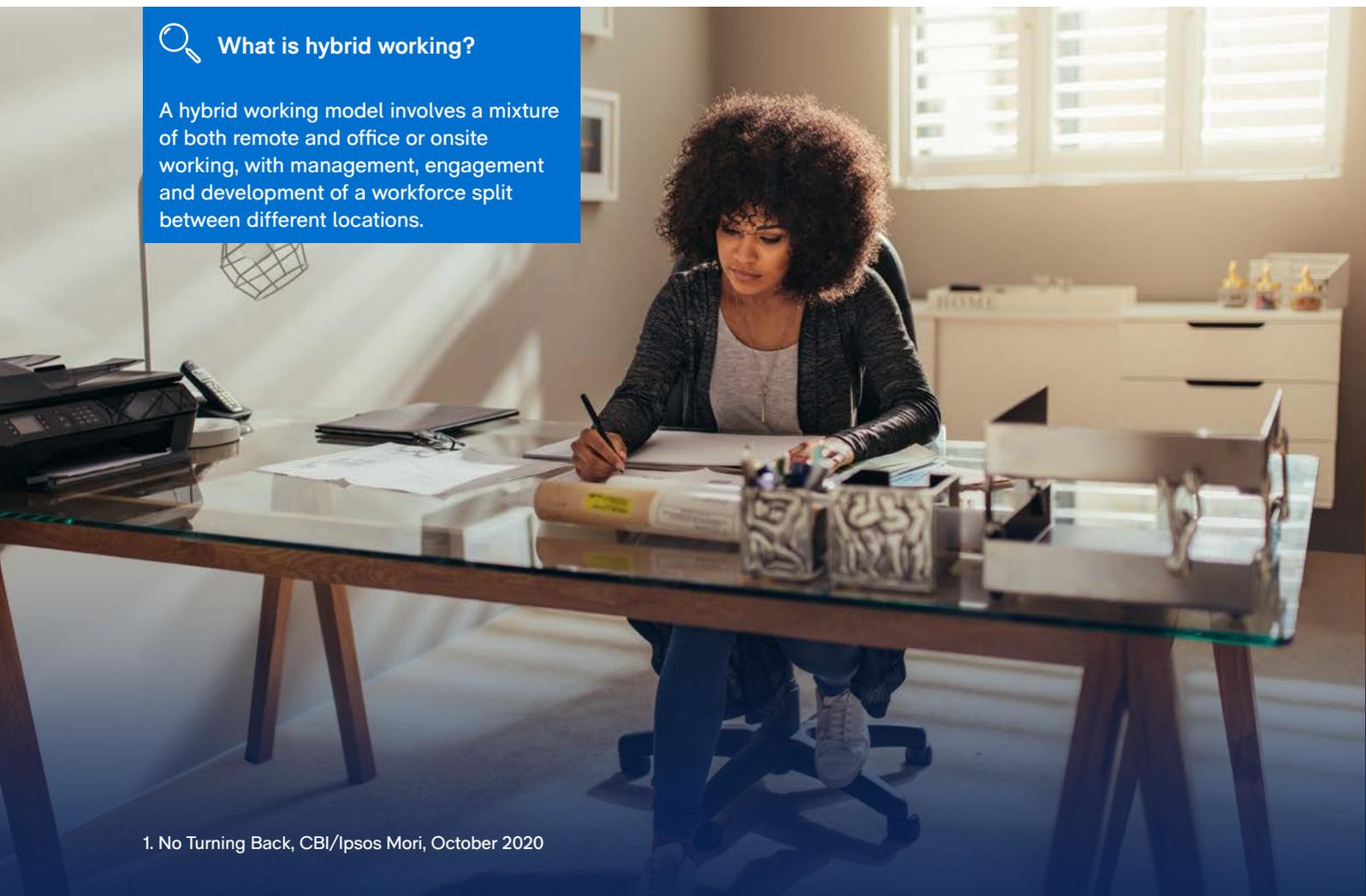


Hybrid working isn't new, but the challenge is in finding the right balance between home and the workplace to make a sustainable shift that works for both the business and employees over the long-term. Doing so requires businesses to consider their approach to health and wellbeing, managing, training, engaging, and leading their teams, and the practical support needed to achieve it. It can be difficult to know where to start when thinking about a long-term change. That's why we've created this quick guide: to give you top tips and practical questions to consider.



What is hybrid working?

A hybrid working model involves a mixture of both remote and office or onsite working, with management, engagement and development of a workforce split between different locations.



Could hybrid working benefit your business?

Hybrid working can mean different things to different businesses. What this looks like in practice is up to businesses and their employees, whether that means designating certain days for team meetings and collaboration, and remote days for individually focused work; or giving employees the flexibility to decide which days they plan to be in the workplace or at home. When done right, hybrid working can bring a number of advantages.

Hybrid working can increase productivity and employee engagement:



58%

of workers in the UK said they have been more productive working from home.²



41%

of businesses believe staff working from home beyond 2021 will have a positive impact on the company's productivity.³

Attracting and retaining talent can be easier in a hybrid working model:



53%

of businesses believe staff working from home beyond 2021 will have a positive impact on the company's ability to attract and retain staff.⁴



91%

of office workers show preference to working from home at least part of the time.⁵

Hybrid working can help build diverse and inclusive workforces:



86%

of working parents want to work flexibly.⁶



91%

of workers with caring responsibilities regard flexible working as highly important or essential.⁷

Harnessing these benefits relies on businesses considering what practical things need to change to transform the workplace into a shared workspace. Most businesses are re-evaluating the purpose of their offices, expecting them to be used for more collaboration and training and less desk-based activity. Firms must therefore consider what aspects of employees' roles need to be done onsite or in the office and what can be done remotely. Solving that puzzle means employers can begin identifying what flexibility they can offer employees that will enable them to achieve the same, or better, commercial outcomes.

2. Lockdown Lessons Report, Talk Talk, September 2020

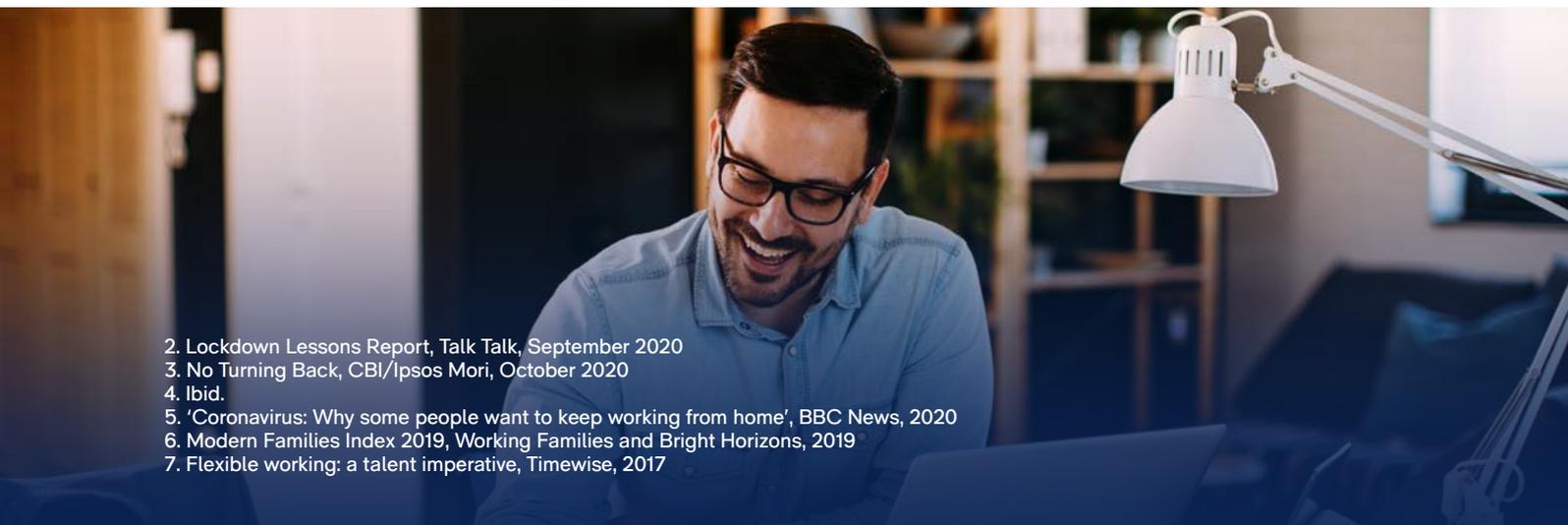
3. No Turning Back, CBI/Ipsos Mori, October 2020

4. Ibid.

5. 'Coronavirus: Why some people want to keep working from home', BBC News, 2020

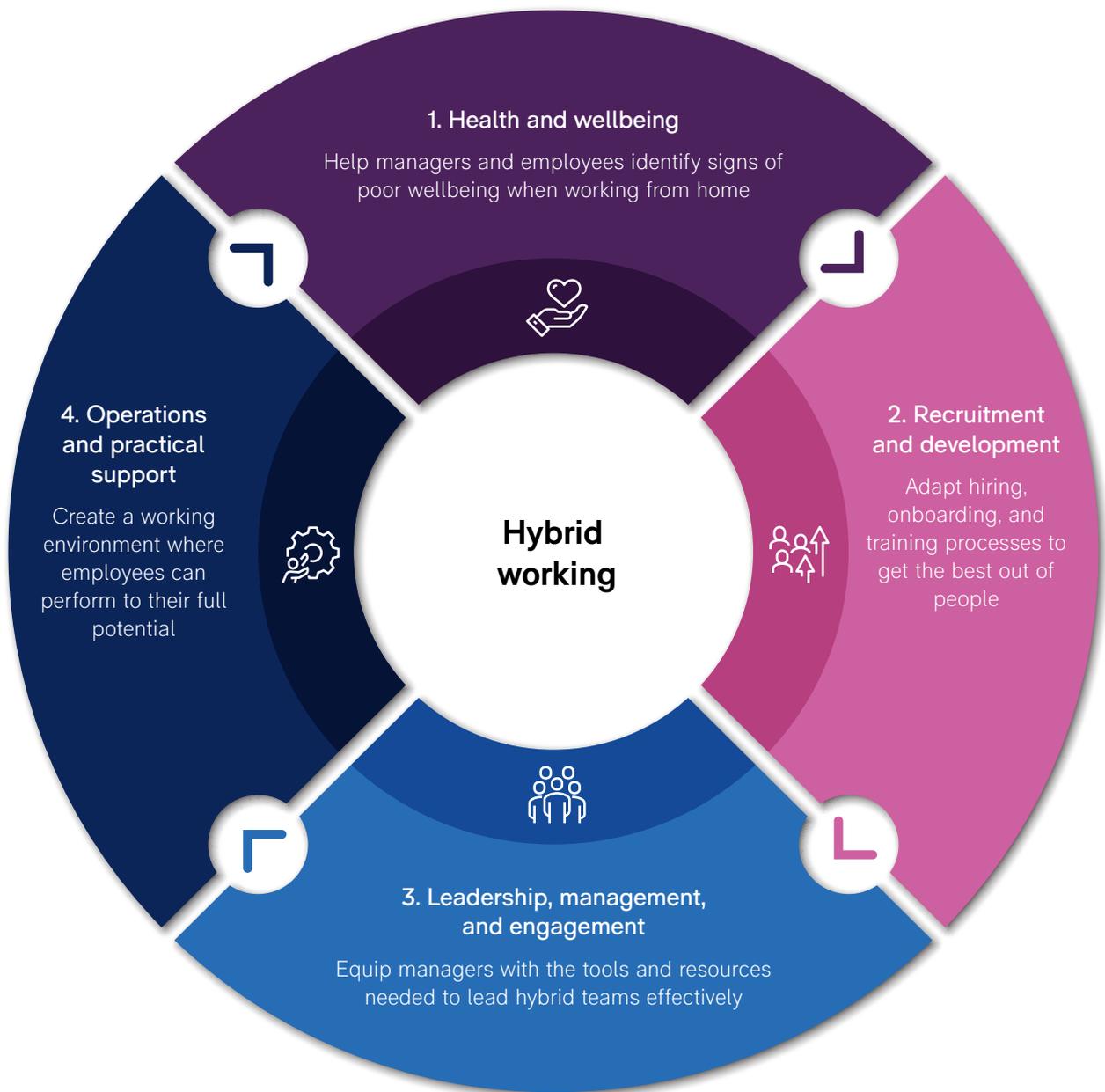
6. Modern Families Index 2019, Working Families and Bright Horizons, 2019

7. Flexible working: a talent imperative, Timewise, 2017



Four considerations to unlock hybrid working

Changing working practices isn't easy – there's a lot for employers to consider. Drawing together the experiences of several businesses, we have identified four areas where businesses should focus their efforts:



1. Health and wellbeing

Help managers and employees identify signs of poor wellbeing when working from home

Lots of employees say that working from home is great for their mental health, but there are risks to look out for, particularly when working from home days are mandated rather than freely chosen. Identifying signs of poor mental health is more difficult when employees regularly work from home. Employers should consider how to change the ways they support employees' mental health and wellbeing.

Questions every business should ask

- How should my business think differently about our mental health strategy to account for home workers?
- How should my business communicate mental health support to everyone in the business?

What you can do for your business

Create additional ways employees can discuss mental health when working remotely:

- Set up virtual roundtables with Mental Health First Aiders, instant messaging services, anonymous hotlines, or launch employee assistance programmes.
- Use workplace networks to communicate the different ways employees and managers can start a mental health conversation.
- Encourage managers to establish a mental health action plan with their teams.

Establish organisational norms that support staff's mental and physical wellbeing wherever they work:

- Encourage flexible working around core working hours, limit call times to 25 or 50 minutes to give employees breaks or encourage them to take a walk during the day.
- Encourage managers to consider employee wellbeing when organising meetings, including setting a precedent that employees can join meetings while walking.
- Create an expectation that managers should regularly communicate with individuals in their team. Suggest the first five minutes of 1-2-1 meetings are spent discussing their wellbeing.

2. Recruitment and development

Adapt hiring, onboarding and training processes to get the best out of people

While businesses and staff have become accustomed to recruiting and attending training virtually during COVID-19, firms will need to future proof their approach by considering what types of development, recruitment, and onboarding practices are best delivered virtually versus face-to-face.

Questions every business should ask

- What training sessions can be delivered remotely and what learning is best completed on location?
- How can my business provide effective training and development sessions remotely?
- How can my business replicate on-the-job learning, especially for younger employees?
- How do onboarding processes need to change for home workers or members of hybrid teams?

What you can do for your business

Evaluate comparative learning experiences to inform whether your business delivers more training virtually:

- Moving learning for knowledge and theory-based courses online can increase participation and engagement.
- Training focused on practical skills, or requiring a behavioural shift often have better outcomes if held in person. Firms could consider prioritising face-to-face sessions for these courses.
- Gather feedback from individuals on training courses to compare the effectiveness of delivery methods.

Establish practices that ensure new starters can integrate with the team and build organisation-wide relationships:

- Consider designating in-person days for all team members to come into the workplace when new starters join.
- Utilise technology to give new starters the opportunity to meet and connect with employees working in different locations.
- Establish a virtual buddy system to help new starters meet new people and build relationships.

When developing new starters or junior colleagues, establish ways to replicate informal 'on-the-job' development discussions:

- Use technology to enable junior and senior colleagues to reflect on work and share advice in real-time as they would in the office.

3. Leadership, management and engagement

Equip managers with the tools and resources needed to lead hybrid teams effectively

Managers will need to adapt to managing individuals and teams who split their time between home and the workplace and consider how they foster team engagement and motivation if employees don't have the same face-to-face and social contact.

Questions every business should ask

- How should my business change the way it leads, manages and engages with employees?
- How should my business support people managers to make this shift?
- What is the best way to maintain a strong organisational culture?
- How do I create an environment that fosters creativity, innovation and encourages idea sharing?
- How should businesses ensure that managers effectively assess employee performance based on outputs, rather than working time?

What you can do for your business

Invest in management training to support managers to change their approach to team organisation and engagement:

- Consider guidance on supporting employee wellbeing, staying connected and inclusive, changing approaches to performance assessment, and using technology to foster collaboration.
- Use webinars to roll out training and make information easily accessible, such as on an employee app, a shared intranet, or LinkedIn Learning.

Encourage managers to recontract with teams about how they'd like to work more flexibly:

- Consider guidance for managers and employees to develop a set of guidelines for working effectively as a hybrid team.
- Learn from and engage with other teams to inspire ways of working differently that balances organisational needs with employee preference.

Establish how hybrid working affects employees who can't work remotely and take actions to mitigate feelings of 'them vs us':

- Consider what types of flexibility can be offered beyond home working, such as flexible hours or shift swaps.
- Share stories to help colleagues understand what flexibilities are available and how they can be used.

4. Operations and practical support

Create a working environment where employees can perform to their full potential

To make hybrid working a success, employees need the right equipment and technology to work effectively at home or in a shared workplace. Firms should consider the costs associated with providing any additional equipment and how the costs will be funded, as well as what the future of their workplace looks like and what facilities changes would complement their new model.

Questions every business should ask

- What practical support should my business offer to hybrid workers, such as extra equipment and financial support?
- How should I ensure fairness in the process?
- How should my business create a hybrid working policy and roll it out across the business?

What you can do for your business

Determine what level of support your business can provide employees based at home for equipment and furniture uplifts:

- Consider allocating additional equipment or furniture on a needs basis, determined by health and safety assessments results or through staff discussions.

Establish what changes should be made to the workplace to make the most of the space as more people work remotely:

- Increase collaboration space and consider hot desking instead of individual workstations to adapt to a flexible workforce.
- Implement a booking system to manage space in the office, especially where employees can choose which days they come onsite or into the office.

Create a clear plan for creating and rolling out a new hybrid working policy across the business:

- Involve managers and employees in the design of a new policy to test what would work well in practice.
- Use the power of leadership voice and role-modelling to help embed a new hybrid working policy.
- Establish a framework to evaluate how well the policy is working. Consider comparing engagement survey results or net promoter scores.

Useful resources to help you on your journey

To successfully transition to hybrid working when offices fully reopen, it's important for firms to start thinking about these practical questions now. The good news is that there are plenty of useful resources to help you on your journey. If you'd like to find out more information, you can:

1. Read the full practical guide on MyCBI

- Get more ideas and inspiration from examples of businesses that are making the transition to hybrid working.

2. Discover more useful CBI resources to help you plan

- Eager to learn more about employee engagement for virtual teams and how to support employees working from home? Our factsheets on **employee engagement** and **remote working** are regularly updated with the latest information and real stories from businesses.
- Looking to invest in your people to help them adapt to new ways of working? Our **Great Job** report highlights the productivity benefits of improving business' people practices and sets out seven key habits that businesses can adopt to effectively lead, engage and develop their staff.
- Looking for new ways to prioritise health and wellbeing in your workplace? Our **Front of Mind** report draws on evidence from other businesses to set some basic principles for how firms can invest in their employees' health and wellbeing with confidence.
- Visit **My CBI**: the CBI's online hub is your go-to place for further information on a range of people and skills topics. Visit **Ideas Forum** for more inspiration.

3. Explore the topic further using external resources

- Timewise has published several articles about the future of hybrid working on their **knowledge hub**.
- **Grae Matta Foundation** features a number of articles on the importance of good mental health in the workplace.

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