

OPINION

Tips for a hybrid workplace: How not to be out of sight, out of mind

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As vaccination counts rise and pandemic restrictions begin to ease across the country, conversations about returning to school and work are becoming more frequent. A lot of universities are planning for an in-person fall term, and businesses that transitioned to work-from-home in March, 2020, are now talking about going back to their workplaces later this summer. But despite the constant discussion about the return of face-to-face, many organizations are actually planning for a hybrid environment.

A hybrid workplace is one in which some people are in the office (or factory, class, shop floor or store) and others are working from home. It can be the same people at each, or some sort of a rotational schedule. The reasons behind a hybrid environment are many: a continued need for physical distancing; poor air circulation in the workplace; staff with compromised immune systems; in the case of universities, students unable to attend in-person classes because of travel complications; to name just a few.

As a result, it is very likely that you may find yourself in a hybrid work situation for a significant period of time. Will these intermittent in-person interactions with your co-workers, clients and boss make it harder to get things accomplished? Will out of sight become out of mind? Will your career progression be negatively affected? The answer to all these questions is “Possibly.” Unless you take specific deliberate steps to ensure otherwise.

The transition from in-person to virtual at the start of the pandemic was challenging. Communication was more difficult; what was expected of you became murky, and unless

trust already existed, it was harder to build. But moving from virtual to hybrid kicks up the complexity even further.

While everyone being “remote” is tough enough, a mixture of remote and in-office is even more demanding. The perception of those who are “remote” can be that those “at work” have greater access to information and resources. And the view of those who are in the workplace can be that their virtual colleagues are often unavailable and out of touch with reality. Whichever side you’re on, here are steps you can take to make sure that your career is not handicapped by hybrid.

Ask for a weekly six-step structured one-on-one meeting with your boss. It doesn’t matter where you or they are located, this is always a best practice to ensure that you not only get things done, but continually demonstrate your accomplishments and skills.

Focus on demonstrating outcomes and results. Because you and your boss may not always be within eye-distance of each other, how you do things and how long it takes does not matter as much as what you complete and deliver. So make it a point to speak about what you’ve done in terms of actual deliverables, and not the process or effort that it took to get you there.

Don’t only identify problems, offer solutions. Just as things are more complicated for you in the hybrid world, so are they for your boss. If all you do is raise what’s wrong, you’re going to be seen as a complainer, which will hurt you. But if you bring up issues and recommend possible resolutions, you’ll be recognized as a problem-solver, which will help you.

Be inclusive by continuing to meet virtually. Even if the in-house team can gather physically around a boardroom table, suggest that everyone should join on a virtual platform individually from their desktops. Why? Because it reduces the appearance of disparity in access to information and resources.

Use online collaboration tools. Just because you’re not all in the same place doesn’t mean that working together to brainstorm or carry out responsibilities has to be more difficult. My personal favourite online tools are Google Docs and Miro, but there is a plethora available to choose from.

Evaluate priorities as a team. When teams are physically dispersed, there are often

misunderstandings about urgencies and deadlines. As much as possible, reach out to your colleagues and work out your priorities together. And get concurrence on what was agreed to by restating, before moving to the next topic.

Make yourself accessible to others. Maintaining relationships in a virtual world is hard, and it is the same in a hybrid workspace. Build connections and rapport by frequently checking in with your colleagues to offer support and assistance. Your effort will not go unnoticed.

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