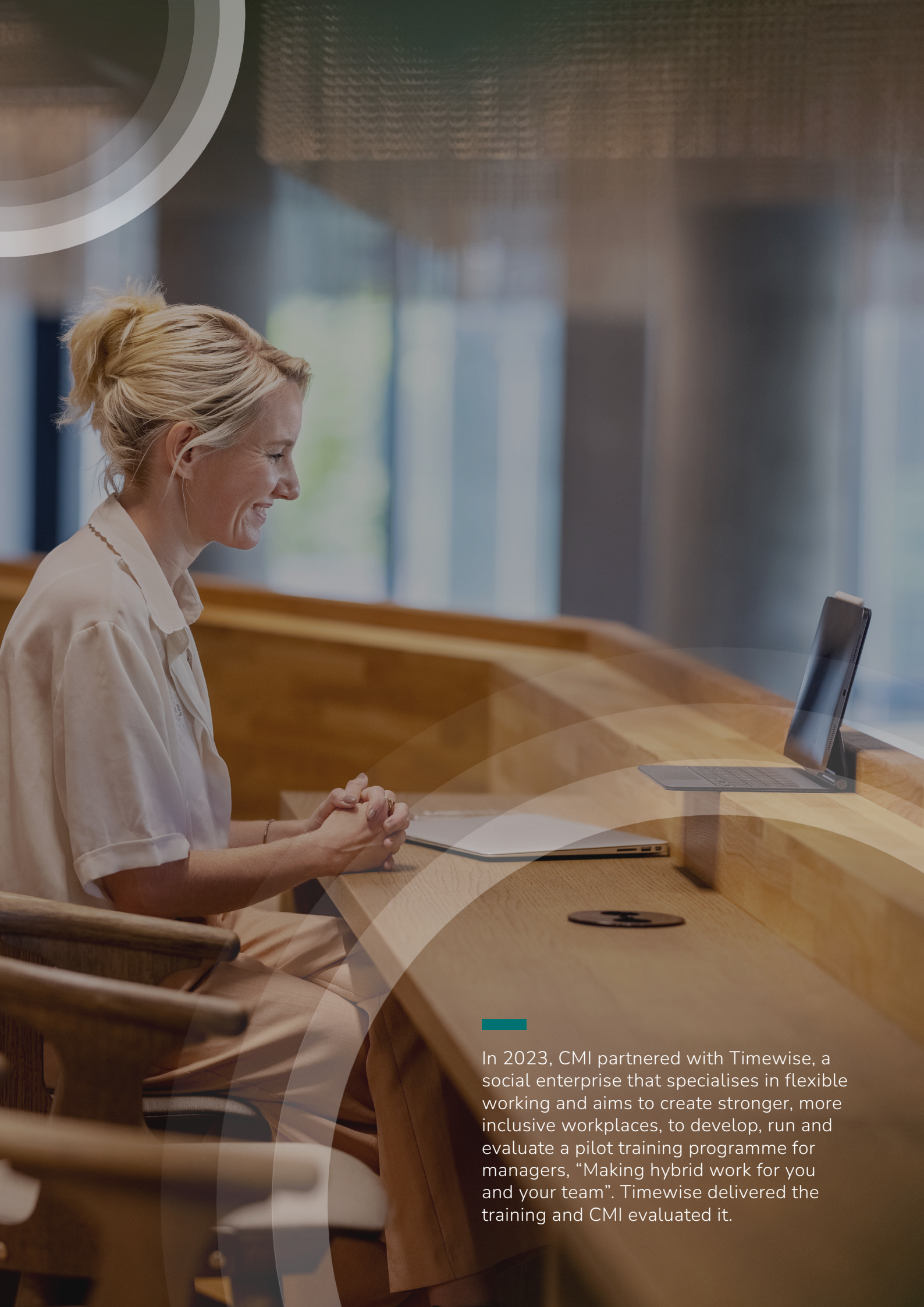





STOP WINGING IT

HOW MANAGEMENT SKILLS MAKE HYBRID WORKING WORK

April 2024



In 2023, CMI partnered with Timewise, a social enterprise that specialises in flexible working and aims to create stronger, more inclusive workplaces, to develop, run and evaluate a pilot training programme for managers, “Making hybrid work for you and your team”. Timewise delivered the training and CMI evaluated it.




This pilot programme tells us that managers – if given the right tools – will play a crucial role in ensuring the long-term viability of hybrid working, including realising the benefits of improved work-life balance and the impact that offer has on employee recruitment and retention. By extension, that means productivity and performance too.

Ad-hoc approaches can only take us so far. A proactive stance, equipping managers with the tools they need to succeed in navigating the complexities of hybrid work environments, was the aim of this pilot. And the data speaks for itself.

As workplaces evolve to adapt to a demand for flexibility, it is crucial that employers and policymakers invest in management training to facilitate these changes and ensure their success.

**Anthony Painter, Director of Policy and External affairs,
Chartered Management Institute**






At Timewise, we know that managers play a pivotal role in creating effective, flexible and sustainable ways of working within their teams. Our research and work across a wide range of sectors has helped us identify the key challenges and opportunities that managers face when leading hybrid and remote teams. This programme drew on this knowledge and experience, together with CMI's deep expertise in supporting managers, and has evidenced that investing in specific hybrid management skills and capability benefits the managers themselves, their teams and their organisations.

We have witnessed the impact of the programme on managers' approach, practices and confidence across a range of organisation sizes and sectors, varying role types and sizes of team. This truly underlines the importance of managers in designing and embedding flexible cultures and new ways of working, and we call on all employers to ask themselves if they have done enough to equip their own managers to lead and develop innovative, future-fit working practices.

Amy Butterworth, Consultancy Director, Timewise



Acknowledgements

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Four years since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, hybrid working has become standard practice for many organisations – and hugely popular among employees. The blend of office-based and home working can help drive improved productivity, efficiency and wellbeing. But it also comes with its share of obstacles. A joint pilot by CMI and Timewise has shown the value of upskilling managers and investing in hybrid-specific skills, so you can get the most out of these powerful working arrangements. Here, you can see the transformative impact of training; learn directly from managers how a considered approach to hybrid work has changed their teams' fortunes; and, thanks to our New Hybrid Handbook, be deliberate in how you tackle hybrid working yourself.

INTRODUCTION

In early 2020, the sudden spread of Covid-19 sent organisations scrambling to develop remote working practices in order to remain operational and keep teams safe.

Many of the systems, processes and working habits that were set up on an ad-hoc basis have since become part of the fabric of our working lives. They evolved into a permanent hybrid approach – bringing together the lifestyle and cost benefits of remote working with the collaborative culture of the traditional workplace. Within reason, former office workers could – and often still can – exercise control over when and where they worked, according to their own preferences.

Four years have now passed since this emergency global workplace revolution. That's enough time to understand the challenges that come with such a seismic shift in working practices, and to recognise a critical flaw in the deployment of hybrid arrangements: Managers have not been given adequate preparation and training for the complicated and ever-changing challenges of managing a hybrid workforce.

A pioneering hybrid programme

CMI has partnered with Timewise, a social enterprise consultancy that helps organisations to shape better flexible working policies and practices, to conduct a pilot programme – “[Making hybrid work for you and your team](#)” – designed to teach managers how to navigate the evolving world of hybrid and flexible work. From September to October 2023, we put 30 leaders, representing a range of industries – from education, health and social work to construction, manufacturing and real estate – through an immersive training course.

Throughout the programme, they shared their diverse experiences of hybrid working so far; examined how they provided the balance of oversight and autonomy to their employees; and honed their own hybrid working skills.

As you'll see, most went into the programme lacking confidence in key areas of hybrid management – from motivation and conflict management to designing and running meetings. But the experience had a transformative effect. For example, prior to the training, only 25% of participants understood how to design and use meetings to best effect in a hybrid environment. But as a result of the programme, that figure shot to 96%. And while only 32% previously understood the role of biases in hybrid teams, that figure soon rose to 96% too.

The impact of managers

The sessions also revealed some profoundly human stories, outlined on page [15](#). Petra Smith* is an accidental manager** of a challenging team who learns the power of setting expectations and speaking out in hybrid meetings. Zaki Mohamed, who wasn't sure hybrid arrangements could work in his field of railway maintenance, shares his new appreciation for flexible working, not least the power of combining real-time communication with more lasting assets. We also meet Samantha Brooker, who has her eyes opened to the many unconscious biases managers may have, that can hinder their team's hybrid performance. And Anita Ibrahim, who learns how trust, listening and openness can help her sales team get even more out of these powerful working arrangements.

These voices represent a generation of managers who have been at the sharp end of employers feeling their way into hybrid working, not always with full consideration of the potential impact



on organisational culture, performance and people's wellbeing. Following the programme, we witnessed these conscientious professionals now taking a systematic approach to hybrid working and developing the specific skills needed to draw out the many benefits it can bring.

Taken together, we see a vision of optimal workplace practice.

The findings of the pilot study come as the UK government introduces the right to request flexible working arrangements from day one of employment.

While it is possible to improvise your way to a functional hybrid set-up, a proper grounding in its quirks, pressures and requirements will help you to build a sustainable hybrid model. This will differentiate your organisation and galvanise your team.

On page [23](#), you'll find our New Hybrid Handbook, a concise collection of practical tips and tools designed to help you reap the benefits of a deliberate approach to hybrid working.

If your hybrid model is built on sound management principles, you can build connection and cohesion among your people. This, in turn, enables you to get the most out of hybrid meetings, to avoid common biases and to tailor your hybrid working practices to the needs of each individual. This bolsters wellbeing, productivity and, writ large, the performance of our economy as a whole.



Managing hybrid teams needs to be a proactive process. The approach needs to be adapted to individuals' skills and learning needs, rather than a one-size-fits-all.

A participant in the CMI/Timewise pilot programme

EQUIPPING MANAGERS FOR THE HYBRID REVOLUTION

In 2023, CMI decided to find out more about the challenges that hybrid work presents for managers and how to support them in developing the specific hybrid working skills they need to have a positive impact.

We partnered with Timewise, a social enterprise that specialises in flexible working and aims to create stronger, more inclusive workplaces, to develop and run the "Making hybrid work for you and your team" pilot programme. Timewise designed and delivered the training and CMI evaluated its impact.

In September and October 2023, we welcomed a cohort of 30 leaders of hybrid teams, from junior managers to senior leaders. The cohort came from a wide variety of organisations, ranging from fewer than 10 employees to more than 10,000, and across various sectors, from accounting and IT to healthcare and law enforcement. Twenty-five of the participants had received no prior training in hybrid working, despite already running hybrid teams.

Timewise led the group through the programme, which explored both the challenges of managing

hybrid teams and the positive effect hybrid working can have on teams' work when it is done well, with the adoption of specific proactive practices.

Structured as a series of workshops and clinics, the training offered participants the opportunity to share ideas and collaborate with others, as well as providing resources on subjects including bias, empathy, productivity, connection and culture, team protocols, and building trust. 86% of participants rated the learning resources provided as good (32%) or very good (54%).

The group examined their own hybrid arrangements and discussed a range of pertinent issues, including management competencies, how to build a hybrid team, and how to communicate with and motivate them. They even covered identity and values and how to bring them to work in the hybrid world. With the training complete, CMI evaluated its impact.

The results were striking.

Prior to the training:¹

Following the programme:



of participants were confident in resolving conflict or conducting difficult conversations in a hybrid environment



of participants were confident in resolving conflict or conducting difficult conversations in a hybrid environment



were confident at keeping their teams motivated



were confident at keeping their teams motivated



were confident they could balance their work and home-life commitments



were confident in balancing their work and home-life commitments

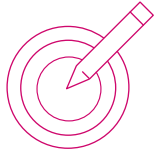


were confident at managing underperformance



were confident at managing underperformance

Participants also came away with a greater understanding of:



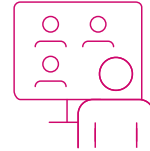
The biases that can emerge in a hybrid environment and how to mitigate them.



Their own hybrid working practices and preferences and how they affect their teams.



The actions they may need to take to ensure their hybrid management approach is inclusive and fair.



How to communicate effectively, use meetings to best effect and support their team to design effective working practices in a hybrid environment.

Prior to the training:



were confident they were building connection and cohesion among their hybrid teams

Following the programme:



were confident they were building connection and cohesion among their hybrid teams



understood the biases that can emerge in hybrid working and how to mitigate them




understood the biases that can emerge in hybrid working and how to mitigate them



understood how to design and use meetings to best effect in a hybrid environment




understood how to design and use meetings to best effect in a hybrid environment



I'm prioritising building trust and connecting with the team, setting clear expectations for communications (both face-to-face and via Teams) and deliverables, and reviewing roles and responsibilities with the team. I also understand my team and my role better and I'm learning to choose courage over comfort.

A participant in the CMI/Timewise
pilot programme



WHY MANAGERS ARE THE LINCHPINS OF HYBRID WORK

Hybrid working offers huge potential benefits to employees, allowing them to balance their work and personal lives, easing the pinch points that drive absence. It can also act as an important tool in improving workplace inclusion.

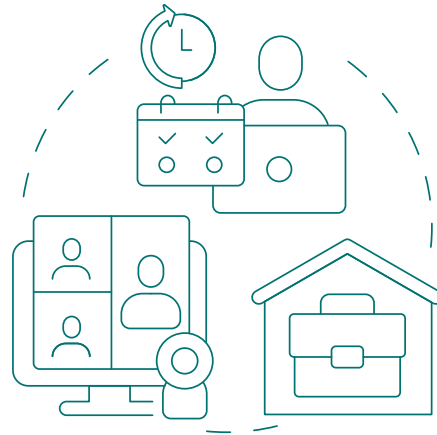
Employers stand to benefit too. Hybrid working may help them attract and retain the brightest and best talent; to recruit a more diverse workforce from a wider area, including people who may struggle to engage in tasks and routines that others take for granted, and those outside major cities.

When teams are spread across locations, with increasingly individual workloads, schedules and movements, management has a major role to play in keeping everything working harmoniously. Researchers from the University of Birmingham highlighted the [importance of line management](#) “in co-ordinating activities and managing local level flexibility” of hybrid arrangements, in order to “avoid any negative ripple effects.”²

One example would be coordinating who is physically present and when, to provide support to those who need to be on site.

/// To be truly effective requires line managers to have a key co-ordinating role to ensure flexible working fulfils the needs of the individual, while enabling [it to] fit with the needs of the team and wider organisation ... this requires a move away from one-size-fits-all strategies towards a tailored approach. ///

Dr Daniel Wheatley, from the University of Birmingham's Department of Management.



CMI's own findings support this. In our research into hybrid working with the Work Foundation, more than half of managers reported that they're responsible for deciding whether their direct reports can work remotely and when they should be present at the office (63%).³

According to our research, a manager's behaviour may also be key to lowering barriers of access to remote work. For example, 61% of disabled workers said they felt comfortable asking for remote working because their line manager was supportive of it (compared with 51% of non-disabled workers).

The challenges they face

According to CMI research, the majority of managers (83%) are in favour of hybrid working.⁴ Yet the task of establishing and running effective hybrid teams can create sticking points for managers. These include, but are not limited to:

- ➔ Reconfiguring deeply ingrained working habits and patterns.
- ➔ Running schedules when the working day is less predictable.
- ➔ Keeping tabs on who's doing what.
- ➔ Fostering and coordinating collaboration, both formal and informal, often using new tools.
- ➔ Ensuring that hybrid work is distributed fairly without exacerbating existing inequalities.
- ➔ Enabling connection and cultural cohesion, and engendering a sense of belonging to the wider organisation.*

66%

of respondents said building relationships at work was harder in a hybrid work setting.

- ➔ Onboarding new starters and ensuring they get the necessary opportunities for development.**

70%

of managers said they found onboarding new team members harder in a hybrid arrangement.

* CMI Manager's Voice Pulse Point Poll conducted in November 2022

** Ibid

The University of Birmingham has found that only

43%

**of all managers have been
trained to manage hybrid teams.**

Why we need to upskill managers

In October 2022, the UK Parliament flagged [the need for training and development](#) to make hybrid working as effective as possible.⁵

“Experts suggest that supporting remote and hybrid working in the longer term will require supporting more inclusive approaches to remote working, more training and support to workers on cybersecurity and increasing access to digital technologies and infrastructure as well as improving digital skills,” it said.

Yet the University of Birmingham has found that [only 43% of all managers](#) have in fact been trained to manage hybrid teams.⁶



REAL STRATEGIES FOR A CHANGING WORLD

CASE STUDY 1

// I became a hybrid manager - by accident //

In 2023 Petra Smith*, a health and safety professional, received the sudden news that her line manager had to step down. And that she would be leading the team of five, including three field workers doing health and safety inspections across three counties.

Petra had become an accidental manager. It was, she says, “a big shock.”

Not only was she relatively new to the team and suddenly in charge, but the organisation had also adopted hybrid working in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Three of her team were never in the office.

“I had never worked with a hybrid set-up before,” says Petra. “Here, I could go a whole month without receiving any communication from the team.”

Her first idea was to try to emulate what her favourite manager had done to make her feel so valued in the past – whether offering training and projects to support her growth, or simply being there when she needed him.

But in the tumultuous new hybrid environment, this felt incredibly difficult to achieve.

“No meaningful conversations were happening,” says Petra. “There were no channels through which I could reach out easily. Whenever I did get hold of someone, they’d just say everything was fine.”

It’s no surprise, then, that Petra was “excited” when she found a LinkedIn post advertising the Timewise/CMI training.

Early in the training, the group looked at their existing hybrid arrangements. In the case of Petra’s team, there was “pretty much nothing”

in terms of formal structure. Petra tried to involve her team in the changes. She set up a meeting to help give her team more agency over their hybrid work, but it ended in a disagreement – in part because one senior member was stuck in a rigid perception of “how things are done” and didn’t believe in open discussions, team feedback or each person having ownership and accountability.

Petra used that story as a living case study in the following Timewise training session – which happened to be about expectations in meetings and having the courage to speak out. This proved transformational.

// “Prior to the training, I’d always tried to prioritise kindness and making people happy,” she says. “But I learned that, by setting expectations, being courageous and speaking out when things aren’t acceptable, we are standing up for others and helping the team as a whole.” //

“I now understand my role is mediation in these virtual meetings. I’m setting expectations, not preventing people from speaking. But if someone crosses that line and things are starting to become more personal or less nice, I have to intervene. That change created a safe space for everyone.”

Having initially struggled to adjust both to hybrid working and to management, Petra reports “a massive difference” since the hybrid working training.

Petra's team now meets every month. People feel free to speak out, and while there are some "good arguments", nothing escalates beyond the sense of safety she has created. The team may spend a half-day in each other's company, working through the issues people bring with them to discuss and solve as a team, collaborating and "growing together."

"The team gives me things for me to bring up in these meetings, because they want that safe space where they can talk," she says. "They don't fear it any more."

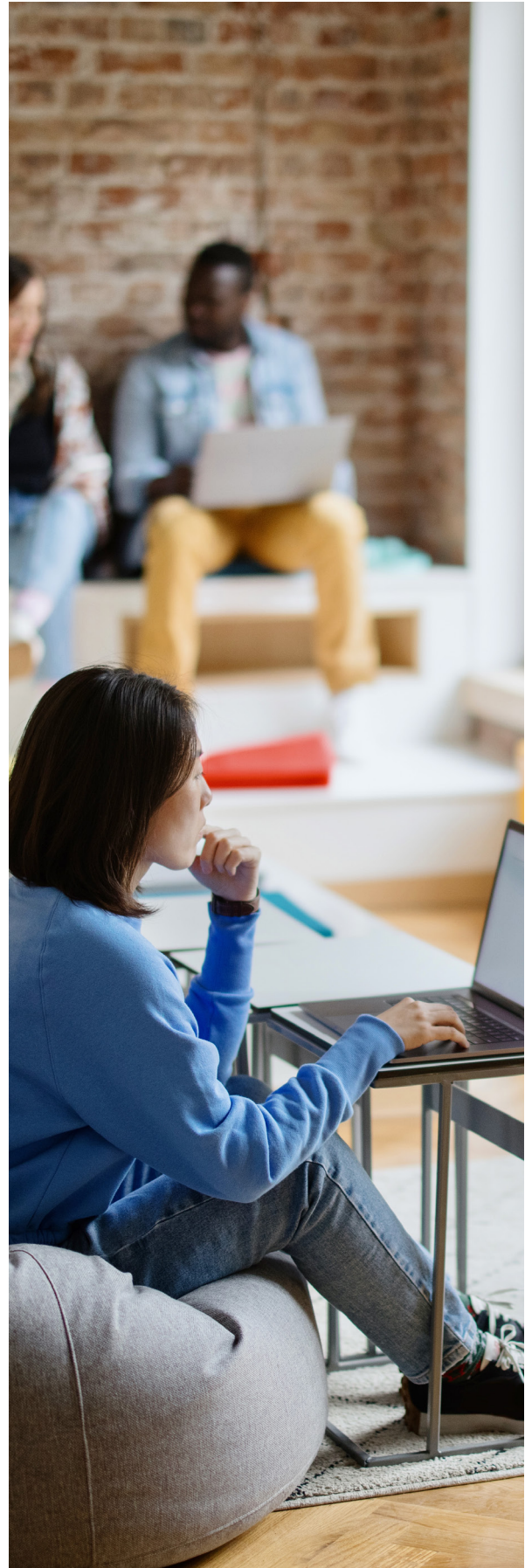
Petra has also instigated weekly catch-ups with the team. And she now visits every team member at least once a quarter, spending a day with them out in the field, conducting an inspection together or simply talking.

Then there's the quarterly team meal.

"We get to talk about ourselves and get to know the team and what makes people tick," says Petra. "That really builds trust, and that is so important. The face-to-face contact resets us as a group and you get to connect again."

The feedback has been excellent: her employees feel happier as a team, that they are working more collaboratively, and that the entire organisation feels more transparent. People now know why things are happening and Petra has made the flow of information between the team and management a two-way street.

“They feel part of something, that we're not hiding anything,” says Petra. “I’m so grateful for the training. It would have taken me far longer to get to where we are today as a team, and to where I am today as a leader.”



CASE STUDY 2

Hybrid management in an unlikely sector

Some work seems to lend itself to remote set-ups. Take software development, graphic design or copywriting. For other professionals, such as those maintaining the nation's railway network, it's more of a leap. The fixing of this critical infrastructure conjures the smell of oil and the clanging of steel. Not Slack chats and novelty Teams backgrounds.

Zaki Mohamed is an assistant regional operational manager in the rail services division at Colas Rail UK, leading a team of around 60. The team maintain tamper machines, rail-mounted devices used to pack track ballast, across the Southern and Anglia regions.

It was November 2022 when Zaki was brought into a meeting that set out his company's hybrid future. After the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it made logical sense. But Zaki was sceptical it could work.

"Maintenance in most cases requires hands-on supervision and on-site coordination," he says. "It's quite hard, because you have to be out there talking with people; not many of these things can be done sitting in the office. And there were often connectivity issues: at some stabling points, you wouldn't get any signal. But I've been pleasantly surprised with how we've adapted."

The Timewise/CMI training taught Zaki the value of mixing synchronous and asynchronous communication in the hybrid world. Real-time chat and messages that happen intuitively (synchronous tools) are good when you need an immediate response; while more considered, lasting assets, such as recorded Teams calls saved in Slack channels (asynchronous), can be a critical resource for others to access when they need them.

Zaki has now made these concepts, and others, part of his team's day-to-day.

"We now start each week with a virtual huddle for updates and relationship-building," says Zaki. "I also try to rotate my in-person site visits so I get regular touchpoints with everyone."

He adds that the programme also provided concrete strategies for "setting clear expectations, mitigating biases, enabling inclusion and maintaining team cohesion across distributed worksites."

It also made him realise how he could be interacting with his team better.

"Everyone does the same work on the tampers, but they may all understand it differently," says Zaki. "Not everyone has the same thought process. The training gave me an appreciation of how things should be delivered. And transparency around how to proceed and what tools I need to further myself – like having clear discussions with each individual – about their skills and how they can deliver."

Zaki describes how he was "energised" by the training.

“I now have a greater appreciation for flexibility where it's possible,” he says. “Some on-site coordination is still required in our line of work, but I feel better equipped to keep us working cohesively. It's an ongoing learning process, but I'm now on the right track.”

CASE STUDY 3

/// Hybrid made me more productive ///

Anita Ibrahim joined tech training provider QA as organisations were settling into a new normal following the Covid-19 pandemic. Around the country, employees were mainly working from home, offices were closing and hybrid meetings and hybrid contracts were an everyday part of working life. Face-to-face client meetings were less commonplace and teams were struggling to find time to get together in person.

At its biggest, Anita's team consisted of 14 salespeople based around England. For many in sales, hybrid working has presented an opportunity for work-life balance not usually afforded in these roles. But it has also brought challenges.

"Going from two or three meetings a day to five or six crossed a line from productive to mentally exhausting," she says. "I was spending what seemed like an excessive amount of time on virtual meetings with colleagues, when ordinarily we'd be getting to know each other through interactions in the office. Back when I was out on the road all day, I would have to do a lot of my admin in the evening. That didn't change when going hybrid, but I was more drained after all those back-to-back meetings."


When she saw the Timewise/CMI pilot programme, Anita took the opportunity to "see what more I could be doing".

"This was the first team I'd managed that had people from their 20s to their 60s, office-based and home-based, living all over the country," she says. "It would cost quite a lot to get everyone in the office at the same time, and I wanted to see if there was something more meaningful than the usual monthly call and quarterly face-to-face that would support our day-to-day work."

Anita says the learning journey was "very rewarding", reporting that the training has changed how she manages her hybrid teams. She learned valuable lessons around gaining more feedback, asking colleagues how they want to work, being available, giving all colleagues an opportunity to use their voice and creating hybrid-friendly team activities, such as in-person socials to promote team bonding.


One key lesson Anita took from the training was that employees who felt trusted to take ownership of their success would find their own balanced approach to hybrid working.

/// People should maximise their use of the office, their home environment and client sites in a way that makes the most sense to them – and we need to be enabled to do this effectively. People need space to grow and find out for themselves what works for them in the hybrid world, then create a new normal organically. They need to be coached to understand how important visibility is, and then use good judgement to strike a balance between productivity and availability. ///



I realised I had to ensure that my team leads and I don't fall into the trap of only giving work to those who are happiest to jump on a Zoom and share with us.

A participant in the CMI/Timewise pilot programme



CASE STUDY 4

A chance to be more efficient and boost morale

When she joined Koru Kids, an organisation that helps families find suitable childcare, Samantha Brooker already had years of experience managing teams in multi-site locations. And her team was high-functioning and largely autonomous. But this was her first time conducting her own role almost entirely from home.

As she'd recently inherited a new function, the CMI/Timewise training caught her eye. She saw an opportunity to explore ways in which to launch new hybrid processes as efficiently as possible; to investigate how hybrid working can impact a team's morale, both positively and negatively; and to learn from others' experiences.

“One of the sections of the training that was most useful to me was understanding the different biases that people can have when working in a remote way,” she says, adding that the concept of proximity bias was one that resonated. “I realised I had to ensure that my team leads and I don't fall into the trap of only giving work to those who are happiest to jump on a Zoom and share with us.”

“It's really easy, if I've been near a particular person and seen them write a really good email, to go, ah, they're really good at writing emails, I'm gonna get them to write that email for this project. The discussion around proximity bias really brought home to me that there are remote members of my team who are really good at

getting their heads down and doing their work, and because their feedback's good I'm not reviewing it. But actually, they may love the opportunity to get involved in this new project we're doing.”

Samantha also felt it was important to look at her manager competencies, and whether she intentionally demonstrated the right behaviours to those in her hybrid team. One such behaviour was to improve transparency across the team – something that can inadvertently slip in the action-led culture of a start-up, where the onus is just on getting things done and not necessarily about sharing your workings. “We work on a principle of 80% good and on time is better than 100% perfect and late,” she says. “Since the training, I've become better at sharing our working docs, saying: ‘Hey guys, this is what I'm working on today. I'll let you know the outcome. But if anyone wants to follow along in my thought process, here's the open Google Doc.’ That has been really important.”

Another small but significant intentional change: default recording all Zoom calls. Even if most end up in the bin, anything useful – such as a discussion of travel expenses – can be shared and pinned in the training channel on Slack, so people can go back and watch it when they need to.

For Samantha, the training has left her more confident, having been made aware of the pitfalls and flaws in her own approach.

“I was ready to hold up that mirror and scrutinise my performance as a manager,” she says. “This has given me more confidence to be able to make different decisions – ones that are smart and more inclusive of everyone.”

HYBRID: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

There are some signs that not everything is a bed of roses in the land of hybrid working. A recent [KPMG survey](#) found that 63% of business leaders in the UK predicted a full return to in-office working by 2026.⁷ Tech giants such as Zoom, Meta and Apple have all been seen to mandate a return to the office. Meanwhile, [The Times](#) has reported that 22% of small businesses in the UK would be less inclined to hire a candidate who asked to work remotely two days a week. In the North of England, that figure rose to 40%.⁸

The reasons will vary, but a clue may lie in what UK chancellor Jeremy Hunt told a British Chamber of Commerce conference in 2023, when explaining why he felt the office should be the “default” location for workers. He stressed that, while working remotely had produced “exciting opportunities”, he was worried about “the loss of creativity ... Not having those watercooler moments, where they bounce ideas off each other ... I think that’s why businesses are saying they want people back unless there’s a reason.”

It’s our contention that there’s another reason. Those organisations haven’t given their managers enough support to make hybrid work a success. By helping their managers to develop specific hybrid working skills and techniques, all organisations – and their people – still stand to gain a vast amount from hybrid working.

Mandated returns: A mistake?

“Work in the office or quit.” So read the headline in early 2023, when John Roberts, CEO of appliances retailer AO World, banned hybrid working from the company, telling [The Times](#) that “the production levels of those people working here who don’t want to be in the office are much lower... I’d urge them to please leave”, referencing any unhappy staff. Over at high street rival Currys, meanwhile, hybrid working was embraced. Staff there could “shape their own work schedules based on their location, workflow and what suits them best on a particular day.”

Around the same time, JPMorgan Chase was asking its managing directors to work from the office for a full five days a week.

Their employees may well be unhappy. In late 2023, the UK government announced an edict saying Whitehall employees need to work from the office three days a week. [The Times](#) reported that 40% of the 12,000 civil servants who responded to a survey were considering quitting as a result.

When CMI teamed up with the Work Foundation in 2021 to research the impact of hybrid working on workers, we found that 88% wanted to keep working remotely at least some of the time. On average, they wanted to work remotely for up to three days per week. It seems little has changed there. In a September 2023 survey of nearly 2,500 global workers by employee-experience research firm Leesman, [94% reported liking hybrid working](#) in principle.⁹

These figures are borne out by organisations themselves. At [Standard Chartered](#), for example, 71% of employees who are able to work flexibly choose to work in a hybrid way, with 2% opting to be fully remote.

This direction of travel would certainly appear to be set. On 6 April 2024, the UK government’s new flexible working regulations will come into effect – giving employees the right to request flexible working arrangements from day one of employment, rather than having to wait 26 weeks. This is likely to increase demand for hybrid working and mean that employers receive more requests for hybrid arrangements from current and future employees.

Indeed, concerns about the effectiveness of hybrid working are unlikely to be solved by mandating set days in the office. According to the [University of Birmingham](#), “mandated presence on fixed days represents a form of ‘fixed flexibility’, delivering lesser flexibility to the individual, and may not create efficiencies at team/function level. For example, where employees work across teams, all members of one team being allocated the same mandated onsite days will create gaps in availability.”

Many of the participants in the CMI/Timewise pilot programme question the wisdom of organisations mandating a full return to the

office. While Samantha Brooker doesn't believe there is a right or wrong way to approach hybrid work, she supports her company's hybrid approach – where monthly office meetings are not required or enforced, but are encouraged and are warmly received.

"It's important for leaders to take a clear and consistent approach to hybrid and to make sure the reasons for bringing people together in person are the right ones," she says. "I like that we're moving towards finding a more human touch, face-to-face. We had one of our in-person catch-ups yesterday. And everyone who was there immediately booked their hot desk for next month. We all agreed we'd had a great day, so we should book them while we were there."

As an accidental manager who struggled at first with hybrid working arrangements, Petra Smith also feels it would be a mistake for organisations to mandate a return to the office, either full-time or for set days.

"I don't think it's helpful," she says. "Hybrid working can really break barriers. It can help people with disabilities[†] and health conditions be productive while taking care of themselves. And it helps everyone, especially parents, to have a better work-life balance."

Despite the challenges, hybrid working is here to stay. Yet to truly make the most of its vast potential, organisations need their leadership to bang the drum for hybrid arrangements as loud as their employees. That means securing buy-in from senior management and developing appropriate training programmes and tool kits for line managers and other leaders.

Equip those people properly, and organisations should find themselves better able to respond to the changing business landscape – while also meeting the particular needs of the individuals who are key to their success.



[†] Term used in the original quote. We recognise there is a debate around terminology

“ I’m being more intentional in my approach to the way my team works and more aware about the impact hybrid working has on equity, diversity and inclusion, team cohesion, and my role as a manager. ”

A participant in the CMI/Timewise pilot programme



A NEW HYBRID HANDBOOK

Four years on from the arrival of Covid-19, and the ensuing revolution in remote working, hybrid has emerged as a permanent fixture for many organisations, and it looks like it's here to stay. That will be welcome news to the countless workers whose work and home lives have been transformed by these flexible arrangements. Managers have a pivotal role to play in making sure that continues – yet thanks to the largely ad hoc adoption of hybrid, too many lack the support and development to really make their hybrid teams thrive.

The good news is, when people take a deliberate approach to assembling and building on their hybrid toolkit, the benefits – to themselves and their teams, as well as their employer – are manifold.

Here are ten key skills you need to develop so you and your team can reap the benefits of hybrid working:

✓ LISTENING

Hybrid working works far better when you're able to accommodate people's personal needs – and when they can see you're paying attention to their circumstances, both at work and at home.

✓ SELF-AWARENESS

Examine your own management competencies and whether you're intentionally demonstrating the right behaviours to the people in your hybrid team. And consider how your own working practices and preferences are impacting the team.

✓ COMMUNICATION

Remote working creates a gulf that requires empathy to cross. You'll need a range of strategies for praise and positive reinforcement.

✓ BEING INCLUSIVE AND FAIR

Hidden biases can easily creep into our hybrid management. It may be easy to give work to those who are closest, or who completed a similar task well recently. It's important to tackle these biases so that team members who aren't so visible are still engaged and challenged.

✓ TRANSPARENCY

It's easy with hybrid teams for people to lose that sense of involvement in other people's processes. So make sure you show your workings. The beauty of remote collaboration tools, like Google Docs or Sharepoint, is that they allow for real-time sharing whenever people need to get more involved.

✓ METICULOUSNESS

Consider recording your meetings. You never know when something will crop up that could be useful as a training tool or resource for others in the team later. Anything useful, pin it in a shared channel. Otherwise, bin it.

✓ BUILDING CONNECTION AND COHESION

Hybrid brings challenges here, not least in the lack of regular casual contact and the ensuing lack of clarity around what other team members are up to. Being in the office at different times, wanting different tasks on different days... It can work but, as the manager, you're the linchpin.





ASSERTIVENESS

As a manager, it's down to you to create a safe space in virtual meetings. Be proactive about setting expectations, and be bold enough to play the role of mediator – stepping in if things veer off course or the tone is no longer beneficial to the group. Virtual meetings bring different demands to ones you host in the office. Make sure everything is right for the task at hand and that you've considered the needs of attendees. This may mean taking a different role to the one you're used to.



MIXING SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS CHANNELS

Remote working tools unlock great potential for collaboration and productivity; the key is demonstrating how best to use them and when. Mix real-time chat and messages that happen intuitively, which are great for immediate responses, with more considered, lasting asynchronous tools such as recording Zoom calls – which people can draw value from later.



EMPOWERMENT

You may be the manager, but it's not solely down to you to make hybrid work. Your job is to encourage others within the team to share that responsibility. Create an environment where your team feel they have ownership of working arrangements and give them the opportunity to discuss and develop them together.

/// The biggest thing for me was realising I often go to the person who is handiest, which isn't inclusive. I'm also quite stubborn in forcing people to use online forums. We have a learning platform and we use it to communicate with each other, but not everyone likes working like that. Some would prefer virtual meetings. ///

A participant in the CMI/Timewise pilot programme

CMI LINKS AND RELATED RESOURCES

[Making Hybrid Inclusive: Key priorities for policymakers \(August 2021\)](#)

[Flexible Working and the Future of Work: Managing employees since Covid-19](#)

[Timewise. Beyond the Hype of Hybrid \(May 2022\)](#)

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5. UK Parliament POST (2022), The impact of remote and hybrid working on workers and organisations
6. University of Birmingham (2022), Flexible Working and the Future of Work: Managing Employees Since COVID-19
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9. BBC Worklife (11 December 2023), 'The permanently imperfect reality of hybrid work'



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