



# A practical guide to managing hybrid teams

The xford Group  
A City & Guilds Business

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Thank you to our team who weaved together their strands of deep knowledge and decades of experience, to bring together this report.

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# Foreword

## Disruptive times

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These are disruptive times. Whilst it seems that change is always present, the waves of change we've all experienced due to the Covid-19 pandemic have been at a level of intensity that many of us will not have experienced before.

Over this time, hybrid working - where teams work either on site, virtually, or some combination of both - has become a new norm.

Although teams have been working together remotely, across sites and geographies for a long time, the novelty here is the magnitude of change. Colleagues that once nearly all worked face-to-face, or were office-based, will now usually be employed with a mixture of working from home and in the office. In fact, LinkedIn reports that 87% of employees will want to remain remote most of the time<sup>1</sup>.

This means for managers like you, who are accountable for coordinating the work of teams that are distributed in different geographical locations, the challenges are real and complex:

1. **How do you build/maintain trust in your team?**
2. **How do you ensure you're inclusive?**
3. **How do you bring somebody new onboard?**
4. **How do you project a vision?**
5. **How do people learn on the job?**
6. **How do you manage performance remotely?**
7. **How do you navigate change?**
8. **How do you create the right company atmosphere?**

Add to these the fact that even before the Covid-19 pandemic, hybrid working didn't work for everyone and the magnitude of the issue becomes even clearer.

At The Oxford Group, we're inspired by the words of the UK's youngest billionaire, the CEO of virtual events platform Hopin, who said, "the quicker you let go, the quicker you grow."<sup>2</sup>

Whilst you're not in control of the change, you can be in control of the way you leverage this change in a way that is right for you, working towards answering those questions raised above, as well as leading your team to sustainable performance.

And we also know that you might want more practical pointers, so that you're primed to prosper and grow stronger. This paper intends to do just that.

To help, we've divided this paper into eight sections, with each section concluding with three practical actions that you might take to support your team and yourself.

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# 87%

**of employees will want to remain remote most of the time**

1. [https://www.linkedin.com/business/talent/blog/talent-strategy/hybrid-work-here-to-stay?utm\\_source=feedblitz&utm\\_medium=FeedBlitzEmail&utm\\_campaign=Once%20a%20day\\_2021-06-29\\_10:30:00&utm\\_content=946764](https://www.linkedin.com/business/talent/blog/talent-strategy/hybrid-work-here-to-stay?utm_source=feedblitz&utm_medium=FeedBlitzEmail&utm_campaign=Once%20a%20day_2021-06-29_10:30:00&utm_content=946764)

2. CEO Secrets: 'My billion-pound company has no office'



# Executive summary

## The hybrid-houseboat

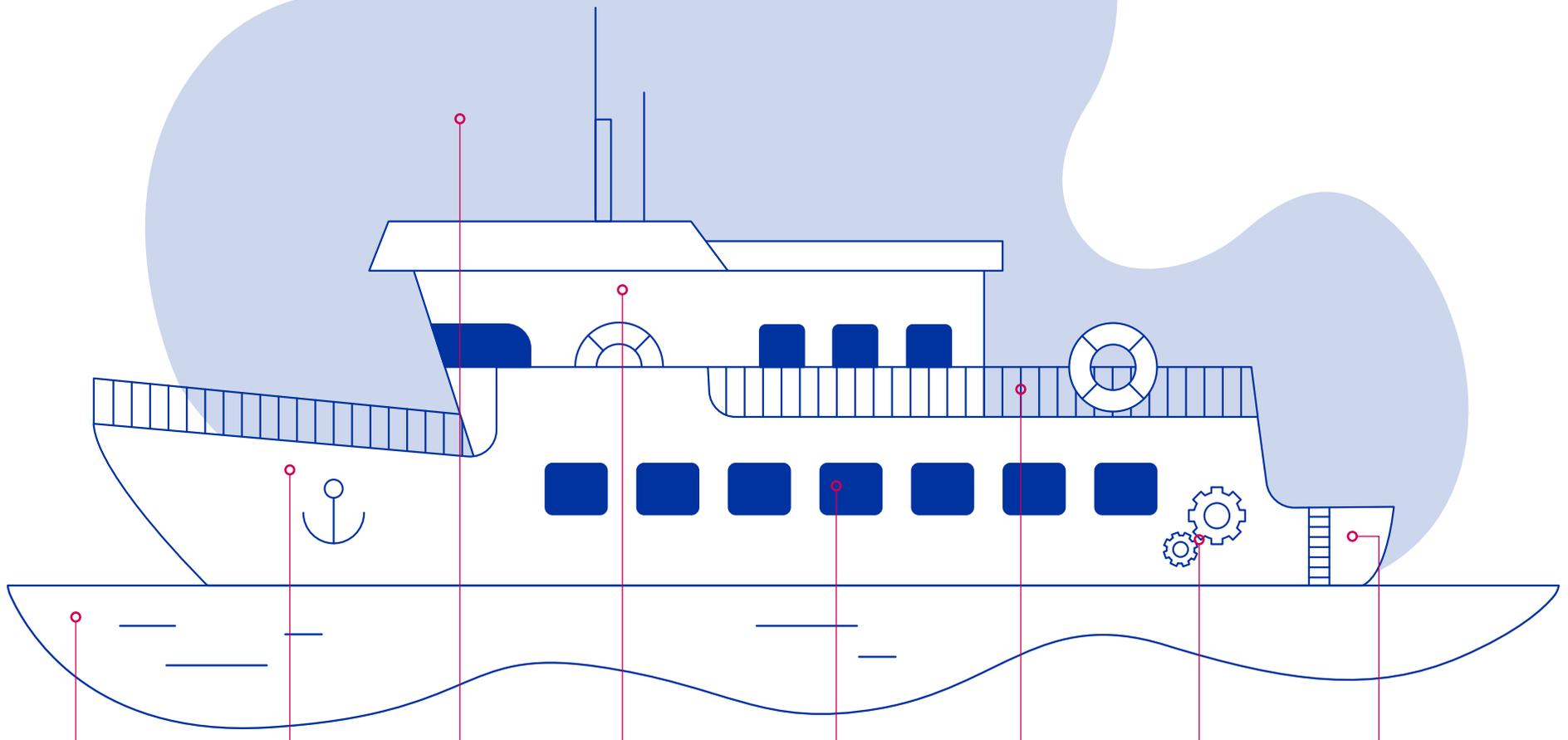
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To successfully manage a hybrid team, we believe that there are eight particular challenges that managers will need to be confident and skilled at addressing.

Welcome, therefore, to the hybrid-houseboat - sometimes anchored to the shore, sometimes out in the water - but always relying on the full engagement of the team to ensure that challenges are successfully navigated while arriving safely at port.

## The eight features of the hybrid-houseboat:

1. Creating a strong base of trust
2. Nurturing inclusiveness
3. Bringing new starters onboard
4. Articulating your vision
5. Learning on the job
6. Managing performance remotely
7. Navigating change
8. Establishing a team culture



**Navigating change**  
The choppy sea

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**Creating a strong base of trust**  
The hull of the boat

1

**Establishing a team culture**  
The atmosphere around the boat

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**Articulating your vision**  
The captain's vantage point

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**Managing performance remotely**  
The lower deck

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**Nurturing inclusiveness**  
The safety rails

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**Learning on the job**  
The engine room

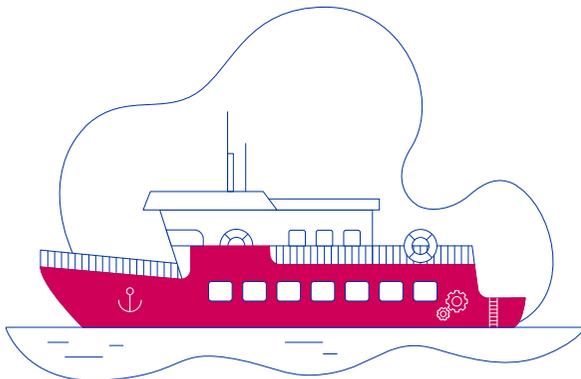
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**Onboard new starters**  
Where you board the boat

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# 1 Creating a strong base of trust

A team that doesn't establish bonds based upon trust runs the risk of becoming toxic. We all know this. We've probably experienced teams that have assumed trust, or, perhaps even worse, abused it. And working in a hybrid way adds more strain to these bonds.



**Creating a strong base of trust**  
The hull of the boat

There are four reasons that hybrid working is corroding trust, according to Mortensen and Gardner.<sup>3</sup>

This corrosion of trust adds psychological complexity to the communication between people, which in turn makes it harder for managers and teams to find shared understanding.



That, in principle, almost everyone can now work from home, whereas before only select highly-trusted individuals, or those whose work allowed it to be measured, worked from home



Many are not set up to manage the challenges of family life and work in the same space



An uncertain economy breeds anxiety



And finally the challenges of working from home (bad WIFI etc.) make it more likely that people may fail to deliver as promised

So the primary task as a manager is to ensure that the hull of your hybrid boat is based upon trust. **With trust strengthened and protected, you will remain watertight as a ship and be ready to weather the different pressures of work.** And like the hull of a ship, trust will need your consistent attention to ensure that no rot sets in, as this would put everything on the boat at risk.

<sup>3</sup> <https://hbr.org/2021/02/wfh-is-corroding-our-trust-in-each-other>

## Anxieties

Something of particular note that will test these bonds of trust is the anxiety surrounding vaccinations and the return to the office. The resistance has a range of sources, including the challenges and risks of commuting and the fact that some people will not want to be vaccinated, which will lead to the discomfort associated with being around those who have/haven't been vaccinated. "The thought of commuting again fills me with fear and dread," says one Guardian headline, quoting a London commuter.<sup>4</sup> Other factors at play include people's anxieties around losing the time they have invested in family, exercise and rest because they don't have to commute.

In one survey by McKinsey, 47% of colleagues feel that a lack of a clear vision about work in the post-pandemic world is a cause for concern.<sup>5</sup>

In our experience from working with managers leading teams in these uncertain times, we hear individuals reflecting on their purpose, re-thinking career decisions and being acutely aware of feeling overwhelmed.

# 47%

**of colleagues feel that a lack of a clear vision about work in the post pandemic work is a cause for concern**



4. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/05/idea-of-commuting-fills-me-with-dread-workers-on-returning-to-the-office>

5. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/five-fifty-hybridized>

6. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/what-executives-are-saying-about-the-future-of-hybrid-work>

7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-57517669>

8. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/five-fifty-better-bosses>

## To support building trust in your teams, why not try these three approaches:

### 1. Micro-transactions

Increase the small moments when different groups connect with each other.<sup>6</sup> Those few minutes before the meeting starts are not time-fillers, they're bond-builders. Add in time to the weekly team huddle to track how everyone is feeling. Provide moments where you connect with each individual team member on a personal note; don't feel that every conversation has to be about discussing projects. For example, the events platform Hopin uses AI bots to scan the messaging platform staff use and pairs up random colleagues once a month for an online coffee (in a bid to replace those water cooler moments).<sup>7</sup>

### 2. Listen

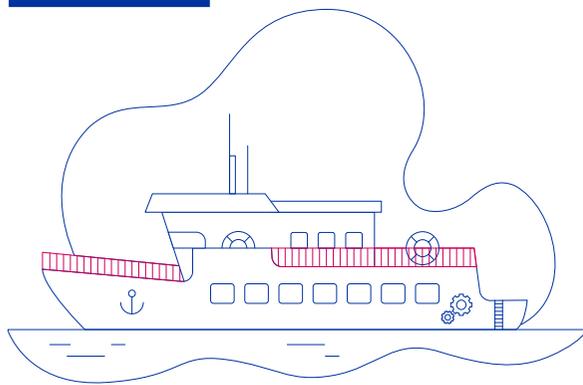
If your team reports that something isn't working for them, you might not agree. However, either the facts the team are presenting are true or the perception of them are. Either way, lean into what you're hearing and explore what you're not noticing. Once your team feel heard, they'll listen too.

### 3. Empathise

As a team leader, it's natural to find yourself always ahead of your team in accepting the change that you've likely had time to consider. Provide empathy as your team make their way to where you are today. Empathy from one's organisation, as reported by McKinsey, is a major feature in job-satisfaction.<sup>8</sup>

## 2 Nurturing inclusiveness

**Deeply connected to trust is inclusion. Think of these as the guardrails drilled into the sides of our boat. The railings literally enclose and provide safety, ensuring inclusion for everyone; because no one belongs outside the boat. In fact, for a boat to function, all the various skills are needed. And it's only by each individual bringing their unique skills into play that the team flourishes.**



**Nurturing inclusiveness**  
The safety rails

As a manager you're richer for making the most of these skills, experiences and neurodiversity to fulfil and grow your team within the context of a demanding workspace.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Covid-19 forced most people to leave their offices; we were literally excluded from our normal places of work. And for a while we were all in the same boat. Then we became aware of - and part of - creating processes and systems to be inclusive of people in whatever authentic way they came to work; with family in the background, or offices set up in the kitchen. Arguably in some ways, the pandemic made teams more inclusive, by bringing the conversation of inclusivity into the mainstream. How then do we maintain that inclusivity? How do you benefit from these new ways of working to achieve more inclusivity than before?

9. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>

**To support building inclusion, why not try these three approaches:**

### 1. Recruit right

Hybrid working means that your world is your talent pool. See more about this in the next section. Here though our focus is on the opportunity to increase the diversity of your team. Think of the range of ages, genders, cultures, nationalities, mind-sets, neurodiversity, to name just a few. Broadening the scope of your team will inject fresh perspectives and ways of working into your team.

### 2. Psychologically safe

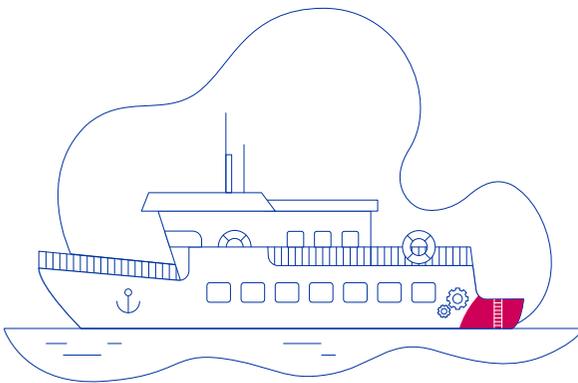
Bringing difference into the team is step one. What is also key is to create a work environment where different ways of working are not only "tolerated", but rather invited. We can't imagine teams "tolerating" difference making for a psychologically safe workplace. (These are places where there is a belief that you won't be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.) And difference means just that; different to what people are used to, a nudge out of our comfort zones, a change in the way we work. Different also means a difference in perspective when approaching a challenge, different ideas to resolve issues, and a difference in the results we achieve; a much needed and profitable difference.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. We all need to be included

Addressing systemic imbalances means including everyone, at the expense of no one. As a manager, you'll be part of nudging processes to be more inclusive. For example, adopting a virtual-first approach means that those individuals working outside the office are not left out, disconnected from information or conversations, ensuring everyone can do their jobs.

## 3 Onboard new starters

Now that you've ensured that your hybrid-houseboat is watertight with trust and is an inclusive space, your next challenge may be to bring new starters on board.



### Onboard new starters

Where you board the boat

Some organisations are taking the opportunity created by hybrid working to review their complete hiring processes. McKinsey reports that, "During the pandemic, nearly two-thirds of organizations have moved in-person recruiting events and activities to remote settings..."<sup>10</sup>

It seems that we have entered an era of talent without borders. According to LinkedIn<sup>11</sup>, 81% of talent professionals believe virtual recruitment will continue post-pandemic and 70% say virtual recruitment will become the new standard.

Once you've found the right person for a role, bringing people on-board includes helping them settle into your trusting and inclusive culture. Doing so will allow them to bring their whole self into the organisation.

To support bringing people onboard, why not try these three approaches:

### 1. Small connections make a big difference

Building a trusted relationship quickly during the process of bringing them onboard means that when your starters are asked by friends and family, 'how's work,' they recall welcoming and friendly conversations with work colleagues they're building relationships with. These firm foundations will provide the strength on which to build a great deal of success. Lis Wiseman in her book, 'Multipliers', explores how leaders sometimes only benefit from 50% of their team members' creative intelligence.<sup>12</sup> So ensure you're available to ask lots of ad hoc questions, or organise video 'hellos' with the rest of the team. And we suggest several small meetings are better than one big one, so there's space to really connect.

### 2. Buddy and mentor

A new workplace is challenging to understand. Hybrid working adds new complexities to the mix. Having a mentor or buddy (ideally both) will give access to a person who can offer answers without risk of judgement, or the danger of feeling judged.

### 3. A chance to be included

Provide opportunities for new starters to share thoughts and ideas before they become blinded by team processes and organisational norms. An innovative and fresh perspective can enrich the team. In turn, the team can use this moment to showcase inclusive behaviour that welcomes the value of difference. One trick you might try is a 90-day new ideas list, where the new starter has a place to record and share all the ideas they have with you (their line-manager), a buddy and/or a mentor.

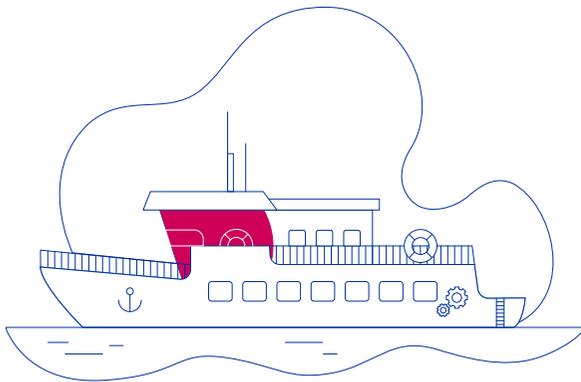
10. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/what-executives-are-saying-about-the-future-of-hybrid-work>

11. <https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/blog/future-of-recruiting/2020/future-of-recruiting#prediction3>

12. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2017/05/17/liz-wisemans-5-secrets-to-make-your-team-smarter/>

## 4 Articulating your vision

**A vision gives your team focus. It provides contextual meaning to the hundreds of small tasks they're completing. Therefore, it's imperative your team has a vision because if our houseboat doesn't have someone articulating a clear vision, it is at risk of being pulled in competing directions.**



**Articulating your vision**  
The captain's vantage point

The first question is, Are you clear about your vision? Closely followed by, Where do you want to be in 2 years? (Or a timeframe that works for your organisation)

The acronym VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) is often used to describe the uncertainty you face as a manager. You've been facing VUCA conditions for some time now. The pandemic has accelerated and complicated this further. There are many issues, and the way these issues interplay with each other is not clear. So how do you create a vision when the world you're trying to make sense of is complex, and your team is scattered and connecting with you in various ways?



## To support building a vision, why not try these three approaches:

### 1. Be clear

Your team doesn't need a hero, they need a navigator. Everyone knows that as captain of your ship, your role is to provide direction, but you can't answer all the questions raised by the uncertainties of the seas you sail. So break down the complex into small manageable chunks. And acknowledge the uncertainty of what is coming and that there are no black and white answers (or scapegoats if it goes wrong). Instead lean on the expertise from different people in your team to create a clear view of the world as you see it today. Tomorrow will bring new challenges, which you'll break down into manageable chunks once more.

### 2. Be together

Visions need space to be stated and explored. Establish your vision with a moment of togetherness, however that may look; a collective virtual meet, or an 'everyone in the office' day. And when you've had the opportunity to articulate the vision, keep repeating it, tell your story time and again so that all your team is clear that there is a vision and specifically what their role is in achieving that vision.

### 3. Be well-formed

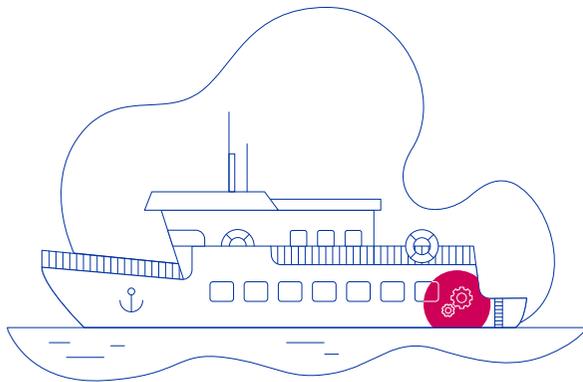
Visions are not strategies, there's no associated day-to-day detailed plan. It's an end goal, but it shouldn't be so vague as to seem a dream. One way to avoid this is to ensure your vision has a well-formed outcome that is:

- Stated in the positive (i.e. what you want, not what you don't)
- Tangible rather than theoretical
- Achievable
- Resourced
- Time-bound
- Takes into consideration how you and others are affected



## 5 Learning on the job

You'll have probably heard of the statistic that 70% of learning takes place 'on the job'. But what happens when the people you might normally expect to see working, and learn from, are now working from home? How do you benefit from learning the right behaviours and creating organic learning connections from the people your team members work with?



**Learning on the job**  
The engine room

In our experience, the answer lies with using the best of both worlds. Take, for example, the exchange of incidental information. " [During the pandemic]... 'The Wall Street banks kept more teams in the office, so they seem to have done a lot better than Europeans,' observes Charles Bristow, a senior trader at JP Morgan. "That may have been due to malfunctions on home-based tech platforms. But Beunza attributed it to something else: in-person teams had more incidental information exchange and sense-making, and at times of stress this seemed doubly important."<sup>13</sup>

**Like the engine of your boat, your team will grow in its power and expertise as people learn on the job.** Our view is that some interactions, for now, are still ideally undertaken face-to-face. In addition, this story shows us that some experiences are becoming more inclusive because they're virtual. A training programme geared at attendees in the room with the token audio conference attendee, who for the most part was ignored, has (hopefully) been left in the BC (before Covid) era.

“

A notable finding is that organizations with the biggest productivity increases during the pandemic have supported and encouraged small moments of engagements.

”

13. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/jun/03/the-empty-office-what-we-lose-when-we-work-from-home>

## To support learning on the job, why not try these three approaches:

### 1. Virtual live sessions

One strategy that has been working for us, is for a manager to share their screen with a new starter and show how to complete a task, explaining what they're doing and why they're doing it. Then over a period of sessions, the new starter shares their screen, and they complete more and more of the actions, until it's the manager watching the new starter complete the whole task.

### 2. Heutagogy<sup>14</sup>

This is the term used to describe the "self-determined learner". Most of us now just check the internet to learn how to present a proposal rather than waiting a week to meet up with the department head to ask them how they do it. This autonomy means that new starters will naturally become channels of novelty as they bring new norms from sources outside of the business (some that will invariably be more efficient and profitable) into the business. This is not an alternative to in-house training, for which you'll need to establish an upskilling programme, but the mind-set that we think is serving us better is not to try to replicate old ways in a new world, but to see what advantages this new landscape offers.

### 3. Mentoring/coaching programmes

Because newness can be ambiguous, having a mentor that is in your office/geography/department/level of seniority – who you do see regularly - means you're enhancing the chances of making the best of both virtual and face-to-face opportunities to grow. Coaching in this space is also invaluable as team members overcome internal inhibitions to achieve external growth. As McKinsey reports, "A notable finding is that organizations with the biggest productivity increases during the pandemic have supported and encouraged small moments of engagements" among their employees, moments in which coaching, mentorship, idea sharing, and co-working take place".<sup>15</sup>

14. Whilst pedagogy and andragogy are about 'an other' directing the learning, heutagogy distinguishes itself by being a self-directed experience.

15. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/what-executives-are-saying-about-the-future-of-hybrid-work>



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## Hybrid meetings

Pre-pandemic we noted a distinct bias for on-site attendees over those that were joining on-line or via a telephone line. During the pandemic, this mostly disappeared with everyone on an equal footing joining a virtual conversation. There was a certain democratisation by having a single mode of connecting, with all interactions designed for virtual engagement and attention given to everyone in the virtual room. As we move to the future, there are calls from some sectors to maintain a virtual-first approach unless all members of the meeting are able to be physically present.

“

**If one of your co-workers is sitting five feet away and the rest are all in different countries, you should all collaborate in the same way.**<sup>17</sup>

Darren Murph  
Head of Remote at GitLab

”

In an interview with Techradar, Darren Murph, Head of Remote at GitLab explained, “The main challenge will be ensuring collaboration remains equitable, with half of meeting attendees in the room and half dialling in over video...”<sup>16</sup>

So how do you avoid the disconnect created by those collaborating face-to-face with remote colleagues, and remote team members sharing information over digital channels excluding office-first team members?

At The Oxford Group we think that the best way is to adopt a virtual-first approach. We are finding this to be the most inclusive experience across the organisations we’re working with.

Technology to enable a face-to-face and virtual simultaneous interaction is nascent and being rapidly explored by universities and some government departments. This might work if enabled by technology. This, however, has yet to be shown on a large scale, especially one that’s also accessible and affordable. For now, our view is that we maintain a virtual-first approach.

## To support hybrid meetings, why not try these three approaches:

### 1. Choose your channels

Curate ways of communicating so that colleagues don’t feel they’re in a traffic jam of alerts, pings and pop-ups. Once identified, use these as exclusive channels to connect, ask, and share.

### 2. Share the knowledge

To ensure everyone has access to the information, record in writing what people need to know, in places they know where and how to find it. This may mean insisting that information is re-sent/re-stored in the agreed repository to establish good habits. Soon the benefits of having the right information to hand will serve to motivate colleagues to use these channels consistently.

### 3. Online/onsite buddies

When a mix of face-to-face and virtual attendees in a meeting is inevitable, why not buddy-up each remote team member with someone in the room, so they can keep a personal connection throughout the meeting? The on-site buddy can ensure their on-line buddy is asked questions and has a sense of when to contribute. They may even connect with them beforehand. This technique has the added advantage of building connections and trust between the team members, especially if you rotate buddies each meeting. (And also takes the responsibility away from you for having to personally make sure everyone is included equally in the meeting.)

16. <https://www.techradar.com/uk/news/hybrid-working-could-be-a-catastrophic-mistake>

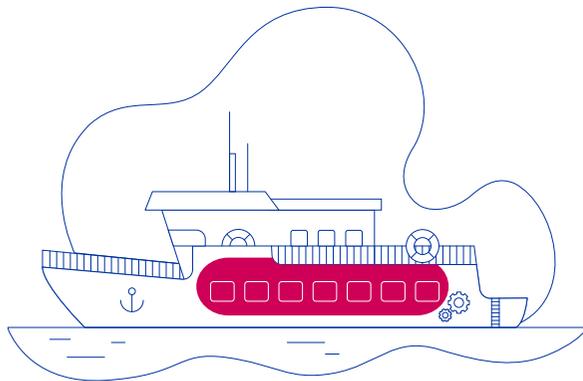
17. <https://www.techradar.com/uk/news/hybrid-working-could-be-a-catastrophic-mistake>



To support managing performance remotely, why not try these three approaches:

## 6 Managing performance remotely

Managing performance has always been challenging. For example, how do you raise conversations about behaviours that don't match your values or company processes? And how do you do this now that team members are working away from your peripheral vision where once you may have gathered first-hand experience of their work-practices?



**Managing performance remotely**  
The lower deck

**On a boat, some members will be working out of sight, on a lower deck. In a hybrid context, where we no longer all work in the same space, we believe that the fundamentals of how we build deep engagement are more important than ever.**

In challenging conversations, we use the power of Rosenberg's Non-violent Communication, that allows people to identify what needs are not being met, and to request that from the other person without falling into the trap of assumptions.

We also believe the premise of all engagement, positive and challenging, is to have a conversation right at the beginning of the relationship with your team member. Here you share your vision for the team, your own goals, and invite the individual team member to do the same. What are their goals, and how can you help them?

We call this Conversation 2: Agreeing mutual expectations, (for more information see our [5 Conversations programme](#)).

The intention is to combine your goals into a co-reliant, mutually beneficial relationship. "How can you help me achieve my vision? How can I help you achieve your objectives?" The answer to these questions becomes the basis upon which to manage performance, especially if your team member's actions are no longer in service of your goals or theirs.

### 1. Be positive more often

We've explored why bonds of trust are even more important in a hybrid context. If you're going to rely on connecting virtually, establishing your communication on trust means that you can be honest and vulnerable. And you're also a manager that gives positive and specific feedback, such as "I found your tone in that meeting really warm", "you met this deadline whilst managing that personal challenge, I appreciate your ability to focus".

### 2. Ask, listen, hear

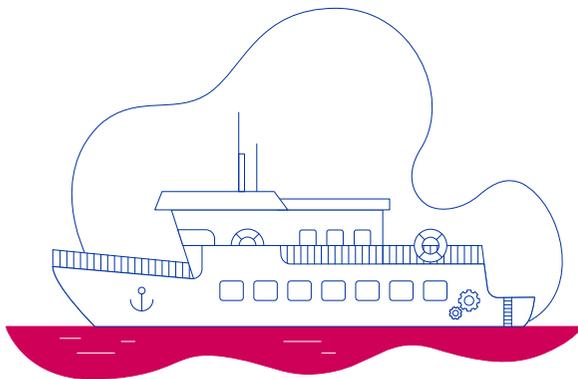
When you have a challenging conversation to raise, your team member knows that you'll always ask first, you'll listen, and you'll do more; you'll hear what they're saying and take time to understand their perspective. This is even more important when you're not able to connect and be fully present in person. You will also be re-stating your consistent expectations if those expectations are not being met. Being consistent bolsters your trustworthiness.

### 3. Start and stay with the facts

Build in moments where you can naturally engage with your team. For example, 1-to-1s, team meets, scrums, informal catch-ups etc., will give everyone a chance to connect, because what was once the default situation, may now need a little more coordination. There are lots of feedback models out there, and all of them hinge on bringing the facts to the table – not your judgement – but what you observed. And working in a hybrid fashion makes this more complicated. Check if you're accidentally bringing assumptions or second-hand judgement to the conversation. Before you raise a conversation, ask yourself, 'What are the factual events I'm going to raise?'

# 7 Navigating Change

When you've mastered how you manage the crew and can handle the boat as a team, you are now super flexible in where you can sail to.



**Navigating change**  
The choppy sea

That's important now because it's a time of exploration and discovery in organisations, not a time of set destinations and easy routes to getting there. **The team that runs a hybrid-houseboat knows that there's no such thing as steady ground, even when you're docked at port; it's only a matter of time that the team will be back out in the open water.** Change is literally everywhere, and you're beginning to feel at ease with it. Although, feeling sea-sick is still completely valid. So, what are some key ways to manage the reality of constant change?



To support managing change, why not try these three approaches:

## 1. Active resisters and change makers

Some people will naturally be change makers, and others vocal resisters. Either way you'll hear from them. Make time to do so, either to understand what change is being suggested, or to facilitate the navigation of their change curve.

## 2. Know what you don't know

By this we mean every voice aside from those above – those voices you don't hear. What are the silent team members experiencing? How can you create opportunities for you to hear their concerns? Can you leverage the psychological safety provided by other team members to coach each other?

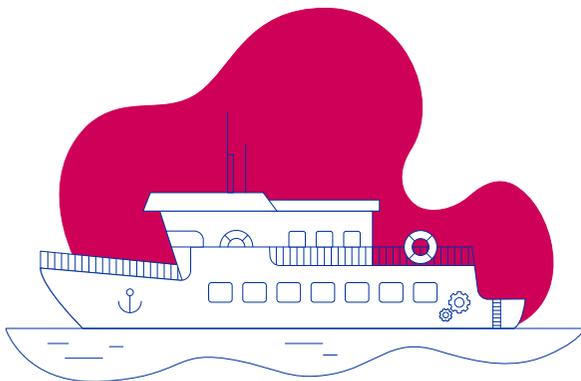
## 3. Sense-making takes place in informal places

In a hybrid environment ensure you have established connection points for informal gatherings and channels of communication; maybe a WhatsApp group, or a Teams channel just to explore feelings, or maybe a mental health first aider to listen. In one regular team gathering at The Oxford Group, we arranged for an agenda free team meet. The monthly two-hour gathering was packed with fruitful conversation of things there's usually no time to explore.

# 8

## Establishing a team culture

**Your team culture is the atmosphere in which you sail your hybrid boat. It's the weather in which you work and complete your day-to-day tasks. If the company culture makes for choppy waters, it will strain the bonds of trust and may even suggest to team members that the inclusivity of the team is at risk.**



### Establishing a team culture

The atmosphere around the boat

So, what's the right culture, and how do you establish it?

Part of our individual identity is how we fit in to our wider social setting. We identify with groups of people and are influenced by that group's behaviours, because that group is 'mine'. As a manager you'll help set the tone of the group, including how inclusive, welcoming, supportive, creative, secure, etc., the group is. You'll ensure that there are no 'in' groups (the senior, longest serving, most vocal) with individual and smaller groups treated as 'out' groups.

Take humour as an example. "In this new world of remote work, where we rarely see our colleagues in person...research reveals that humour is one of the most powerful forces an organization has for building genuine connection, well-being, and intellectual safety among our colleagues."<sup>18</sup>

And we couldn't agree more. Your company will have its unique culture; from a mix of the organisation's 'why' it does business, to who your customers are, to the blend of cultures each individual brings to work. All these make your workplace unique, and without taking away from that distinction, all productive team cultures are also a place where your team members'

wellbeing and intellectual safety is considered of primary importance. To achieve this, your team culture will have to be safe and open, especially in a hybrid context. LinkedIn reports that, "employees at "remote-friendly" organisations — those with a large share of remote job posts on LinkedIn — are 32% more likely to say they struggle with work-life balance."<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, consider what company cultures are forming as virtual working evolves into hybrid working. There's a risk that two cultures emerge (in groups and out groups) dominated by on-site staff who benefit from co-location and in-person collaboration, while social cohesion for the virtual workforce suffers. "When this occurs, remote workers can soon feel isolated, disenfranchised, and unhappy, the victims of unintentional behaviour in an organization that failed to build a coherent model of...virtual and in-person work."<sup>20</sup>

Maintaining a shared identity helps preserve that which motivates us to do our most creative work, as well as a sense of belonging.

18. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/five-fifty-hybridized>

19. [https://www.linkedin.com/business/talent/blog/talent-strategy/hybrid-work-here-to-stay?utm\\_source=feedblitz&utm\\_medium=FeedBlitzEmail&utm\\_campaign=Once%20a%20day\\_2021-06-29\\_10:30:00&utm\\_content=946764](https://www.linkedin.com/business/talent/blog/talent-strategy/hybrid-work-here-to-stay?utm_source=feedblitz&utm_medium=FeedBlitzEmail&utm_campaign=Once%20a%20day_2021-06-29_10:30:00&utm_content=946764)

20. [https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/reimagining-the-postpandemic-workforce29\\_10:30:00&utm\\_content=946764](https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/reimagining-the-postpandemic-workforce29_10:30:00&utm_content=946764)

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# 32%

of employees at remote friendly organisations are more likely to say they struggle with work-life balance.



To support your team culture, why not try these three approaches:

### 1. Wave to any child or pet

One virtual meeting room rule we love is the request that all participants wave to any pet or child that might happen to come into view. The underlying message is that the distinction between work and home is a blurred one, but not a source of discomfort or embarrassment. This forms a great basis to establishing your unique and inclusive company culture.

### 2. Note the message you're sending

Consider the effect your organisational and management decisions have on your team culture. Are you walking the talk? Are all colleagues clear on the time-flex policy? Can everyone work from home as and when they like, or do you have expectations about being in the building on some days? Is that policy applied fairly and consistently? It's imperative that your team culture is a shared culture that has the same identity whether your people are working remotely or on the premises.

### 3. Invite participation

Perhaps in the pre-pandemic era, company cultures were defined in the head office and team members were forged into shape through dominant office-based cultures. Now each hybrid colleague is virtually bringing more of their own home cultures to work. Invite all colleagues to consider how their unique individuality can add depth and meaning to the wider company culture – and what will that mean in the way the individual translates and expresses those values in their unique way? Doing so will make the team culture a lived set of values and a supportive environment within which to sail your houseboat. Then when you have to navigate troubled waters, you can expect the team to be emotionally agile, ensuring that when under pressure, everyone responds in a way that is true to the team's values and culture.<sup>21</sup>

21. <https://hbr.org/2013/11/emotional-agility>



# Approaches you might try

## Creating a strong base of trust

### 1. Micro-transactions

Increase the small moments when different groups connect with each other

### 2. Listen

If your team reports that something isn't working for them, you might not agree, but either the facts the team are presenting are true or the perception of them are, so listen closely.

### 3. Empathise

Provide empathy as your team makes its way to accepting all the change that's happening.

## Nurturing inclusiveness

### 1. Recruit right

Hybrid working means that your world is your talent pool. Broadening the scope of your team will inject fresh perspectives and ways of working into your team.

### 2. Psychologically safe

Create a work environment where you invite a difference of perspective, a difference of ideas, and see a difference in results.

### 3. We all need to be included

Addressing systemic imbalances means including everyone, at the expense of no one. For example, adopting a virtual-first approach for all meetings.

## Onboard new starters

### 1. Small connections make a big difference

Building a trusted relationship quickly during the first few weeks helps set firm foundations on which to build a great deal of success.

### 2. Buddy and mentor

This will give access to a person who can offer answers without the danger of feeling judged.

### 3. A chance to be included

Provide opportunities for new starters to share thoughts and ideas before they become blinded by team processes and organisational norms.

## Articulating your vision

### 1. Be clear

Your team doesn't need a hero, they need a navigator - break down the complex into small manageable chunks. And acknowledge the uncertainty of what is coming.

### 2. Be together

Visions need space to be stated and explored. Establish your vision with a moment of togetherness, however that may look.

### 3. Be well informed

Visions are not strategies, there's no associated day-to-day detailed plan. It's an end goal, but it shouldn't be so vague as to seem a dream.

## Learning on the job

### 1. Virtual live sessions

One strategy that is working for us is for a manager to share their screen with a new starter and show how to complete a task. Over time the new starter completes more of the task until it's the manager watching the new starter.

### 2. Heutagogy

The self-determined learner is here to stay. And also this is not an alternative to in-house training, for which you'll need to establish an upskilling programme.

### 3. Mentoring/coaching programmes

Having a mentor who you see regularly means you're enhancing the chances of making the best opportunities to grow. Coaching in this space is invaluable as team members overcome internal inhibitions to achieve external growth.





## Hybrid meetings

### 1. Choose your channels

Curate ways of communicating so that colleagues don't feel they're in a traffic jam of alerts, pings and pop-ups.

### 2. Share the knowledge

To ensure everyone has access to the information, record in writing what people need to know, in places they know to find it.

### 3. Online/onsite buddies

When a mix of face-to-face and virtual attendees in a meeting is inevitable, why not buddy up each remote team member with someone in the room, so they can keep a personal connection throughout the meeting.

## Managing performance remotely

### 1. Be positive more often

Be a manager that gives positive and specific feedback; "I found your tone in that meeting really warm", "you met this deadline whilst managing that personal challenge, I appreciate your ability to focus", "thank you for your energy, you're a pillar of this team."

### 2. Ask, listen, hear

When you have a challenging conversation to raise, your team member knows that you'll always ask and listen first, and you'll take time to understand their perspective.

### 3. Start and stay with the facts

Build in moments where you can naturally engage with your team. For example, 121s, team meets, or scrums, because what was once default may now need a little coordination.

## Navigating change

### 1. Active resisters and change makers

Some people will naturally be change makers, and others vocal resisters, either way you'll hear from them. Make time to do so.

### 2. Know what you don't know

What are the silent team members experiencing? How can you create opportunities for you to hear their concerns?

### 3. Sense-making takes place in informal places

Ensure you have channels for informal gatherings; maybe a WhatsApp group, or a Teams channel just to catch up.

## Establishing a team culture

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### 2. Note the message you're sending

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### 3. Invite participation

Invite all colleagues to consider how their unique individuality can add depth and meaning to the wider company culture – and what will that mean in the way the individual translates and expresses those values in their unique way?



## Conclusion

**Changing to a largely hybrid working model has been disruptive for most of us, and mostly uninvited. It's OK to therefore feel a little nervous or uncertain about what this means for your team and how you work best. No one can avoid going through some change-curve journey.**

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And that's also not the whole picture.

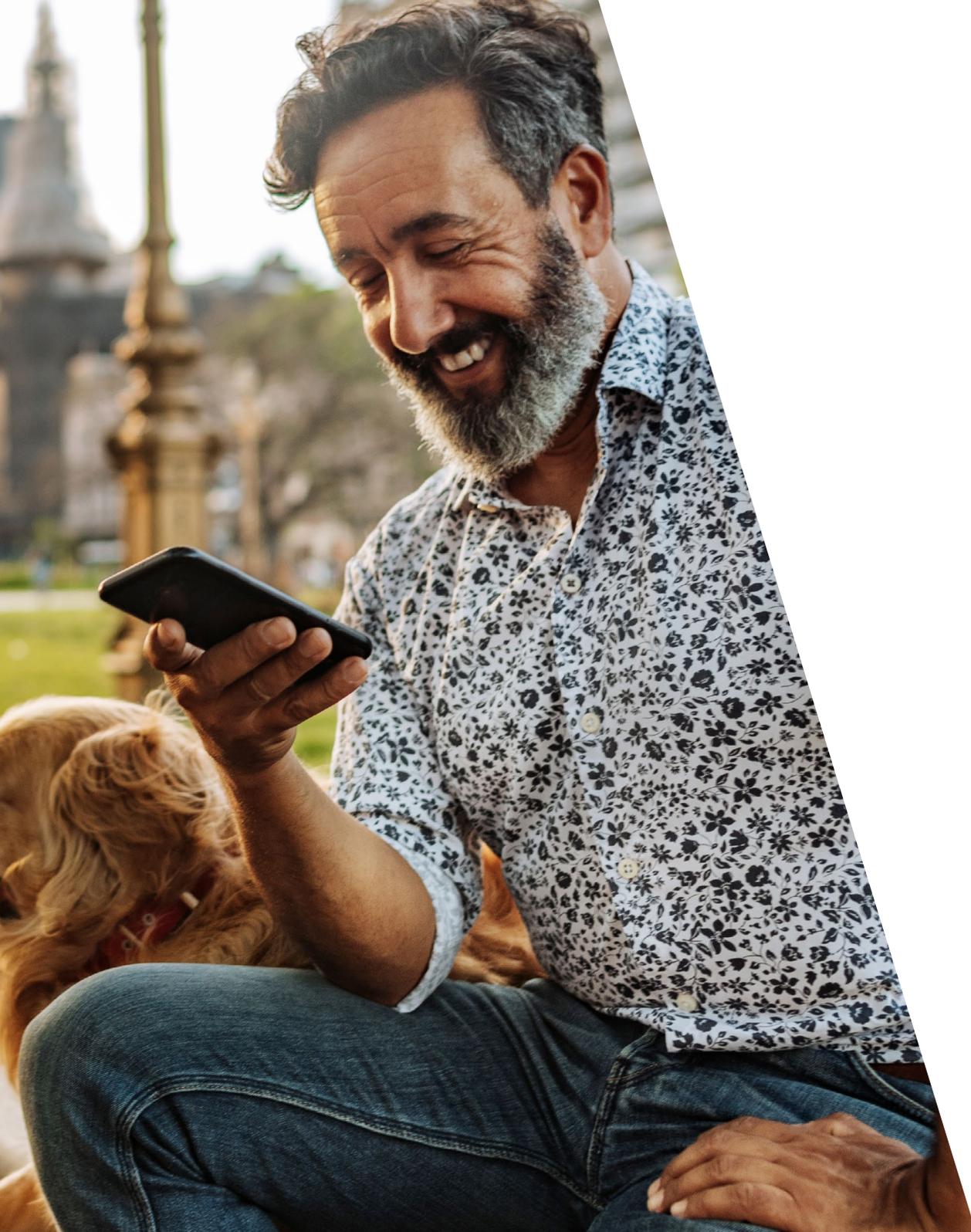
There's space here, an advantage even, to reflect how we can enhance the way we work. By adopting a growth mindset, you have some great opportunities to refresh old, unproductive ways of doing business. Using this moment to pivot and become more inclusive, to add to your creative talent pool, and define more balanced (not less profitable) ways of working, means you'll form a stronger and richer team, not just an exhausted one.

Great team leaders take their team on a journey, rather than announcing "we've arrived!" to nervous and startled colleagues. No manager has all the answers, and there's not one universal solution. There are, however, answers that work for your team, and there are solutions that will remedy your challenges.

By tapping into the many talents of your team, you'll engage everyone in the reality of sailing your hybrid-houseboat that works in different places in a way that works for everyone.

We have been supporting organisations to create conditions for success for over 30 years. If you'd like a discussion about how we can help, just get in touch.





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