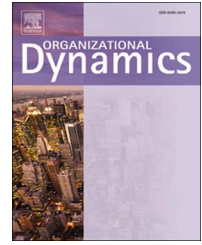


Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

ScienceDirect

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/orgdyn

Hybrid team management: The long and winding road

Anna Wiatr*, Beata Skowron-Mielnik

Poznan University of Economics and Business, Al. Niepodleglosci 10, 61-875 Poznan, Poland

KEYWORDS

Hybrid team;
Hybrid organization;
Hybrid team
management

LET US SUMMARIZE WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT HYBRID TEAMS

At the end of 2021 Oxford English Dictionary had updated its definition of 'hybrid' to include 'hybrid working'. Now we officially know that hybrid working means: "Of employment, education, etc.: providing flexible models for working or learning, specifically by using digital communications technology to allow effective remote access and home working in combination with or in preference to traditional office or teaching environments."

If we consider hybrid working from the perspective of virtual collaboration, it is easy to agree with Mark Dixon, the Founder and CEO of Regus parent company IWG, that the definition is long overdue and "hybrid working has probably been evolving ever since the dial-up modem first made it (relatively) easy for people to send messages from computer to computer." A good example is the dispersed teams, which work, even if its members meet face-to-face once a year, falls under the definition of hybrid working and

which existed long before the pandemic. If we consider hybrid work as a form of flexible working meaning a way of working that suits an employee's needs, it turns out that this is not so common and well known.

Although the term hybrid team is sometimes used to describe a team in which artificial intelligence and robots work together with their human counterparts (e.g., Canan, Sousa-Poza and Dean, 2017; Makarius et al., 2020), our focus is on a different approach i.e., the one in which a hybrid team is described as a mix of co-located employees and remote workers.

A search for the term "hybrid team" in scientific databases brings three main features of such teams:

1. They lie on a continuum from more to less virtual (e.g., Fiol and O'Connor, 2005; Mitchell and Brewer, 2021; Klonek and Parker, 2021);
2. They combine face-to-face communication with computer-mediated interaction (e.g., Cousins, Robey and Ziguers, 2007; Mitchell and Brewer, 2021);
3. They perform their tasks while working from different locations (e.g., Klonek, and Parker, 2021).

Before the pandemic, hybrid teams were mostly reserved for virtual, partially distributed teams i.e., ones

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: anna.wiatr@phd.ue.poznan.pl (A. Wiatr), beata.skowron-mielnik@ue.poznan.pl (B. Skowron-Mielnik).

which consist of some members being co-located, while others are geographically dispersed. While responding to employees' changing expectations for work flexibility was one of the reasons for the development of distributed teams, there were other reasons important from a business perspective. These included access to a global, diverse talent pool that means better hires, faster scaling and growth, cost-effectiveness associated with hiring specialists from emerging markets and reducing office costs as well as increased team agility giving the company a competitive advantage. As planned from the beginning and justified in business terms, both employees and managers were aware of the model they were working in and the challenges it posed. Leaders and employees did not have to manage and adapt to the hybrid teams of the past, as they were predictable, and so were the ways in which these teams worked together. Nowadays, not only is there an increase in the number of people interested in hybrid working, but such an organization is becoming more flexible than before the pandemic, with more frequent employees' expectation of freedom to choose their options, or to decide where and how to work on an ongoing basis. Quoting Lynda Gratton, a professor of management practice at London Business School and the founder of HSM: "If leaders and managers want to make this transition [to a hybrid model] successfully, however, they'll need to do something they're not accustomed to doing: design hybrid work arrangements with individual human concerns in mind, not just institutional ones." And this will not be easy. According to Gallup 2022 survey of U.S. employees, while 53% of remote-capable employees expect a hybrid arrangement, there is no clear consensus from employees about how to define hybrid work, as the employees' preferences and the appropriateness of hybrid work schedules vary greatly by organization, team, role, and individual. About four in 10 employees say they want full autonomy to come and go as they wish, and six in 10 want more structure, but still with no consensus on how to coordinate in-person and remote schedules - certain number of days per week, all hybrid team members working on-site a few specific days per week, or everyone working together on-site for at least one day per week. And these options do not fully exhaust the possible arrangements. The setup is not static and can change depending on the workload and actual needs, as modern hybrid organizations increasingly often accept bottom-up, spontaneous flexibility when their employees can choose what suits them best in terms of convenience and productivity. Employees' choice becomes another feature of a hybrid team definition.

Considering the above, let us therefore present how we understand a hybrid organization and a hybrid team. A hybrid organization is an organization that allows employees to choose between working in an office or workspace, working remotely, or alternating between the two. A hybrid team while it was traditionally defined as a mix of co-located employees and remote workers, due to the evolution of the term now includes workers who want to split their time in the office and at home during the week. Therefore, we can say that a hybrid team is a team made up of both in-office and remote employees and the hybrid team structure allows employees to decide whether they

prefer an office environment or working from anywhere remotely. It means that employees' choices are at the heart of a hybrid team definition and digital communications technology comes only as a tool facilitating the collaboration between the members of such teams. And that is exactly what employees expect from hybrid organizations and what companies do not necessarily offer. Poly's 'Recruit, Retain and Grow' report (2022), looking at how organizations are responding to employees' workplace needs, clearly confirms this. As many as 84% of those surveyed say that team members have rules imposed on the number of days they have to be in the office, and among those who resign from work, 16% cite a lack of the expected flexibility of hybrid working as the reason. While offering a certain structure in a hybrid working arrangement is important, it is not the number of days in the office but the purpose of the meetings that should guide the structure. For example, Laszlo Bock, the CEO and co-founder of Humu, recommends picking a day when the majority of employees can be present in person.

From the perspective of managers, it is important to know that it is not enough to equip an employee only with the tools of the job. The managers should first and foremost focus on the employees and their changing needs and behaviors. The manager job in this new context is to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of a place, people, and time and use them to guide teams toward their objectives.

As many organizations were forced to switch to a hybrid model during the pandemic rather than choosing it deliberately, we can treat their experience from this period as a prelude only, giving an idea of what to look out for in the future when, hopefully, the pandemic is over. However, this does not make these experiences less important.

The aim of our study was to identify not only the key challenges of hybrid team management from the perspective of managers leading such teams during the pandemic but also to pinpoint key competencies required to manage hybrid teams. We collected data using written interviews which were designed to capture the breadth of managers' experiences in hybrid team management and to explore the topic in detail. The research was conducted among managers, Executive MBA students, in two consecutive years, 2020 and 2021. This allowed us to gather their experiences in managing a hybrid team in the first year of the pandemic and after a year. The participants of our study described not only their personal, individual experiences, but also the experiences and solutions of their companies, and thus the experiences of other managers from those companies. A total of 29 managers participated in the study, 12 in the first period and 17 in the second one. Finally, 13 interviews were selected for analysis. The interviews included in the final analysis met the following criteria: (1) minimum 3 months of experience in managing a hybrid team; (2) managing a functional team of which some employees work remotely and some in the office at the same time during the week. Consequently, the interviews with managers leading fully remote teams, geographically dispersed teams, or cross-functional teams were excluded.

In conclusion, we propose a REALM model that summarizes what is key in managing a hybrid team.

HYBRID TEAM MANAGEMENT FROM THE MANAGERS' PERSPECTIVE

Before we give the floor to the managers participating in our research, let us start with what constitutes the effective performance of each team. First, team members need to successfully integrate their individual activities. They play a specific and unique role when each contributes to collective success. Second, as teams work in a highly complex and dynamic environments, team members need to work more adaptively when coordinating their actions. And finally, a leader's success in defining team directions and organizing the team to maximize progress contributes significantly if not critically to team effectiveness. This is exactly the topic we explore in our research.

Referring to four commonly accepted functions of management that include: planning, organizing, leading, and controlling, our research shows that challenges arise in each of them.

Operational planning & organizing is people oriented

Almost all participants reported problems with mapping out exactly how to achieve team's goals and then organize the team according to the plan:

"The main difficulty in managing a hybrid team is the proper planning of all activities and the great discipline in managing the calendar of the working day. Delegating tasks and being precise about objectives, time to complete tasks and performance indicators is essential."

Managers recognize the need to be flexible and constantly adapt to changing conditions:

"One of the challenges is the manager's ability to plan work in a hybrid team. It seems that pure project management methods in the waterfall or agile formula will not fully pass the test. What is needed here is rather a lot of flexibility and building such an attitude among team members."

Team interaction requires adaptation to environmental conditions. In essence, truly effective teams are those that are able to maintain a high level of collective performance even when team and environmental conditions become significantly unfavorable. Such high performance requires both leaders to support and teams to develop norms and operating procedures that promote individual and collective flexibility and adaptability. From a leader's perspective, this means focusing on the competencies of the team members:

"It will therefore be crucial in hybrid work to adapt the message, tasks and detailed form of cooperation for individual team members according to their natural predispositions."

Knowing the team members and anticipating their needs and behaviors is central to how teams effectively work together and for hybrid team managers one of the most important issues.

Leadership is relationship

Relationships have always been important, but today they mean even more. While research shows that the quality of the relationship people feel they have with their managers is the primary driver of engagement, and thus performance, in managing a hybrid team is particularly important in building belonging and unity:

"At present, after several months of working in the hybrid model, it is observed that some of the new employees do not identify with the company to the same extent as those who were hired before the pandemic [...]. There are also claims from more senior employees (more than 2 years) that they now identify less with the company, which is becoming more and more anonymous to them."

Meeting together for lunch, over coffee during work, or going out after work is no longer the case, and online meetings cannot replace them:

"I observe that solutions such as online afternoon meetings, which were supposed to be the equivalent of out-of-office team meetings, are becoming less and less effective. I have noticed that fewer and fewer employees use this form of keeping in touch. Some of them say directly that working in their own apartment they have lost the sense of where the line between work and private time is. It's difficult and frustrating to meet up with co-workers in front of a screen in the same chair they were sitting in two hours earlier because people feel like they are at work all the time."

The lack of direct contacts, informal conversations on topics other than work has a significant impact on psychological safety which encompasses basic teamwork concepts such as fostering trust and safety, embracing new ideas, and moving the team above one's own ego. Lack of psychological safety distances team members from each other:

"In the long run, employees who do online work are pushed to the margins of exclusion, and this leads to an increasingly rapid distance from the team."

And this lack of psychological safety also impacts on team collaboration:

"During this time [hybrid working] fatigue was prevalent, with numerous communication problems, especially between the employees who worked remotely and returned to the office and those who performed their duties on site [...]. Chaos was often evident and there were many misunderstandings and conflict situations."

The role of the hybrid team manager in particular is to focus and respond to the needs of employees:

"[...] the starting point is a focus on employees. In times of uncertainty especially, but also under normal circumstances, focusing on the needs of employees should be one of the cornerstones of any company. Listening to the needs, motivating, getting to know the point of view or dilemmas should become a permanent element of every manager's work."

Control - autonomy - trust link

With the development of flexible working, established command and control styles of management do not work anymore:

“One of the most common problems that line managers report on hybrid working is that they lose their sense of control over their employees.”

However, giving autonomy is a risk-taking action as the managers thereby deepens his or her dependence on the subordinate's competence, goodwill, integrity, and benevolence. Before giving autonomy, the manager must first trust the employee's ability to comply with his or her tasks:

“Managers and leaders were not prepared to supervise the remote work of their teams. In isolated situations where an employee worked from home, faith was placed in the fact that they had actually done the work to the full extent of their responsibilities.”

And secondly, the manager does not feel the need to emphasize his or her authority position. Empowering and becoming more dependent on subordinates is not always easy for leaders, and they may feel that their roles and contributions decrease as employee autonomy increases:

“I also think that a lot must have happened in the minds of managers, who hitherto had a great sense of power and control over their employees, and now have to show a great deal of trust in the way their employees carry out their tasks.”

However, as trust and control are not static phenomena, managerial control may have both a positive and a negative effect on employee trust. On the one hand, managers who monitor their subordinates' performance and thus show that they value their performance and are interested in their work, are trusted more than those who do not seem to care. On the other hand, if behind monitoring is an intention to control employees' behavior, monitoring and control systems contribute negatively to trust:

“Every manager's performance is determined by two basic factors - trust in his or her team and checking that they are doing the right job. However, when I talk to other managers, I often get the impression that for them, measuring performance is equal to showing a lack of trust in their employees.”

The relationship between control, giving autonomy and employee trust seems to be dependent on perceptions, attributions and meanings related to control. People vary in the extent to which they need autonomy and too much autonomy can cause dissatisfaction if employees feel that they are left too much on their own or that their workload has increased. Therefore, it is important that autonomy affirms the individual's ability to exert influence and achieve desired goals:

“In my opinion, the biggest challenge that managers of hybrid employees face is to maintain their equal efficiency and commitment to their tasks. This is due to both the competencies of employees and their willingness to take responsibility and their habits.”

Hybrid teams require more autonomy for another reason. Decision-making processes can be significantly extended, which can affect the performance of the entire organization:

“The issue of employees' decision-making and autonomy remains an important element in the hybrid model. In principle, remote working does not change the extent of their power to make autonomous decisions. However, in cases where consultation or formal approval is needed, this takes more time. When there is no opportunity for direct contact, a precise description of the problem becomes a necessity, usually done by e-mail. Unfortunately, it is more and more often the case that due to the increasing volume of e-mails received, one is not able to keep up to date with the incoming messages, resulting in a backlog.”

It is important to notice that team management is not about choosing between control and autonomy, because paradoxically autonomy and control can and must coexist. Effective management is the ability to use these two options and optimize them to influence the engagement of team members.

And communication all around

Although we have declared that we will refer to management functions, it is impossible not to distinguish a thread that emerged particularly clearly as a result of the data analysis - communication. Communication can most simply be defined as the transfer and understanding of meaning. On the one hand, communication was the most frequently reported challenge among our research participants. On the other hand, it is effective communication that they indicate as the way to deal with the challenges arising in all the areas described above. However, before we point out what effective communication requires, it is important to mention how important equal access to information is:

“In my organization we started using Microsoft Teams, on which channels were created with specific files and data. This allowed everyone to access all documents and it didn't really matter whether someone was physically or virtually at work. At the same time, the further development of this software helped the organization to manage the information chaos. Before the introduction of the software, we struggled with poor flow and access to information.”

What makes communication effective in managing a hybrid team then?

Transparent and complete as it impacts significantly on completion of tasks:

“As we hardly ever do work that can be done independently, sharing information with each other, analyzing materials together and drawing conclusions are the basis for effective work. This is much more difficult to achieve in a hybrid working environment. Therefore, it becomes crucial to define specific and clear expectations towards each other and to know who from the team

is working on what and how their work affects the whole task.”

And also impacts on decision-making processes:

“With a complete set of data, in quality and on time, you can make business decisions without undue delay.”

Accurate and timely so that, regardless of the place of work, everyone understands the message in the same way and accountability for specific tasks is clear:

“The big managerial challenge is to maintain a high quality of communication, despite the distance, so that all stakeholders have the right information, necessary for their work and, most importantly, on time. This will avoid a situation where a task is left without a business owner, or is duplicated, or there is simply a desynchronization of processes due to limited or disrupted information flow.”

THE REALM OF HYBRID TEAM MANAGEMENT

There is a long and winding road to effective hybrid team management.

Planning and organizing in hybrid team management are no longer separate functions and the study participants confirmed this by analyzing them together. As both planning and organizing require a flexible approach and constant adaptation, they are so intertwined that it is difficult to say where any of them begins or ends. Planning as a function involving setting objectives and determining a course of action for achieving those objectives requires the managers to be good decision makers. While we previously considered operational planning as short-term, managing a hybrid team requires “here and now” planning. The same is equally true for the organizing function that for a manager means developing a structure of a team and allocating its members to ensure the accomplishment of objectives. As planning is “here and now”, organizing also follows the same way. It requires a fundamentally different approach to leading a team i.e., focusing more on setting directions and aligning people rather than planning, budgeting, organizing, and staffing.

While employees’ choices are at the heart of the definition of a hybrid team, their competencies and predispositions determine the team functioning and their cooperation. Not only planning and organizing, but also controlling should be based on the skills and attitudes of individual team members. The need for flexibility and adaptation to the changing environment, but also the way of working on a daily basis requires adjustment of the form of communication, tasks, and the degree of autonomy given. This in turn requires from the manager to know the members of the team, their needs and their competencies, and above all it requires the manager to trust the employees. Not only is trust the foundation upon which motivation is based, and therefore its level affects the performance of an organization or a team but trust also induces reciprocal trust. This “positive” cycle of mutual trust increases motivation and thus performance. In addition, manager’s subjective trust leads to behavioral trust by giving autonomy to trusted employees to schedule and

determine how they do their work, which in turn strengthens the employees’ beliefs in their ability to have a say in their team. However, people vary in the degree to which they need autonomy. Managers may encourage employees’ reciprocal trust by giving an employee as much autonomy as he or she is willing to accept. This again brings us back to the point that knowing your employees, their capabilities, attitudes, motivations, and needs is key. Building a relationship of mutual respect, where employees perceive that their needs are considered and are acted upon appropriately underpins the managerial support. Leaders support employees by building a culture of trust, a safe psychological environment that motivates people and by helping them to cope with the demands of their role. In a hybrid organization, relationships become even more important. Not only do hybrid team members identify less with the organization, but through the lack of informal conversations, they are less committed to building relationships with one another. This has a major impact on teamwork and brings the role of the leader primarily down to relationship management.

Hybrid teams need authentic leaders who elicits trust among employees, alleviate negative emotions such as anxiety and threat, and enhance the positive ones such as hope and enthusiasm. Hybrid teams need leaders who are ready to share power (give autonomy) as well as psychologically empower employees, so they have the confidence, determination, a sense of meaning of their work, competence, and most importantly, the feeling of impact on the organization. Hybrid teams need ego free, considerate leaders who put the employees’ needs first, show concern and respect for them, look out for their welfare, and express appreciation and support. Hybrid teams need leaders who are open to any suggestion from anywhere and communicate effectively.

Quality communication is a key to quality leadership and as companies strive to achieve quality relationships it becomes even more important to hybrid organizations. Clear communication throughout the change process which is moving to a hybrid model influences the perception of fairness and trust. The success of organizational change strongly depends on internal communication. Leader’s effective communication, including the ability to clearly articulate information as well as focus on the frequency of communication helps with uncertainty and anxiety among employees and supports their feeling of psychological safety. Communication supports willingness to interact with the employees during times of uncertainty and ambiguity. The more useful, timely, and adequate the information in times of change, the more fulfilled the psychological contract, and the higher the trust. Effective communication means also positive communication that affects the emotional buy-in and serves as a stress reducer.

As a result of our research, we recommend hybrid team management which takes into account what we summarize in the Hybrid Team Management REALM model. REALM is an acronym that stands for the necessity of building meaningful Relationships, attention to Effective communication, giving Autonomy, free of ego Leadership and Motivating through trust (see [Figure 1](#)).

For many managers, a hybrid team is essentially a new team. Even if it is made up of the same people they worked



Figure 1. Hybrid Team Management - the REALM model.

with before, it requires them to take a different approach to successfully integrate their individual activities. However, this does not mean that we are writing an entirely new chapter here. A wide variety of activities and practices employed for managing virtual teams as well as teams during a change can still be used. Although our research focused mainly on the challenges and competency gaps in relation to hybrid team management, based on the available literature and research as well as interviews with managers, we offer the following advice to help managers develop competence in each area.

Relationships

Relationships in a hybrid team are characterized by volatility and diversity, so a key element from the leader's perspective is to build equally good, effective relationships with remote and on-site employees. This is especially true since in a hybrid team there may be people working only remotely, people working only in the office, and still others alternating between the office and remote work. With each group, and depending on the organization of the individual's work, you will need to take care of the relationships not only between the leader and the employee, but above all the relationships within the group, ensuring that the group works cohesively and that all members are integrated every day regardless of their working mode. When there are team meetings, each person should have a reason to be there, each person should contribute in some way, and each person should be engaged. This will help the team members to integrate around a common goal, ensure equality between remote and on-site employees as well as to build trust with the leader and the team. One of the biggest challenges of hybrid work, however, is finding ways to nurture social relationships. Hallway conversations or coffee chats are not only important for creative ideas to be triggered but for nurturing relationships and the trust that they entail. In a hybrid world, leaders need to coordinate time in the office so that people can connect for those moments over coffee. Leaders should be smart about how they use the time they have got in person, and whenever possible schedule one-to-one time with team members when they are in the office. In-person meetings can also combine work and social interactions in the most information-rich way, so the team members are less likely to misunderstand expectations and plans and can socialize at the same time.

Considering the above, we offer the following advice:

- Look for opportunities to have all team members together, e.g., pick a day when the majority of employees can be in the office in person and ensure time to develop social interactions, e.g., joint coffee or lunch breaks. Make it a standing rule. Meeting people in person is important to build trust;
- Create opportunities where all team members are encouraged to share their experiences and concerns, e.g., create "special places" to be more conducive to dialog and conversation than traditional conference rooms. This will help individuals get past the stumbling blocks that prevent dialog and conversation;
- Promote a culture that is more tolerant of speaking up about mistakes and circumstances that have a potential to create problems or crises, e.g., share your concerns or struggles as a leader. This will help to enhance psychological safety of the team and its members, and your team members will be more likely to trust you with their concerns;
- Communicate the value and importance of each employee to the entire team and the organization, e.g., make it a regular part of one meeting each month. Do not leave anyone out.

Effective communication

The hybrid nature of teams means that a uniform system of communication must be forgotten. Since some employees are in the office and others are at home, communication with each group will inevitably happen via different channels and messages will take a different form. For employees working in the office, a shared conversation will suffice, for those working remotely, written information may be needed, communicated to all in the same way and conveying the same message, especially when a shared conversation even via a virtual communicator is not possible. Experience to date indicates an increase in the formalization of communication in remote working, thus a leader will need to develop a relatively uniform, baseline communication system based on a formal message, complemented by less formalized conversations. Establishing a sound remote communication structure as well as synchronous access to the information is key. Holding consistent, weekly meetings, ensuring two-way communication, and relying on systems to keep everyone informed ensures transparency in the hybrid office. A hybrid work arrangement requires constant communication to prevent silos between in-office and remote employees. Leaders set an example by taking extra time to communicate and thus building long-term trust. However, a non-verbal communication remains the biggest challenge. It is extremely difficult to develop the same effective formula for those in and out of the office, especially without a camera. In the case of a hybrid team, leaders must therefore face, on the one hand, greater formalization in communicating certain messages and, on the other hand, figure out how to remotely convey non-verbal messages.

Considering the above, we offer the following advice:

- Establish ground rules for communication taking into consideration the needs of remote and on-site team

members. These rules should address: 1) modes of communication for different types of messages, e.g., synchronous communication for feedback or problem-solving sessions, asynchronous mode to process high quality information, 2) rules for conducting and participating in meetings, e.g., speaking with a microphone instead of using a chat during online group meetings, using cameras, implementing turn-taking measures so everyone has a chance to share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions, 3) dialog rules, e.g., using respectful tone, not interrupting, asking questions instead of assuming what others are thinking, maintaining confidentiality;

- Ensure that writing everything down is the norm. Documenting messages in a written format will ensure understanding of mutual goals, prevent excessive catch-up meetings, and ensure clarity;
- Communicate clearly. Ensure team members are on the same page and mitigate any overlap in efforts geared toward task completion, e.g., if you have a lot of information to share, consider preparing a document that provides background information on a topic, use bullet points and numbering to make the text easier to digest, stick to language that is familiar and inclusive. Communication quality is significantly more strongly associated with performance than its volume;
- Respond in a predictable and timely manner. Predictable and timely responses to inquiries or task requests not only highly impact team performance but also build trust and improve a member's sense of engagement and feeling of being valued and respected.

Autonomy

Since hybrid work balances autonomy and collaboration, one of the key success factors in hybrid working is employee autonomy, self-reliance in performing tasks, and awareness of the undertaken commitments. To achieve these objectives, a precise distribution of tasks is necessary. Organizations that had used the task-based work systems prior to the pandemic and were then forced into remote working, had little trouble achieving their goals at their usual level. The hybrid team leader should therefore analyze the work in terms of location-related limitations, with reference to the employees' competences and deadlines, and distribute tasks in such a way that they are carried out autonomously, without the need of control by the leader or other employees. The way the task is executed must be up to the employee, and the leader's role should be limited to monitoring the result. However, autonomy does not mean leaving every individual or team to work on their own. It is rather about giving individuals the freedom to work in a way that suits best their wellbeing and productivity.

Considering the above, we offer the following advice:

- Lead when the time is right, e.g., identify the conditions that increase the chances of team effectiveness or that create obstacles to team performance and then intervene;
- Remove organizational or technological boundaries that exert tight control and hinder the team from being

effective, e.g., move away from detailed policies in favor of introducing general guidelines and accountability mechanisms, refrain from implementing monitoring systems;

- Support a growth mindset and invest in competence. The more skilled the employees are at their tasks, the more autonomous they are. E.g., invest in good training schemes for your employees, consider and provide any possible on-the-job training, allow the employees to exercise their knowledge and expertise in projects or problem-focused discussions;
- Ensure that each employee has exactly as much autonomy as he or she needs, e.g., decide what types and levels of autonomy each employee needs and you are able to offer, and talk about it with your team members, encourage them to see this as an ongoing conversation and consider together where you can adjust as individual needs change.

Leading beyond ego

Transformational leadership has been discussed for a long time. With regard to hybrid teams, discussion is no longer the point, as here implementation is required. Leaders need to be open to discuss the work organization of a hybrid team but they also need the openness of the employees. The above-mentioned volatility in the distribution of tasks, the place of work of the team members, or the form of communication, cannot depend on the will of the leader. The leaders are not at the top of a hybrid team - they are in the middle, act as facilitators, coordinators. The leader's role is to bind the whole group together by setting the rules and aligning people around company's and team's goals, and not by exercising control or disposing motivators that often blow the leaders' egos. In managing a hybrid team, of the four main behaviors that distinguish transformational leaders, one in particular proves to be significantly important - individualized consideration, meaning the inclusion of people into the transformation process and the need to diagnose their wishes, needs, values, and abilities in the right way. The leader, who is aware of the different needs and wishes of people as well as their talents and skills, has an opportunity to use all those different demands in the right way and support the employees in developing and demonstrating these key skills and behaviors.

Thus, in addition to the above-mentioned suggestions we offer the following advice for leaders:

- Be empathetic to how each team member is feeling, regardless of where they are located, e.g., ask the employees how they are feeling and take the time to listen;
- Advocate for the employee ideas by actively listening to them, responding, and sharing;
- Ask for feedback. Managers who ask for feedback set an example for the employees to follow and demonstrate the best approach to constructive criticism. This helps the employees learn to ask for strengths-based feedback from each other;
- Show genuine concern for well-being of all the employees e.g., make wellbeing a part of career development conversations;

- Communicate with your team in a manner that highlights their values.

Motivation through trust

Since members of a hybrid team are expected to work autonomously and control is outcome-based, the leader's trust in the employees lies at the heart of effective hybrid working. We are not talking about trust on a 'I believe they are working (because I can't control)' basis. It is results that show they are working and doing it well. And this happens when the employees have the necessary competencies. In hybrid work, it is more difficult to compensate for competency deficits - in the office, you can always ask someone, replace someone - at home, you have to be able to perform the task on your own. Thus, the leader's main responsibility is to build these competencies in the employees and to support their self-motivation that they use these competencies in the right way.

Thus, in addition to the above-mentioned suggestions we offer the following advice for the leaders:

- Provide coaching, feedback, and role modeling, thereby helping people grow professionally, develop competencies, and enhance their self-esteem;
- Support collaborative behaviors among coworkers e.g., by regular problem-focused discussions, so that they can learn from each other;
- Take a strengths-based approach, e.g., assign tasks to the person who can bring the most passion to the project. Employees are usually most motivated when they have the chance to use their strengths at work.

Particular elements of the model address all situations important for the functioning of a hybrid team as identified in the interviews. However, it is crucial to note that the success of working with such a model depends on both the leader and the team members. It can be difficult for the leader to maintain all five dimensions at the right level, and this raises the question of the competencies required from managers to manage a hybrid team effectively. In turn, team members should be at least aware of what the manager needs from their side - about their needs, problems, or possible solutions. They should also be able to decide and choose what they need in hybrid work. Moving to the proposed hybrid team management model therefore entails tasks and challenges for the whole team.

The REALM model indicates what is the foundation of a hybrid team management. What is worth adding is that only through a holistic approach the manager can influence the effectiveness of the hybrid team. It would be a mistake to be selective. Aces do not determine the durability of a house of cards.



SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The quote from Mark Dixon is taken from his article “Hybrid work: a better way of life” which appeared in powered by Regus Magazine UK, 2022, <https://www.regus.com/work-us/en-us/hybrid-work-a-better-way-of-life/>.

For reading on fundamental components of team effectiveness, see: S. J. Zaccaro, A. L. Rittman, M. A. Marks, Team Leadership, *The Leadership Quarterly* (2001), [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(01\)00093-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(01)00093-5).

For reading on the importance of trust in building virtual teams, see: R. C. Ford, R.F. Piccolo, L.R. Ford, Strategies for building effective virtual teams: Trust is key, *Business Horizons* (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2016.08.009>, and on reciprocity of trust and the role of autonomy in this process, see: T. Seppälä, J. Lipponen, A.-M. Pirttilä-Backman, J. Lipsanen, Reciprocity of trust in the supervisor-subordinate relationship: The mediating role of autonomy and the sense of power, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2010.507353>.

For a study of how managers motivate subordinate cooperation using applications of controls and demonstrations of their trustworthiness, see: C.P. Long, To control and build trust: How managers use organizational controls and trust-building activities to motivate subordinate cooperation, *Accounting, Organizations and Society* (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aos.2018.05.006> and to read on the importance of monitoring and employee control for employees to feel trust and motivation, see: V.H. Bernstrøm, H. Svare, Significance of Monitoring and Control for Employees' Felt Trust, Motivation, and Mastery, *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies* (2017), <https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.v7i4.102356>.

For additional information on successfully managing and communicating with virtual employees, see: S.A. Newman, R.C. Ford, G.W. Marshall, Virtual team leader communication: employee perception and organizational reality. *International Journal of Business Communication* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488419829895>, and on the link between employees' trust toward the organization and transparent communication, see: C. A. Yue, L. R. Men, M. A. Ferguson, Bridging transformational leadership, transparent communication, and employee openness to change: The mediating role of trust, *Public Relations Review* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.04.012>.

For reading on what to pay special attention to in the transition to a hybrid model, see: L. Gratton, How to Do

Hybrid Right, *Harvard Business Review* (2021), <https://hbr.org/2021/05/how-to-do-hybrid-right>.

For ideas to create psychological safety in virtual teams, see: A. Lechner, J. Tobias Mortlock, How to create psychological safety in virtual teams, *Organ Dyn* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2021.100849>.

For reading on why the companies need ego free leadership and how to become such a leader, see the book: G. Young, D. Grant, J. Knights, *Leading Beyond the Ego. How to become a Transpersonal Leader*, Routledge, 2018.

For reading on new directions for leading teams in the digital age, see: L. Larson, L. DeChurch, Leading teams in the digital age: Four perspectives on technology and what they mean for leading teams, *The Leadership Quarterly* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2019.101377>.

For reading on how leaders impact change, see: S. Oreg, Y. Berson, Leaders' impact on organizational change: Bridging theoretical and methodological chasms, *The Academy of Management Annals* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2016.0138>.

For reading on the relations between authentic leadership perception, trust, and followers' emotions during change, see: L. Agote, N. Aramburu, R. Lines, Authentic Leadership Perception, Trust in the Leader, and Followers' Emotions in Organizational Change Processes, *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886315617531>.

For reading on general rules for leading a hybrid team, see: L. Bock, 5 New Rules for Leading a Hybrid Team, *Harvard Business Review* (2021), <https://hbr.org/2021/11/5-new-rules-for-leading-a-hybrid-team>.

For reading on the future of hybrid work, see: B. Wigert, The future of hybrid work: 5 key questions answered with data, *Gallup* (2022), <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/390632/future-hybrid-work-key-questions-answered-data.aspx>, and on strategies for leading hybrid teams, see: A. Mitchell, P.E. Brewer, Leading hybrid teams: Strategies for realizing the best of both worlds, *Organizational Dynamics* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2021.100866>.

For more information on using written interviews in qualitative research, see: D. Schiek, C. G. Ullrich, Using asynchronous written online communications for qualitative inquiries: a research note, *Qualitative Research* (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794117690216>.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant support from public, commercial, or non-profit agencies.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Anna Wiatr: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization. **Beata Skowron-Mielnik:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Supervision.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Anna Wiatr, MA, Assoc CIPD, is a PhD student at the Department of Corporate Resources Management at Poznan University of Economics and Business in Poland. She has over twenty years of managerial experience in HR consulting, mainly executive search, competency profiling and talent management. Her research interests include flexible working arrangements, managerial support and competencies, and leadership.

Beata Skowron-Mielnik, PhD in economics, business management, is an Associate professor at the Department of Corporate Resources Management at Poznan University of Economics and Business in Poland. Her research focuses on work organization, job design, hybrid working, time management, competence development, and interim management. She places particular emphasis on the fact that science should be "practical and applied". She is the author of scientific publications on human resources management and the initiator and coordinator of business studies and projects.