

## Leading hybrid teams successfully

The modern working world is increasingly becoming a hybrid working world in which employees who work directly on site at the company collaborate with employees from the home office, mobile or other branches of the company. To make collaboration successful, a mix of digital and analog methods is needed to support optimal collaboration. It is important to remember that managing people is always a dynamic task. For team leaders, it is a core task to provide all team members with all the data and information they need to do their jobs reliably. It is essential to build a positive team spirit at a distance, regardless of location, to close communication gaps and to manage conflicts that may arise within a virtual team, even over the Internet. In doing so, it is imperative to take into account the special characteristics of virtual teams.

Basically, the hybrid work culture, which is based on trust, a permanent communication flow, cross-location collaboration and connection among each other, must be established in the team. For the team leadership of hybrid teams, this means that they must ensure that the work - which is to be done by different team members and, if necessary, interlocks - can also be coordinated via digital meetings. At the same time, one of the most important leadership tasks is to create transparency and a sense of belonging, and to ensure that all team members never lose focus on successfully completing the tasks assigned to them. Team leadership should never neglect the individual team member and regularly seek 1-to-1 contact. In such meetings, the focus should not be on the technical tasks, but on so-called soft factors such as the employee's well-being, satisfaction and motivation. If desired, private topics should also be addressed.

In practice, the team leader acts both as a guide and as a manager. It must take care to use the chosen methods and instruments in the team in such a way that the needs of the individual are reconciled with the dynamics within the group. Regular reflection meetings with the entire team provide valuable assistance. These meetings, which usually take place virtually, focus on the concerns of the team members as well as the quality of cooperation within the team. Such meetings should take place every two to four weeks during the project. In them, team management and team members exchange information about personal concerns, which builds trust and shows appreciation for the employees. These meetings should be open and also encourage employees to express dissatisfaction or criticism so that frustration cannot build up. Managers themselves also benefit from these meetings, because they are aware of the mood in the team at all times.

## Key factors when working in hybrid team

The management of hybrid teams is not comparable with the management of classic on-site meetings. This already starts with the existing prerequisites, because the technical infrastructure must be in place both in the company and in the home office or when working on the move. All team members must be equally involved - regardless of where they are working from. To achieve this, a stable Internet connection, equipment with a high-quality camera system and audio devices play an enormously important role.

Probably the most important factor is ensuring good communication across the geographically dispersed team members. It is absolutely essential that each team member has access to the data and information relating to his or her work. Valuable support is provided by the use of a common communication platform through which all those involved in the project can exchange information with each other in real time and through which they can obtain all relevant information at any time.

It is also important to place trust in the personal responsibility of employees working in a home office. Flexible and location-independent working requires a mutual understanding between the team and team management. This is the only way to build long-term trust with the team's leadership

and the other team members. If everyone does their work independently and reliably, thus doing their part to complete the project, this gives the team more security and the leadership knows that it can rely on the team.

Another factor that contributes to the success of hybrid teams is regular social interaction among all team members. Even if meeting directly on company premises is more effective for these social, more informal meetings, these meetings are also increasingly being conducted entirely over the Internet. In such an informal atmosphere, many new ideas are generated, symbioses and creative approaches to solutions are developed through direct exchange. In addition, the team members also get to know each other better on a personal level.

## Practical tips for successfully leading hybrid teams

While working from home is becoming increasingly popular, not everyone is able to get their work done in a timely manner from home or on the road. In hybrid teams, every employee finds their place to work successfully. For team leaders, this means setting clear priorities and goals so the team can always focus on what's important. As the fear of virtual communication tools continues to diminish, hybrid team meetings are being held virtually. For leadership, the following aspects should be considered:

### **1. FOCUS ON RESULTS**

Since it is not possible to know what the individual team member is currently doing due to location independence, the need for control must be replaced by a trusting attitude. It should always be assumed that the team is willing to perform and motivated to achieve the set goals within the planned time frame. The work results achieved should be valued.

### **2. ESTABLISHING CLEAR STRUCTURES AND GOOD COMMUNICATION**

Each member of the hybrid team is given clear rules for collaboration. Here, it is useful to establish common guidelines for action and - in case of non-functioning - to readjust them. Since communication is a core aspect for the success of the team, clear communication structures must be established in the team.

### **3. FOR MORE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND PERSONAL FREEDOM**

Team leaders should be open to new ideas and the creativity of individual team members. Studies have shown that employees are more innovative and motivated when they have more personal freedom. When new team members are integrated into the team, they should be trained on time management.

### **4. FOSTER A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND EXCHANGE**

The lack of face-to-face communication can cause the sense of unity within the team to suffer. Therefore, it is essential that exchanges among team members and team leadership are lively so that the team communicates virtually on one level and also acts as a team overall.

### **5. USE OF NEW TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGIES**

In order for information to flow smoothly, digital tools must be used that are easy to use and that each team member is proficient in. The ability to use media and content according to their own needs and goals gives employees more confidence and less digital stress.

### **6. SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND NETWORKS**

Existing knowledge must be made available to anyone who needs it. Regardless of whether he works at home or in the office. Helpful structures include building a knowledge base or

using the company's social intranet. For new employees, it is essential to have a social connection in order to develop their full potential.

These points can be used to create a working culture based on trust for all team members. Employees should also be prepared to voice problems and criticism, which the team management then accepts, thus ensuring that the working environment in the team remains stable. In the process, employees should be actively encouraged to address existing problems and involve them in their solution. Working in hybrid teams is considered error-prone, which makes openly dealing with mistakes all the more important. If employees can be sure that they will not have to fear any negative consequences if they make mistakes, they will deal with them more openly.

### Building new hybrid teams

The teambuilding of hybrid teams goes through several phases - similar to normal teambuilding - although the teambuilding of hybrid teams is by far more complex. This is especially true when latent conflicts within the new team are not immediately resolved, but instead resentment continues to fester. In order for the team to still be able to operate successfully, it is necessary for the team leadership to be able to actively manage crises. Only if such difficult situations are resolved promptly can the team grow together and work together effectively.

Therefore, it is even more important that the team deals with each other in an open and transparent manner and that the leadership develops a feeling for sensitive, difficult situations. It is necessary to listen and create a climate of openness and mutual respect as well as transparency. At the same time, members of hybrid teams should know that they do not need to keep critical thoughts under wraps, but that they can also openly address negative aspects. The team leadership should also always follow up if they have the impression that a harmonious working atmosphere within their hybrid team is at risk.