XISY

10 steps to building successful hybrid teams

Introduction

Around the world, organisations are coming to grips with the idea that the old ways of working are over – that, even post-lockdown, employees are reluctant to return to the office full-time. And this isn't just a passing phase. Changes to markets, social habits and expectations are driving this too. A flexible life and the benefits that come with it are just too hard to give up – and if current employers won't adapt to this new world, there are plenty of others who will.

Hybrid (spending some time in the office and some at home) has become the dominant work model for knowledge workers. We know that hybrid and remote employees score higher than in-office workers on all employee experience measures, suggesting that it's time to move on from the 'remote versus office' debate.

The future of work isn't either/or, it's both.

Now is the time for organisations to reevaluate, refresh or maybe even start over with some of their management processes, from performance evaluation to practices around innovation and collaboration. While it might be a tough pill to swallow, it's simply not effective for us to try and fit old models into this new way of working.

The crisis is the opportunity.

What do people want?

Globally, more than two-thirds of knowledge workers say their preferred work environment is hybrid—highlighting the urgent need for leaders to align on how they can embrace hybrid working while ensuring an equitable experience for all members of their workforce.

We know that location and schedule flexibility is the expectation and increasingly the norm for knowledge workers and that flexibility is considered a core benefit that people value when considering a job - second only to monetary compensation.

The desire for flexibility is particularly strong among those who have been historically underrepresented in knowledge work, including people of colour, women and working mothers.

Globally, women are more likely than men to be remote workers (33% versus 27%), while working mothers and fathers are more likely than non-parents to be opting into flexible work arrangements (75% versus 63%).

Location flexibility continues to be valuable to parents, including 83% of working mothers—an all-time high for that group. Sixty percent of working mothers now say they want to work outside of the office three to five days a week, up from 58% in February.

80%
want flexibility in where they work

94%
want flexibility in when they work

(Reference: Future Forum Pulse Survey, July 2022)

The **future** of work is flexible, connected and inclusive.

What is flexibility?

True flexibility refers to both time and location. Its adoption enables organisations to recruit from broader, more diverse workforces and increase retention and engagement.

What is connection?

To foster connection in a hybrid work environment, leaders need to redesign the role of the office and rethink the role of technology to better encourage collaboration in a flexible work environment.

What is inclusivity?

Diverse teams outperform their peers. They grow faster, are more innovative, and adapt faster to external and internal events, but it takes sustained, continued investment to build true belonging among diverse teams. Organisations must rethink how they attract, retain and reward talent to build the outcomes they want.

How do we get there?

01 Identify your purpose & principles

Stand for something. Define your flexible work purpose and set the principles by which you're modelling what good work looks like in your organisation.

Consider:

- What are the problems you're trying to solve?
- How will you approach the shift in ways of working?
- What are the outcomes you want to achieve?

02 Create guardrails for behaviour

Flexibility works best within a framework. We call them "guardrails" that guide how hybrid work will work at your organisation. If your purpose is to unlock the power of talent within your organisation - guardrails are there to help make that happen.

To develop effective guardrails, consider:

- How might you align **leadership** around shared goals?

- What might you need from the **physical workplace**?

- What is the **culture** that you want to foster?

03 Develop team level agreements

Team level agreements put your principles and guardrails into everyday practice. They're a set of guidelines that establish expectations for how members of the team work with one another. These agreements define what flexibility actually looks like on a daily basis. **You're making the implicit, explicit.**

Consider establishing:

- **Core collaboration hours:** e.g. a three- to five-hour timeframe when teams must be online for collaborative in-sync engagement

- **Meeting agreements:** e.g. synchronous meetings are for when teams need to engage in a discussion, a debate, to decide something or to develop

- **Accountability guidelines:** e.g. making it clear when we need feedback, from who and in what timeframe

04 Create a connected culture

When people feel connected to something bigger than themselves they're more satisfied, they perform better at work, and they're more inspired to help an organisation achieve its goals. But creating that in a hybrid working world takes intentional curation. That means thinking beyond just video calls (Zoom fatigue is real!) to connect virtually.

Cloud based tools like **digital whiteboards, shared documents and app integrations** facilitate collaboration, while platforms like **Slack and Teams Chat** can be used for more social conversations that people miss when they're not in the office. As well as real time banter, these platforms and tools allow for **asynchronous engagement where appropriate** and the best teams are intentional about their use of them to stay connected throughout the day.

05 Move beyond meetings

One of the most significant and high return investments a hybrid team can make is around how they meet.

Meeting overload is a major culprit when it comes to undermining flexibility. So many meetings can be eliminated or broken up into parts, so consider:

- Sending project status updates out prior to the meeting
- Sharing presentations as decks or asynchronous video so people can review them in their own time
- Minimising the time you ask for, and if you are chairing the meeting be sure to invest the time to prepare so the meeting is quick and impactful

Tactics like these can lessen your meeting time considerably, allowing time together to be more meaningfully spent on weighty discussions or team building.

06 Be intentional with technology

Technology is central to managing people, guiding teams and getting work done, but you need to make sure you're matching the tech to the task. The complexity of the communication should determine the delivery mechanism.

Think about the purpose, what are you trying to achieve?

- Use leaner text-based media like email for memos or records of understanding, or when pushing out information in one direction

- Use chat (instant messaging platforms) for text-based conversation

- Use web conferencing for more complex discussions, for problem-solving or negotiation, which require squaring different ideas and perspectives

- Ensure leaders are accessible through digital office hours (more on this below)

- Leverage digital tools to host town halls and company-wide communications virtually

In short, the more complex the task, the closer you should be to in-person communication. And yes, sometimes meeting face-to-face is the best option.

07 Evolve the role of the physical space

It's time to reimagine the role of the office. When it comes to physical space there are three primary needs of employees, these include:

- Community socialisation
- Immersive team time
- Heads-down concentration space for those that need it

Shared space is for teamwork first. Getting teams together in person should have a purpose, such as team-building, project kick-offs, and other events that are planned in advance.

08 Transform your managers into coaches

The age of the manager as a gatekeeper is over; today's most successful leaders are more akin to coaches, using empathy to create environments of connection and trust. Building an environment of psychological safety is a foundational step.

- Explain the advantages of the hybrid model not just for the organisation but for teams and individuals. People naturally want to know **what's in it for them.**

- Encourage your leaders to **create digital office hours** in which individuals can 'drop in', or make appointment booking apps available (at X is Y we use Calendly) so it's easy to schedule time for conversations. In a hybrid environment employees need a sense that they are **supported beyond scheduled team check-ins**.

- **Err towards over-communicating** – it can be helpful to create a list of people you'd like to connect with each day, who you might ordinarily bump into if you were working in a physical office.

09 Prioritise outcomes over activity

For too long, organisations have rested on the wrong type of measurements - presenteeism, key strokes, hours in the office, time logs, etc. With the rise of remote and asynchronous work comes the revelation that traditional productivity and performance measures don't work—they haven't for a long time and they're even more ill-suited to managing teams in a digital-first world.

It's time to stop focusing on inputs and actions, and instead measure impact and value.

10 Measure the impact of hybrid work
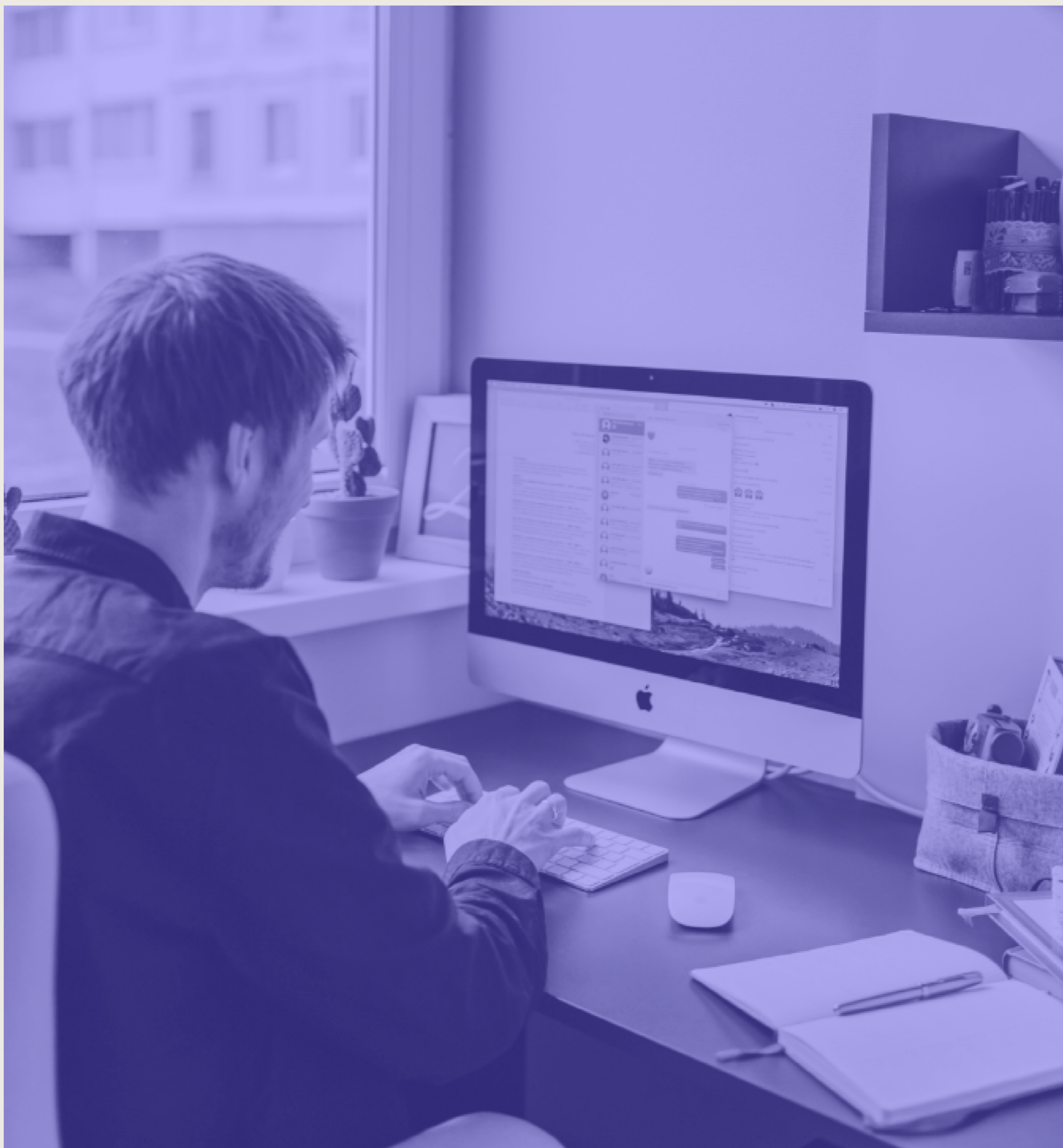
We're regularly asked how can organisations go about measuring the impact of hybrid work and the success of teams working in a flexible way?

Consider

- Is the hybrid model driving business outcomes and are the team delivering on those? Is the team delivering value to the organisation? (note these are the same questions you would ask if your team were in the office)

- Employee engagement. Monthly or fortnightly pulse surveys (<5 questions) work well, particularly if you're doing more with the data than simply directing recruitment and retention efforts. Consider larger surveys (>10 questions) quarterly.

- Are you delivering value in a way that promotes predictability, learning, accountability, recognition, and psychological safety?

The ten steps summary

01   Identify your purpose and principles
02   Create guardrails for behaviour
03   Develop team level agreements
04   Create a connected culture
05   Move beyond meetings
06   Be intentional with technology
07   Evolve the role of the physical space
08   Transform your managers into coaches
09   Prioritise outcomes over activity
10   Measure the impact of hybrid work
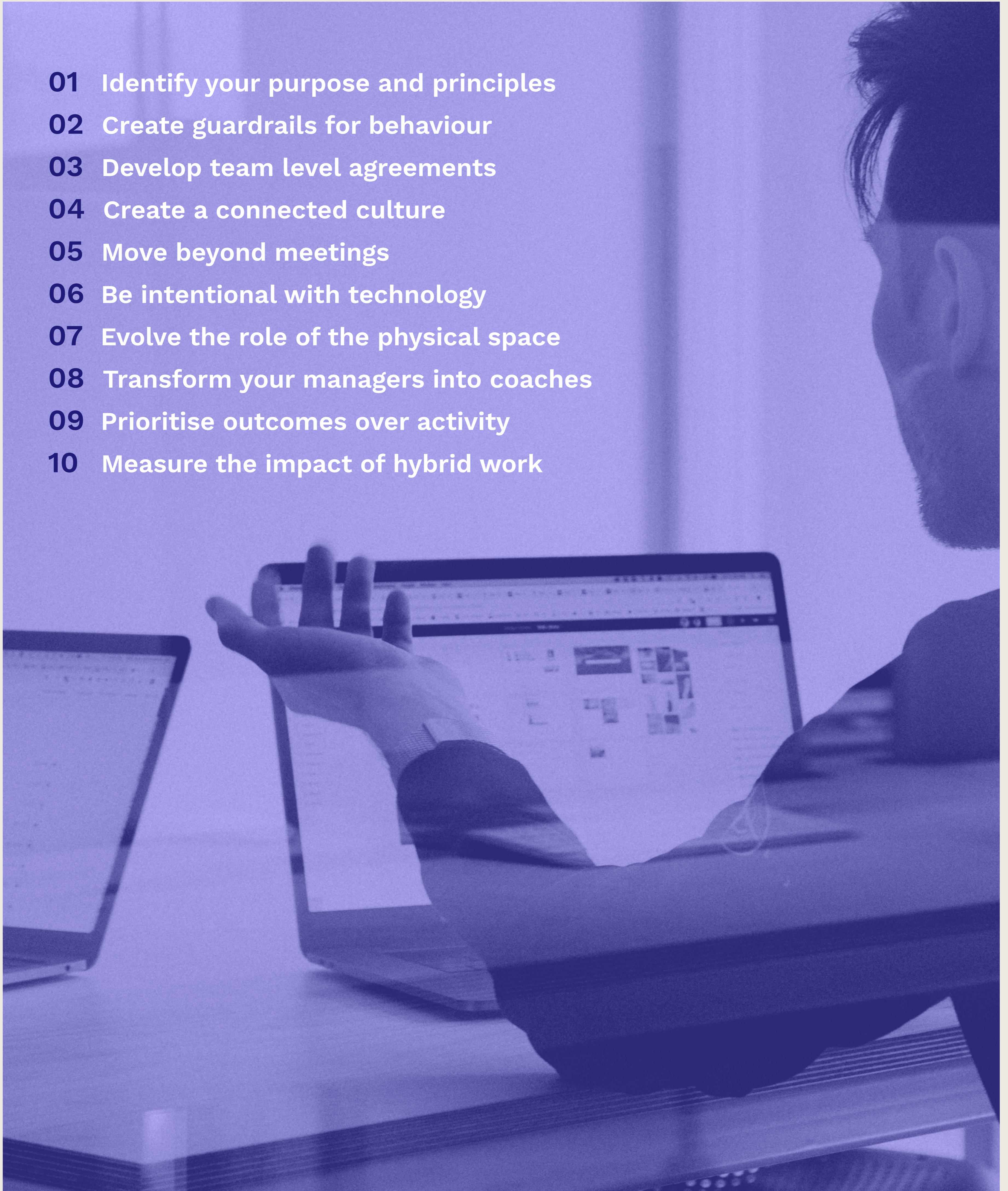
Final word

Today's workplace environment is centred around flexibility, and employees who don't have it will simply leave. Organisations need to think about how they provide flexibility not only in where but also when people work.

Start by starting and learn by doing. Hybrid workplaces, flexible work and adaptive organisations are here to stay, but organisations that resist change may not be.

Ready to shake things up at your own organisation?

Please reach out to get a conversation going. We'd love to hear from you.

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