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Ordre des conseillers en ressources humaines agréés

GUIDE TO TRANSITIONING TO HYBRID WORK

Produced by the Ordre des conseillers en ressources humaines agréés

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With a membership of 11,000 CHRPs | CIRCs, the Ordre des conseillers en ressources humaines agréés is the benchmark organization for management practices. We protect the public and contribute to the advancement of CHRPs | CIRCs. Through our public activities, we are a major influence in Québec's workforce. We are actively involved in helping organizations maintain a balance between company success and employee well-being.

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Disclaimer

This document is provided for information purposes only and is not intended to constitute professional advice on the subject matter addressed. The information presented here should be interpreted in light of individual experiences. When in doubt, readers are encouraged to consult an expert on the subject.

Note

The objective of this guide is to support organizations in planning, implementing, and supervising hybrid work and to suggest topics for reflection and guidelines on this form of work. The advice and recommendations contained in this guide are based on best practices and can be adjusted to specific circumstances and constraints. They must also be tailored to the organization's culture.

Legal deposit

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The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many organizations to adopt remote work at top speed. For most employees and employers, the experience has been an eye-opener. It has demonstrated the benefits of working from home, but also its limitations. Many remote workers experience isolation, aimlessness, and lack of cohesion and motivation. On-premises work thus has advantages over remote work, but not enough to warrant eliminating remote work. Rather, there needs to be a balance between the two.

With this new Guide to Transitioning to Hybrid Work, the Ordre des conseillers en ressources humaines agréés (CRHA) is offering employers and managers guidelines and clear benchmarks for rolling out and conducting hybrid work.

We emphasize that there is no single way to implement hybrid work. The work must be adjusted to the needs of the organization, whether they relate to business, organizational culture, structure, and infrastructure, or the work environment. It is up to each company to find a balance between office-based and remote work.

In addition to the guidance on hybrid work and related strategies, information on safety measures is also important. The public health emergency began more than one year ago, and the need to maintain physical distance between workers requires limiting the number of face-to-face employees. In addition, not all employees want to telecommute, as some are deeply unhappy about constantly working from home. This also indicates the need for balance.

Given these circumstances, this guide begins by tackling the challenges of planning for hybrid work, addressing the options for establishing a policy to guide this work, and showing the relevance of maintaining office space. It then provides advice for managers on how to lead team members who divide their time between home and office, how to refresh the culture of the organization, and the importance of good communication. Lastly, it spotlights the employees experiences and the health and safety issues of hybrid work.

Happy reading!

Manon Poirier, CHRP

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ORDRE DES CONSEILLERS EN RESSOURCES HUMAINES AGRÉÉS

INTRODUCTION

AFTER THE METEORIC RISE OF REMOTE WORK DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, WORKPLACES ARE NOW FACING A NEW CHALLENGE : ADOPTING A HYBRID WORK MODEL.

Now that a year has passed since the beginning of the public health emergency, workers have become accustomed to exercising their profession from home. Many do not want to return to the office five days a week. Instead, they want to find a balance between home, where they can accomplish the work on their own, and the office, where they can get energized by attending their team meetings.

Employers, meanwhile, have been pleasantly surprised by the remote work experiment that was imposed by the pandemic and are not ready to eliminate this set-up altogether, according to a December 2020 U.S. survey of 133 managers by **PricewaterhouseCoopers**.

52% MORE THAN HALF FOUND THAT EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY WAS MAINTAINED, IF NOT ENHANCED, DURING REMOTE WORK.

RESULT :

73% OF THE RESPONDENTS WERE CONSIDERING REDUCING THE NUMBER OF DAYS THEIR STAFF MUST BE PRESENT ON COMPANY PREMISES.

Undeniable advantages

Hybrid work is a balanced combination of office and home-based work. Although this work arrangement existed before the COVID-19 health emergency, there is every indication it will continue its momentum as the pandemic winds down, because its benefits are undeniable.

Under this type of work arrangement, workers can gain greater independence, reduce their need to commute to and from the office, and enjoy better work-life balance.

By opting for hybrid work, companies will reduce absenteeism and boost employee productivity. They will also gain an additional asset for attracting, and more importantly, retaining talent. Companies will no longer need large offices with a dedicated workstation for each member of their staff, which will lower their operating costs and reduce their environmental footprint.

The balance between remote and face-to-face work will take a different form from one company to another. There is no single recipe. Employees might choose which days they work from home, or the employer could schedule them based on the flow of activities and workstation availability. One, two, three, or even four days could be spent in the office or in a coworking or shared office space. In other words, the possibilities are endless.

Unavoidable challenges

While hybrid work may seem very attractive at first glance, it can also contribute its share of challenges. Employers will need to plan the roll-out to ensure continuity in the tasks performed in the office and at home.

First and foremost, is the staff ready to dive into this new adventure? If so, how? An internal survey can help anticipate expectations. Are all employees eligible for hybrid work, or just some of them? What level of flexibility will they be given? And what will the remaining workspaces be used for?

Companies have everything to gain if they adopt a hybrid work policy to establish a framework for this new work arrangement. They should also rethink their organizational culture to instill a new type of cohesion.

To successfully implement hybrid work, managers should be trained to manage employees working from multiple locations and create a team spirit among them. As was often emphasized during the COVID-19 pandemic, communication must be top of mind.

Workers' right to disconnect from work should also be a component of the planning process. This means drawing a definite line between personal life and work. Health and IT security issues must also be addressed to avoid setbacks.

This guide offers some food for thought on all these aspects of hybrid work. Since this type of work is in demand among employees and managers, it should be carefully planned.

Is there a demand for hybrid work?

Most employees and employers in Canada do not envision returning to the way things were before March 2020, when attendance at the office was usually required every day of the week. The pandemic experience has highlighted the benefits of remote work, and this arrangement is here to stay. But to what extent should it be adopted? Employers and workers do not see eye to eye on the issue. Open, two-way communication will be needed to make the new work model run smoothly and successfully.

WHAT EMPLOYEES WANT	WHAT ORGANIZATIONS WANT (ACCORDING TO CHRPS)	
38%	1%	**Full-time remote work**
9%	6%	**Full-time office attendance**
24%	8%	**Full flexibility** without conditions
18%	**52%**	**Hybrid arrangement** with a minimum requirement for on-site work, according to a weekly, **fixed, and predetermined formula** (e.g., 3 days remote and 2 days at the office each week)
10%	**23%**	**Hybrid arrangement** with a minimum requirement for on-site work, **according to the tasks**, activities, and nature of the job (e.g., 30% of the position duties requiring on-site work over the course of the year)
	9%	Do not know yet

Findings from two surveys conducted in May 2021 by the Ordre des conseillers en ressources humaines agréés, one among its certified professionals (CHRPs) and the other among Quebec remote workers.

The results show differences in opinion regarding a post-pandemic work model. Employees crave total flexibility like before, whereas organizations grapple with their own legitimate imperatives and concerns (team cohesion, organizational culture, maintaining group productivity, etc.) and want some part of the work performed on their premises on a scheduled basis.

"A genuine effort to dialogue and communicate on the issues will be needed from both sides if an acceptable arrangement is to be reached," explains Manon Poirier, CHRP, Executive Director of the Ordre. "This will be a great opportunity for organizations to demonstrate flexibility, innovation, and co-creativity. The challenge will be to ensure both increased productivity for the company and improvement of workers' wellness and work-life balance."

In the Ordre's opinion, the hybrid model is particularly compelling. It will ensure a degree of employee presence at the office, which can not only sustain organizational culture but also promote group productivity, innovation, team cohesion, and a sense of belonging. The idea is to work in person together when it is most productive and impactful, and to give people the flexibility to work from wherever they want when the work is best performed solo.

A DIAGNOSTIC TOOL

To find out what conditions are optimal for the adoption of a hybrid work model, read the diagnostic and decision-making tool.

⬇ DOWNLOAD THE TOOL

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ARE YOU READY FOR THE HYBRID WORK MODEL ?
DIAGNOSTIC AND DECISION-MAKING TOOL

1.1 | HYBRID WORK PLANNING

For many organizations, returning to the office after a year and a half of telecommuting will not be a seamless activity. Although some professionals want nothing more than to ditch their Zoom meetings and cramped living conditions, others have relished the joys of a home-to-work commute that takes only seconds and would like to continue enjoying it a few days a week—or even every day. Under the circumstances, planning a hybrid arrangement that will satisfy both staff and business objectives will require some skill.

ADOPTION STRATEGIES

"At our company, remote work has worked well, and we'll continue to offer it to those who want it as long as they can work it out with their manager."

— Marie-Claude Boivin, CHRP, Human Resources Management Consultant, Université du Québec Pension Plan (RRUQ)

The goal is to remain competitive with other organizations that offer flexible work arrangements.

However, there must be clear guidelines regarding the number of face-to-face workdays required to maintain team cohesion. "Human contact is what is missing right now," says Marie-Claude Boivin.

At FX Innovation, an IT firm, the arrangement will be even more involved. "Previously, remote work was accepted, but relatively uncommon," explains Mélanie McClure, CHRP, Vice President, People and Culture, "but we have come to realize that it has a lot of benefits."

Companies now have the opportunity to tailor hybrid work to their needs. In some cases, the balance between home and office will be defined by the employer, while in others it can be left to the employees' discretion.

A PROTOCOL FOR RETURNING TO WORK

The logistics of returning to work in a hybrid arrangement can be full of challenges in terms of organizing and making the workspace safe and working with others in locations that were designed before new safety-related considerations came along.

At the RRUQ, these challenges have already presented themselves. A team working with non-digitized documents was required to visit the office regularly during the pandemic. "We don't have shared offices, and some staff members were working in cubicles," explains Marie-Claude Boivin. "So we let them use the closed offices of those who were away working from home, so they didn't have to wear masks all day when it wasn't required."

It should be noted that returning to the office will be conditional on the trajectory of the epidemic. According to the Quebec government's **deconfinement plan**, face-to-face work will be permitted only in yellow and green zones until the end of August. Masks must be worn, and physical distance must be maintained between workers. Steps must be taken to keep away symptomatic individuals and encourage frequent hand washing and disinfection of equipment and tools.

The lifting of mask requirements at the office could occur gradually, once a good portion of the population has been fully vaccinated, and primarily in workplaces without public contact, according to Quebec's Director of Public Health, **Dr. Horacio Arruda**.

DEVELOPING

THE RIGHT FORMULA

There is no one recipe for finding the right balance between flexibility and efficiency. At RRUQ, the human resources team surveyed managers about their experiences during the pandemic.

"We asked them to think about the last six months, after the adjustment period," says Marie-Claude Boivin, "and to reflect on what had changed, for better or for worse, in the way they planned, organized, managed, and monitored activities."

The new hybrid work arrangement will be adjusted based on responses to the survey and those from a second survey, which will focus on staff expectations. "We want to know how people feel about remote work, how many days a week they would like to spend in the office, and how much support they are receiving in the transition."

HOW TO PLAN THE LOGISTICS

OF A SAFE AND EFFICIENT RETURN TO THE OFFICE

SOME QUESTIONS TO PONDER :

- ARE STAFF RELUCTANT OR EAGER TO RETURN TO THEIR WORKPLACES?

- WHAT WILL BE THE DAYS OR HOURS OF MANDATORY OFFICE ATTENDANCE? WILL THEY BE THE SAME FOR EVERYONE?

- SHOULD THE WORKSPACE BE REORGANIZED TO INCREASE THE PHYSICAL DISTANCE BETWEEN PEOPLE?

- IS THERE ENOUGH SPACE FOR ALL STAFF TO BE PRESENT AT THE SAME TIME OR WILL THERE NEED TO BE A ROTATION?

- IS DATA AVAILABLE ON AIR QUALITY AND THE CONDITION OF THE VENTILATION SYSTEM SO THAT THE TRANSMISSION OF AEROSOLIZED DISEASE CAN BE PREVENTED?

- WHAT IS THE STATUS OF THE MASK REGULATIONS?

1.2 | FUNCTION OF PHYSICAL SPACES

THE NEW VOCATION OF OFFICES

With the relaxation of public health measures, employers will gradually bring their employees back to the workplace, without necessarily giving up on remote work. When choosing to combine these two ways of working, they need to look at the space they have. What will it be used for and how can it contribute to the success of the business?

As countries were bringing the COVID-19 pandemic under control, hybrid work was at the forefront of **Google**'s thinking. The tech giant generally plans to have some "Googlers" report to the office three days a week in flexible spaces and do their work wherever they want the rest of the time.

"Since in-office time will be focused on collaboration, your product areas and functions will help decide which days teams will come together in the office."

— Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google

GET THEIR OPINIONS

While many organizations may be tempted to take a cue from Google, they would be well-advised to first consult with their employees. "By listening, a company engages its employees and fosters their commitment," emphasizes Stéphanie Sauvé, CHRP, President of STES Services Conseils.

HERE ARE SOME TYPES OF QUESTIONS TO ASK :

- DO YOU WANT TO CONTINUE WORKING REMOTELY?

- DO YOU WANT TO RETURN TO THE OFFICE FULL-TIME?

- DO YOU WANT TO SPLIT YOUR TIME BETWEEN HOME AND OFFICE (HYBRID WORK)?

- IF HYBRID WORK IS ALLOWED, HOW DO YOU PLAN TO DIVIDE YOUR TIME BETWEEN REMOTE AND FACE-TO-FACE WORK?

Once it gathers the answers, the company can assess how well they match its own needs. Depending on their responsibilities, employees may have to report to the office daily. Sauvé suggests holding focus groups to find a consensus before presenting the action plan to all their teams.

After this exercise, the company might choose to redesign its office space   and even reduce its footprint   in favour of conference rooms, undesignated workstations, and perhaps even a gym or break room for those who cannot work remotely, or it might prefer to rent coworking space or even shared space with another company.

If employee attendance is not scheduled ahead of time, a reservation system should be implemented to avoid conflicts.

COLLABORATION

According to two surveys conducted by the Ordre des CRHA in May 2021 among certified professionals (CHRPs) and remote workers, the tasks that enjoy added value when done in the office rather than remotely are:

- TEAM MEETINGS AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

- MANAGEMENT OF SENSITIVE FILES

- HIRING AND ONBOARDING NEW TALENT

- TRAINING, COACHING, KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER, AND MENTORING

- ACTIVITIES THAT SPARK CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

- ADMINISTRATIVE AND CUSTOMER SERVICE TASKS

- MANUAL WORK AND PHYSICAL MAINTENANCE

"The office must transform itself.
It should become more event-oriented."

—Stéphanie Sauvé, CHRP, President of STES Services Conseils

ALLEGIANCE BUILDING

Google is going to great lengths to accommodate its staff because it wants its employees to stay on.

"It's very significant [when an employee wants to stay on despite more attractive offers elsewhere]," says the President of STES Services Conseils. To achieve this requires companies to be flexible and listen to their people, she says.

Does one of your employees want to be in the office full-time? It is a good idea to allow them to do so, even if it means reserving a space for them.

"One of my clients had an employee who wanted to go to Australia for six months," says Sauvé. "He was highly valued, so he was allowed to continue working on a part-time basis. After his trip, he returned to his position. It was a difficult situation, but by giving him some flexibility, my client was able to keep him."

AIM FOR SUCCESS

Companies must be attentive as they review their office operations. Are adjustments necessary? Stéphanie Sauvé suggests creating a committee of managers and employees to look at the situation.

The following points should be thoroughly examined:

- Occupancy rate
- Level of staff engagement
- Turnover rate
- Absenteeism
- Impact on recruitment
- Productivity rate
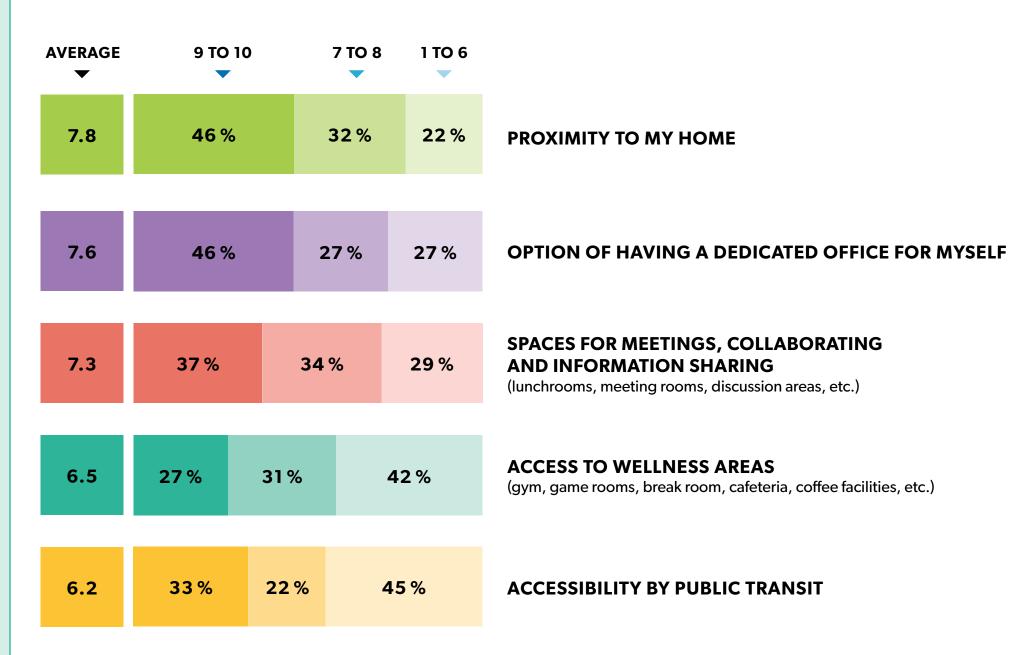- How daily activities are conducted

Sauvé adds that a new office configuration would benefit from being modular so that adjustments can be made as needed.
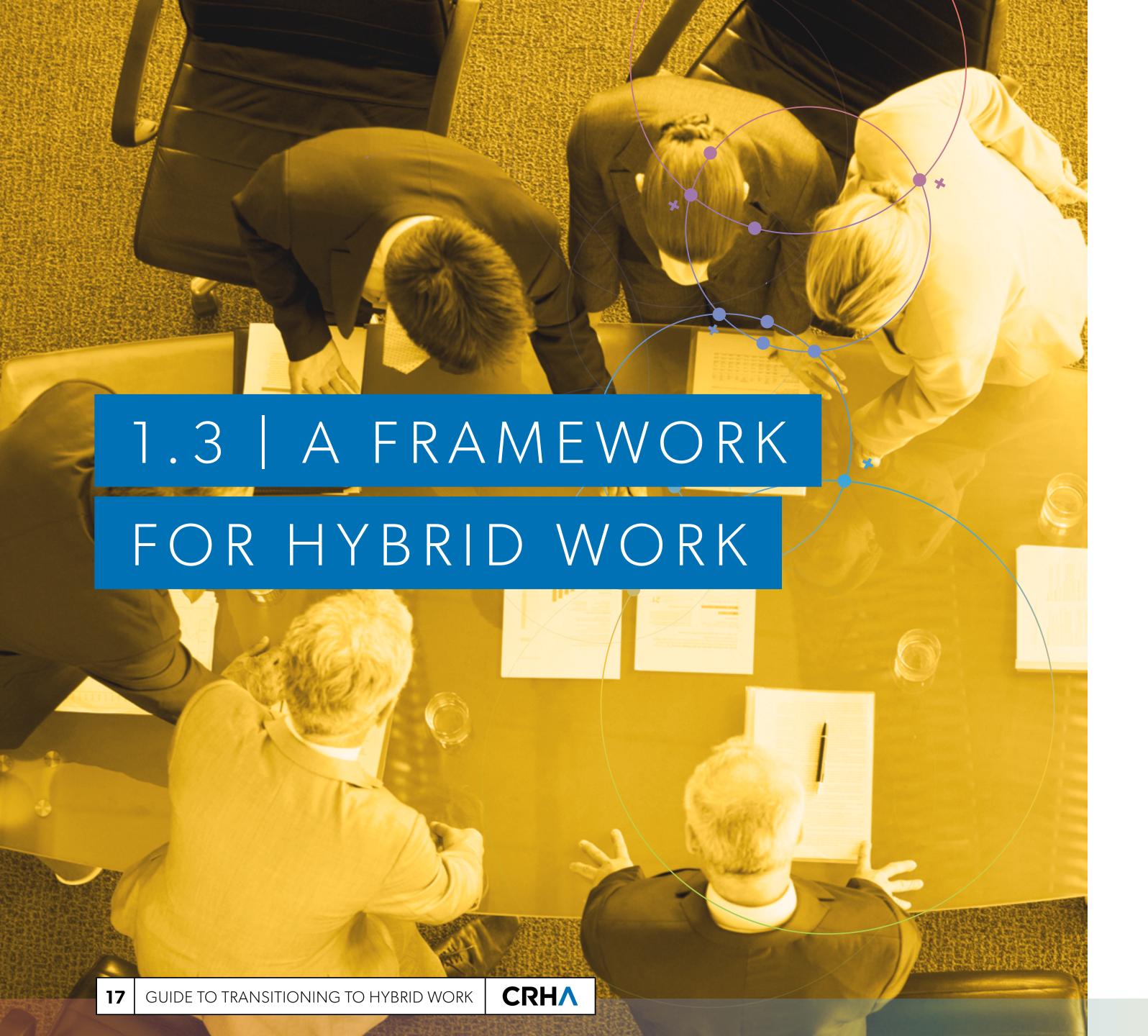
"Nothing should be set in stone. If a company sees the need for one more conference room, it should be able to easily add one."

According to the survey of Québec remote workers conducted by the Ordre des CRHA in May 2021, the important components of an in-office space are the following:

Question: If you could work permanently in an arrangement consisting of a combination of remote and in-office work, how would you rate (on a scale of 1 to 10) the importance of the following aspects in terms of workspace at the office?

AVERAGE	9 TO 10	7 TO 8	1 TO 6	
7.8	46 %	32 %	22 %	**PROXIMITY TO MY HOME**
7.6	46 %	27 %	27 %	**OPTION OF HAVING A DEDICATED OFFICE FOR MYSELF**
7.3	37 %	34 %	29 %	**SPACES FOR MEETINGS, COLLABORATING AND INFORMATION SHARING** (lunchrooms, meeting rooms, discussion areas, etc.)
6.5	27 %	31 %	42 %	**ACCESS TO WELLNESS AREAS** (gym, game rooms, break room, cafeteria, coffee facilities, etc.)
6.2	33 %	22 %	45 %	**ACCESSIBILITY BY PUBLIC TRANSIT**

1.3 | A FRAMEWORK FOR HYBRID WORK

HOW TO DEVELOP A HYBRID WORK POLICY

As companies plan a gradual return to face-to-face work and consider the place of remote work in the coming years, hybrid work is emerging as a promising middle ground. The transition to this new way of working requires significant changes in the working conditions of employees, which would benefit from being described in a clear policy.

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THE BENEFITS OF A POLICY

Having a hybrid work policy in place clarifies not only the expectations and obligations of the employer, but also those of the employee. It adds consistency to the new work reality. Developing and disseminating the policy raises awareness of hybrid work issues in every team.

"You need to establish a framework for work delivery and give yourself rules," says Véronique Morin, CIRC, a labour lawyer. "In addition, a clear and well-established policy influences the employer's brand and helps attract or retain experienced employees."

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

There are no specific laws for remote work. The legal provisions that govern it are the same as those for face-to-face work. "This means the Civil Code of Québec, the Act respecting labour standards, the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, the Act respecting occupational health and safety and the Act respecting industrial accidents and occupational diseases," explains Morin. "These are the minimum provisions applicable."

Can a company impose hybrid work? Not if it was not part of the work arrangement before the public health emergency. Employers cannot unilaterally change working conditions without the agreement of their employees, nor are they obligated to allow hybrid work, for that matter.

THE ESSENTIALS

A hybrid work policy must align with existing policies and the organizational culture.

Among other things, it should clarify the following points:

POSITIONS AND DEPARTMENTS INVOLVED

Not all job categories lend themselves to hybrid work. You need to take the time to clarify this and make choices based on the company's mission and values.

EXECUTION OF THE WORK

Determine the required availability periods, the ratio of face-to-face and remote days, and the preferred mode of communication.

TECHNOLOGY PROVIDED BY THE EMPLOYER

These provisions allow for remote work consistent with the company's quality and data security standards.

GUIDELINES SURROUNDING CHANGES TO THE WORK ARRANGEMENT

A protocol for notices must be agreed upon should either party wish to change the terms of the work arrangement.

ADAPTING MANAGEMENT STYLE

Establishing a hybrid work arrangement requires managers to make significant changes to their management style. "This means management by results," explains Yarledis Coneo, CHRP, a work-family balance specialist. "Checkpoints, regular follow-ups, and coaching must be planned together."

Since most people know how to do their job, managers must learn to point out the destination, not the path.

FROM WORDS TO ACTIONS

The process of implementing hybrid work is as important as the policy itself, according to Yarledis Coneo. Transparency in communications is therefore the key to success. The plan presented must be clear and executed gradually. It must be accompanied by a concrete commitment from management, which allocates the financial and human resources to ensure its success. Some organizations may opt for a phased deployment or a pilot project so they can recalibrate their approach if necessary.

HYBRID WORK : HERE TO STAY?

Coneo is optimistic that hybrid work will be adopted by many organizations. "Especially because of the advantages in terms of work-life balance and psychological health," she says.

Véronique Morin, however, has a caveat: "In the medium and long term, this type of work can jeopardize the worker's sense of belonging," she says. "There's more synergy and collaborative spirit with in-person work."

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For further details on laws governing remote work and the responsibilities of employers and employees:

⬇ DOWNLOAD THE GUIDE

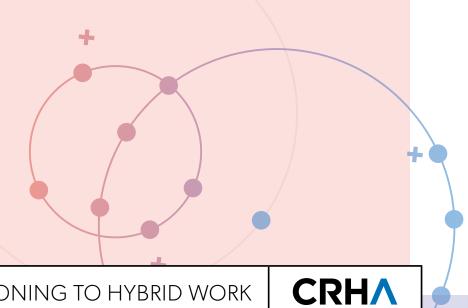# 1.4 | MANAGING A HYBRID WORK ENVIRONMENT

BECOME THE COACH OF YOUR TEAM

All managers must adapt their management style in a hybrid work setting. The principles of situational leadership are well suited to the variability of this type of work arrangement because they are geared to increasing participants' independence, whether they work remotely or at the office.

It is up to managers to determine what leadership style to adopt for each employee in the organization.

Julie Tardif and Médina Cayer, both CHRPs and co-founders of Iceberg Management, a human resources and organizational development consulting firm, are intimately familiar with the process. In the seven years since launching their company, they have had an exclusively remote working arrangement with their collaborators.

"Managers must have a comprehensive perspective and consider the environment as a whole to gain an overall view of its resources and collaborative ties, and then make the right choices," explains Cayer. "It is from this position that they can identify the level of independence of their human resources, propel them forward, or make other needed decisions."

THE KEY QUESTIONS

To know which style to adopt – selling, delegating, collaborating, telling, coaching, etc. – managers must ask their employees questions. The nature of the responses will determine the appropriate management style. These questions should cover:

- the meaning of work;
- the need to review some priorities;
- the tools at employees' disposal for accomplishing what is required;
- other resources in the team that could assist.

"These questions help with understanding needs and mindsets, and therefore the management style to use. If the answers point to a need for supervision, managers should opt for a directing style of leadership. If employees are highly independent or developing their independence, managers should delegate tasks according to the employees' inherent strengths," says Médina Cayer.

Obviously, the answers to these questions change over time, which is why the exercise should be repeated as long as the collaborative relationship with the employee continues. "The questions directly relate to the meaning that employees attribute to the work, and therefore their motivation and skills, the two essential ingredients for developing independence," adds Cayer.

THE LEADER-COACH STYLE

Armed with this overview and detailed knowledge about what work means to their employees, managers can adopt the leader-coach style, which can create the conditions for developing independence, an added value in remote work.

"Coaches remove obstacles from the employee's path, promote skills acquisition, and motivate their players, which leads directly to greater independence," says Julie Tardif.

And as employees' independence grows, so do their leadership qualities, which enhances their efficiency and development. "It's very compelling: managers meet their employees where they are and accompany them in their development. If an employee needs to learn, the manager adopts a transformational style; if the employee is highly independent, the manager will use the delegating style," she adds. Such leadership can result in employees achieving a degree of independence that allows managers to decentralize decision making.

CHARACTERISTICS OF REMOTE LEADERSHIP

Evidently, a great deal of non-verbal communication is lost in remote work arrangements. Since the specific nature of employee responses to key questions is paramount to adopting the right leadership style, managers should not hesitate to ask employees for clarification of their responses.

At the same time, managers must also explain their choices and clearly state why they made them. "These managers don't trigger impostor syndrome among their people," says Julie Tardif.

To ensure optimal communication, especially in remote work situations, managers can use tools that deliver specific information such as surveys, scheduled scrums, and individual meetings. They can also reach out to employees who leave their webcams off during virtual meetings or those who appear to be down in the dumps.

"Non-verbal language is even trickier to interpret in remote situations, and any potentially demotivating situation should be quickly addressed."
— Médina Cayer, CHRP

As for brainstorming sessions, creative meetings, or any other process that engages group thinking, it is best to wait for a face-to-face situation, even when new applications make these activities possible in remote work.
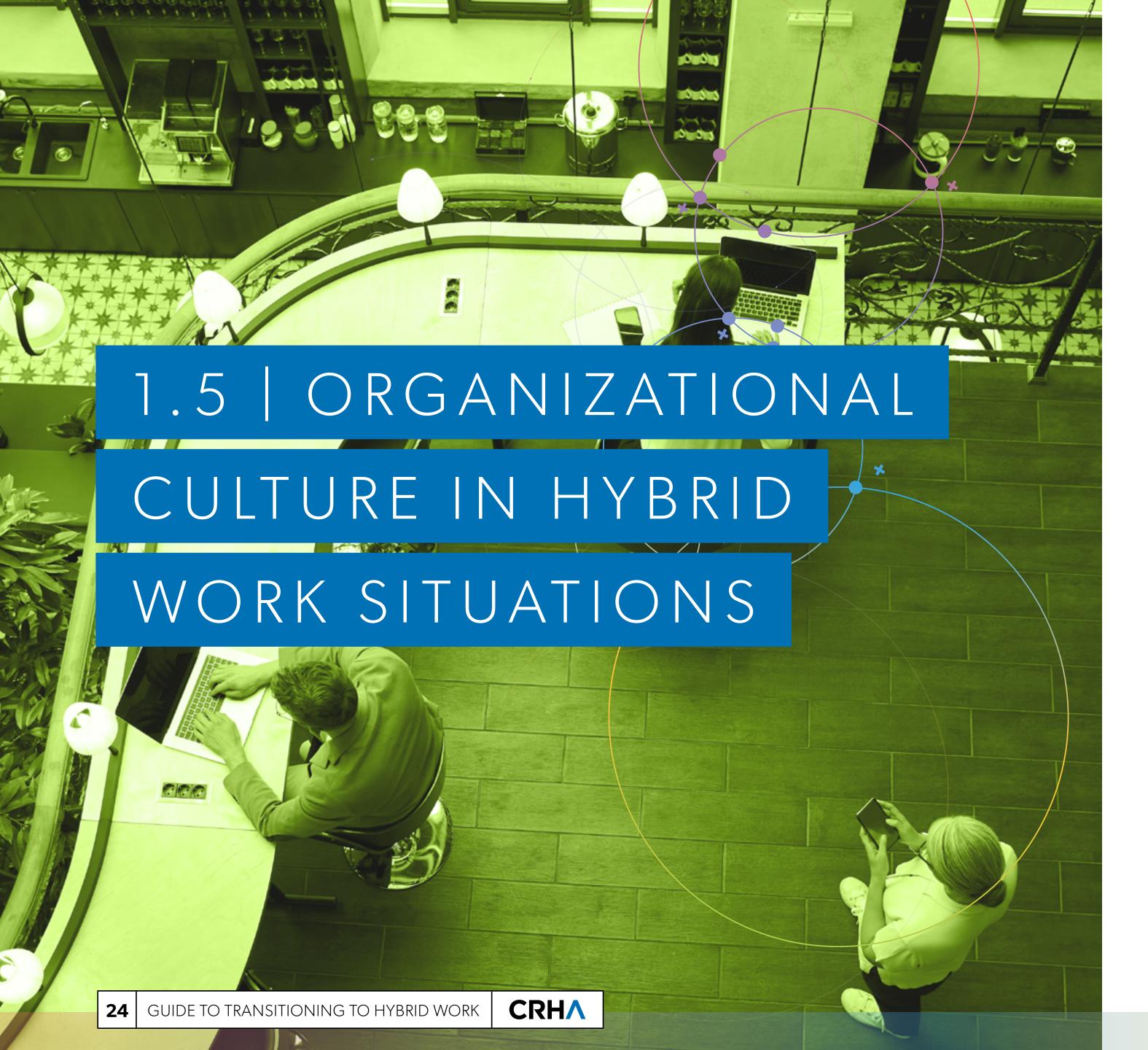
"But be careful not to replicate the office environment!" says Tardif. "From now on, in-person meetings will require more preparation, such as transforming the room to set up collaborative spaces or creating a multifunctional room that doesn't look like yesterday's office or, even worse, the employees' home offices!"

According to the survey conducted by the Ordre des CRHA in May 2021 with Quebec workers who were working remotely, the important components of their relationship with their manager in a hybrid work situation were the following:

Question: If you could work permanently in an arrangement consisting of a combination of remote and in-office work, how would you rate (on a scale of 1 to 10) the importance of the following aspects of your relationship with your manager?

AVERAGE	9 TO 10	7 TO 8	1 TO 6	
8.1	50%	33%	17%	MANAGER DEMONSTRATES TRUST
8.1	51%	32%	17%	MANAGER ALLOWS INDEPENDENCE
8.1	49%	32%	19%	MANAGER DEMONSTRATES EMPATHY AND COMPASSION
8.0	47%	34%	18%	YOU ARE TREATED WITH SAME EQUITY AND FAIRNESS AS YOUR CO-WORKERS
8.0	46%	35%	19%	MANAGER PROVIDES RECOGNITION
7.9	46%	35%	19%	QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIP WITH MANAGER
7.6	35%	40%	26%	MANAGER PROVIDES SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT FOR YOUR TASKS
7.4	33%	40%	27%	FREQUENCY OF COMMUNICATION WITH MANAGER

1.5 | ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN HYBRID WORK SITUATIONS

For many companies, the sudden transition to remote work in March 2020 was a culture shock. But after more than a year of adjusting to the new normal, returning to the office could be a tough challenge as well, especially if not all employees return at the same time or at the same pace. How do you protect, rebuild, or redefine organizational culture in post-covid times?

MAKE CULTURE A PRIORITY

"Culture is something that must be actively addressed."

— Mélanie McClure, CHRP, Vice President,
People and Culture, FX Innovation

The values of having a minimal hierarchy and good communication and transparency, which were already at the heart of FX Innovation's culture, have guided its response to the pandemic and will guide its approach to getting back to normal.

"But the message has to come from the top," McClure emphasizes. "Without a strong commitment from senior management, there can be no optimal outcome."
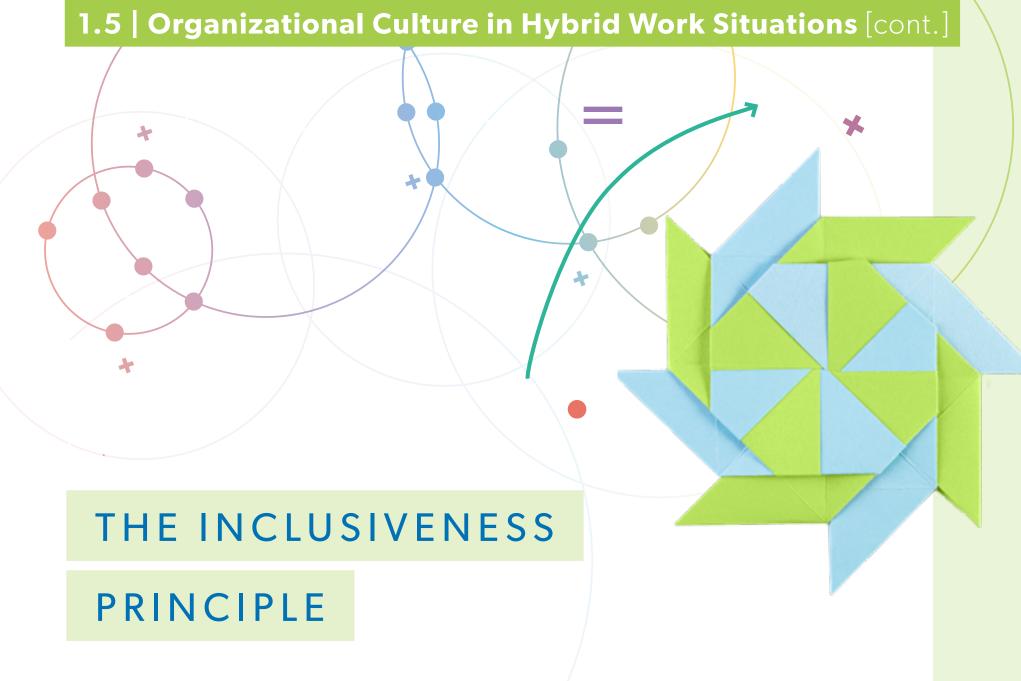
MAINTAIN THE GAINS OF THE PAST YEAR

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many companies to quickly adopt remote work. This experience demonstrated the benefits of this type of work arrangement. Employees were better able to balance their career and personal lives and enjoy time savings and a measure of independence.

Conducting an internal survey can help managers identify their team members' expectations for returning to the office and determine the balance between face-to-face and remote work.

Companies would be well advised to maintain the approaches they put in place during the long months of lockdown to maintain their team spirit, or at least to find a formula suitable for hybrid work. Many have been highly creative in implementing new communication tools such as instant messaging, scheduling virtual meetings with employees to review activities or provide training, or inviting employees to virtual cocktail parties to socialize and enjoy a few laughs.

HYBRID WORK AND COHESION

How do you create a performance culture in a hybrid work environment? It is all about trust: talking to each other often, communicating personal expectations and the expectations of clients, and then letting people have the freedom to deliver results, according to Marie-Claude Boivin, CHRP, a human resources management consultant at the Université du Québec Pension Plan. "We can no longer content ourselves with just managing time," she says. "Instead, you must manage assignments and objectives. A good face-to-face employee will also be a good remote worker, and if you have misgivings about a remote worker, you would still be wary of them after they're back in the office!"
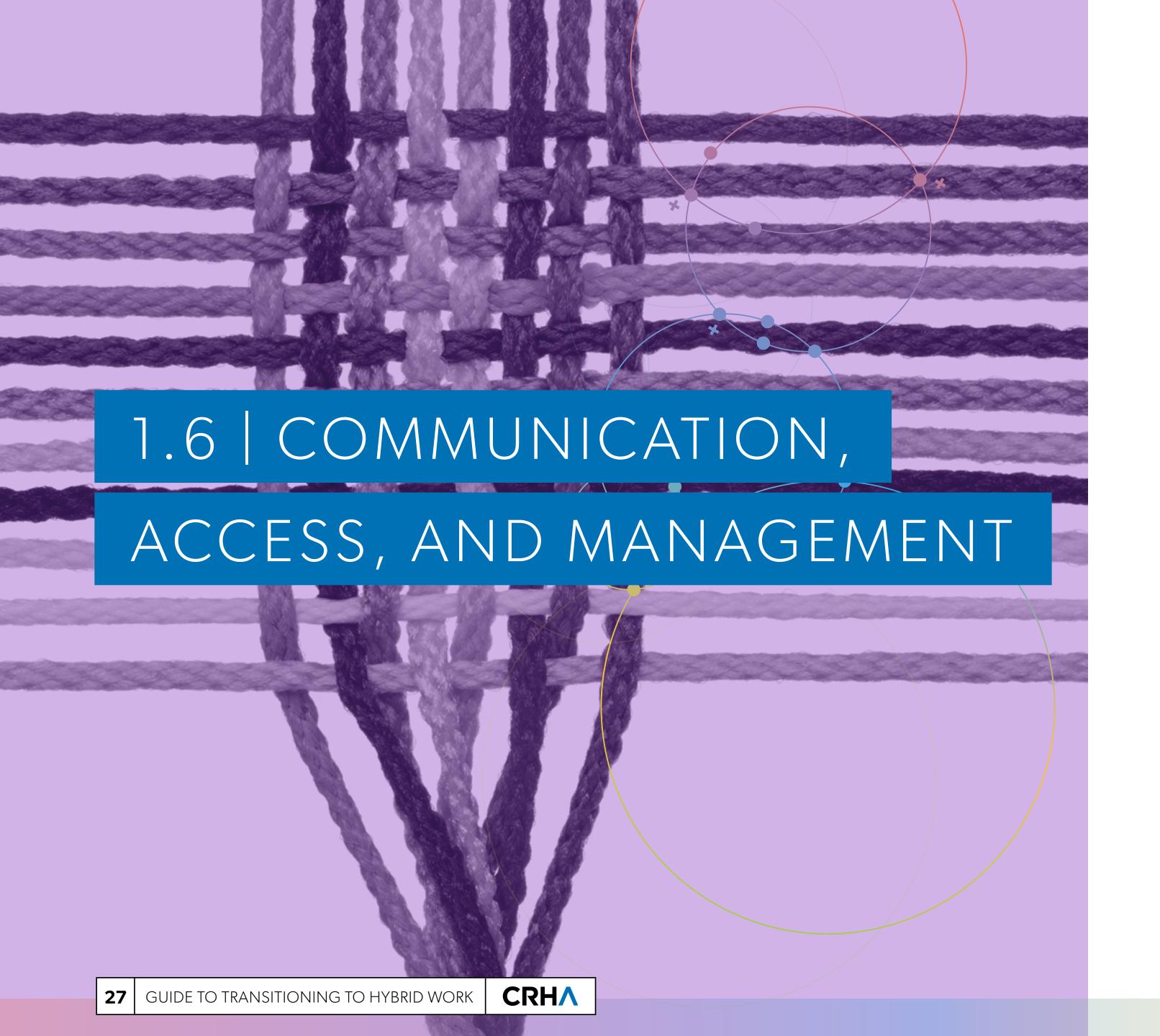
Wondering how to compensate for the loss of informal networks that energize work relationships, such as meeting around the coffee machine? Actions that were taken during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as creating discussion threads in text messaging platforms, can fill the gap until employees can cross paths at the office again.

THE INCLUSIVENESS PRINCIPLE

To support the cultural shift to hybrid work, steps must be taken to ensure that all employees are on an equal footing. For example, during video-conference meetings at FX Innovation, workers in the office will be required to use their computers and webcams rather than gather in a meeting room, so that remote workers are not disadvantaged in any way.

Senior management will also have to lead by example by not always being in the office at the same time. Otherwise, staff may feel compelled to do the same.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO CAPITALIZE ON

A strong organizational culture can adapt to even the most sudden changes. According to Mélanie McClure, companies have no other choice.

"I speak to a lot of companies, and they're all wondering if they'll be able to get their old culture back. For those that don't want to make any changes, I say good luck to you. One thing's for sure : your competitors are going to adapt."

— Mélanie McClure, CHRP, Vice President, People and Culture, FX Innovation

1.6 | COMMUNICATION, ACCESS, AND MANAGEMENT

RELEARNING

TO COMMUNICATE

The advent of hybrid work means that communication will once again become front and centre. In her presentation on the challenge of remaining connected and exercising remote leadership, given at the "Printemps des priorités" event organized by the Ordre des conseillers en ressources humaines agréés, Isabelle Lord, CHRP, President of Lord Communication managériale, cited four challenges facing employers and managers in communicating effectively with employees : proximity, interaction, coaching, and inclusiveness.

PROXIMITY

Lord, author of *L'étoffe d'un leader: 52 façons d'améliorer votre communication-leadership* ("The stuff of a leader: 52 ways to improve your leadership communication"), describes proximity as a managerial quality that "provides everyday inspiration."
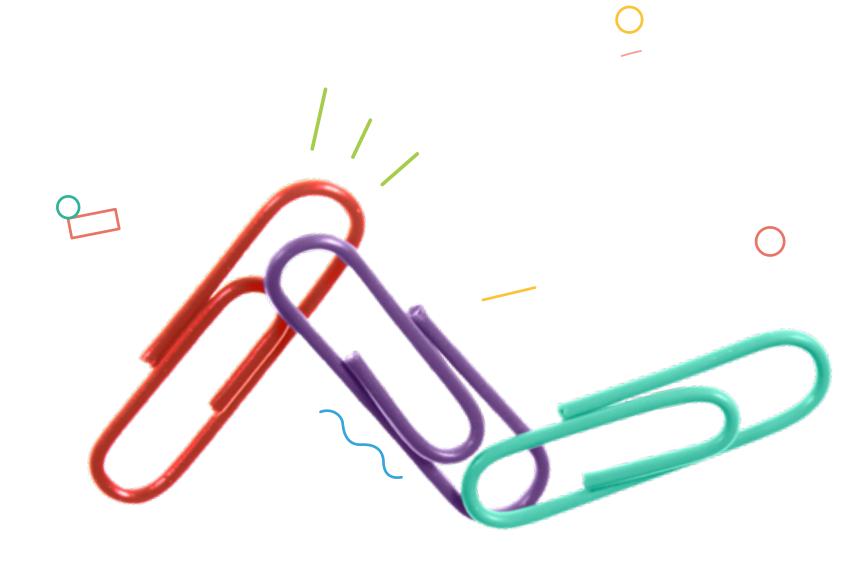
"It's important for managers to make employees feel that they're still part of the team and that the work is being done in the usual way, by detailing what is expected of them and helping them organize their time," she notes in an interview.

Lord believes it is important to have a strict routine with orderly actions: being attentive, holding meetings at set times, communicating your blocks of availability, making clear goals and assignments, etc.

"You have to put in the time and sometimes invest more of yourself. Proximity is not about being available 24/7, but about creating the sense that employers and managers are accessible," she said in her presentation.

"We need to question how we communicate. With the team's role and mandate in mind, the manager needs to ask if the right efforts are being deployed in the right places. In hybrid work, there are fewer cues, so we have to regularly review our own communication routines."

It is not as much a matter of continuous adaptation as it is a matter of keeping an open mind—in other words, using our "antenna" to maintain contact.

"Proximity is not about being available 24/7, but about creating the sense that employers and managers are accessible."

INTERACTION

The way we interact is of great importance in establishing better communication. During a meeting, managers must develop their "sensitivity toward others."

Isabelle Lord points out that working remotely requires a little more patience and increased awareness of the signs or unspoken messages that employees may convey. These perceptions must then be validated so misunderstandings are avoided.

The points to remember for positive interaction are:

- ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

- GET PEOPLE INVOLVED

- KNOW WHEN A ONE-ON-ONE MEETING IS NEEDED

- INSTILL IN EMPLOYEES A SENSE OF INDEPENDENCE

- GIVE EMPLOYEES LATITUDE TO DEVELOP THIS INDEPENDENCE

COACHING

To succeed at the challenge of coaching ("which is an absolute must"), "you have to know what motivates each employee—in other words, what drives them in their work," Lord emphasizes.

"A good leader doesn't need to know what the employee's favorite food is. It's more about the employee's professional contribution. In terms of proximity management, it could be good to know that an employee likes tennis or bonsai trees, but it's not essential." If employers or managers get in-depth insight into the professional qualities of their employees, they can give them more responsibilities. It is important to understand what employees enjoy doing, both alone and as part of a team, or how they feel they can contribute to the company's vision.

"For hybrid work, you almost have to map out employees' level of independence in terms of whether they are fully, moderately or somewhat independent."

Managers can then encourage their employees to surpass themselves and can foster their creativity by setting ambitious but sensible and well-paced objectives. The important thing is to make employees feel like "partners" by calling on them to contribute.
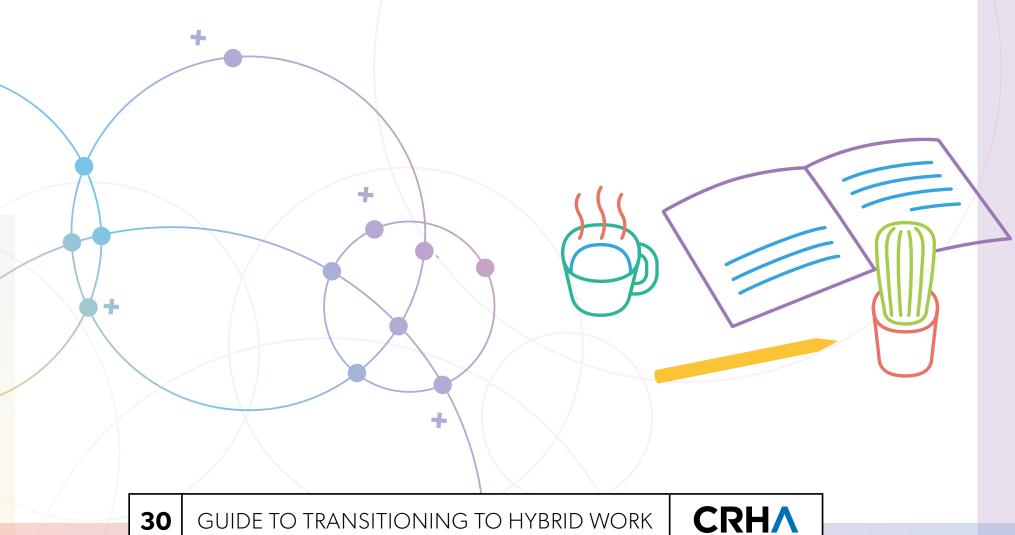
"Managers don't always realize that it comes down to the type of questions they ask," she says. "Creating impactful conversations is about asking questions that elicit interaction, rather than submitting people to an interrogation."

INCLUSIVENESS

Employers with hybrid work teams must be aware of practicing inclusiveness. Remaining sensitive to bias is a challenge that must be addressed candidly and appropriately.

"Managers can benefit from creating similar conditions for success for everyone," says Isabelle Lord. "You have to bring people together and respect everyone's point of view. The word 'we' is important in a discussion. It's about setting an example, being yourself, and avoiding a disconnect between the message and the action."

A hybrid work situation can affect sensibilities even when that is not the intention. In a meeting between face-to-face and remote participants, remote employees can easily feel left out. "This problem isn't just the employer or manager's responsibility," says Lord. "It's a shared responsibility."

TECHNOLOGY

With technology constantly evolving, Isabelle Lord, CHRP, believes that employers need to stay on top of new communication tools by having someone assigned to this task.

According to Genesis Integration, a firm that provides technology solutions to businesses, employers who opt for hybrid work must work with tools that:

- PROMOTE COLLABORATION

- INCLUDE SECURITY SOLUTIONS AND CLOUD STORAGE

- ARE EFFECTIVE IN COMBINED FACE-TO-FACE AND REMOTE SITUATIONS

Although hybrid work creates great opportunities for employees and employers, it also gives rise to challenges related to cybersecurity, data management, and employee monitoring.

Among respondents, 32 % said they were tracked by monitoring technology while working remotely. This practice has consequences, since 40 % of respondents believe that it increases stress levels.

Organizations use these systems to prevent employees from abusing their privileges and to maintain productivity and ensure the security and confidentiality of information.

"We feel that this monitoring practice is counterproductive to building trust and independence," says Manon Poirier, CHRP. "We think it's better to show trust and manage the exceptions when necessary."

1.7 | EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

PLANNING FOR THE RIGHT TO DISCONNECT

Working from home has its advantages—no more traffic jams or lunch at the restaurant! Telecommuting means flexibility, time savings, and efficiency. However, with the relaxation of lockdown measures and employees' increasing demands for hybrid work, the challenge will be to draw a strict line between personal and professional spaces.

11% of CHRPs report that their organization has formal mechanisms in place to limit hours worked and logging in outside of normal work hours.

Based on the Ordre's May 2021 remote work survey of its certified professionals (CHRPs).
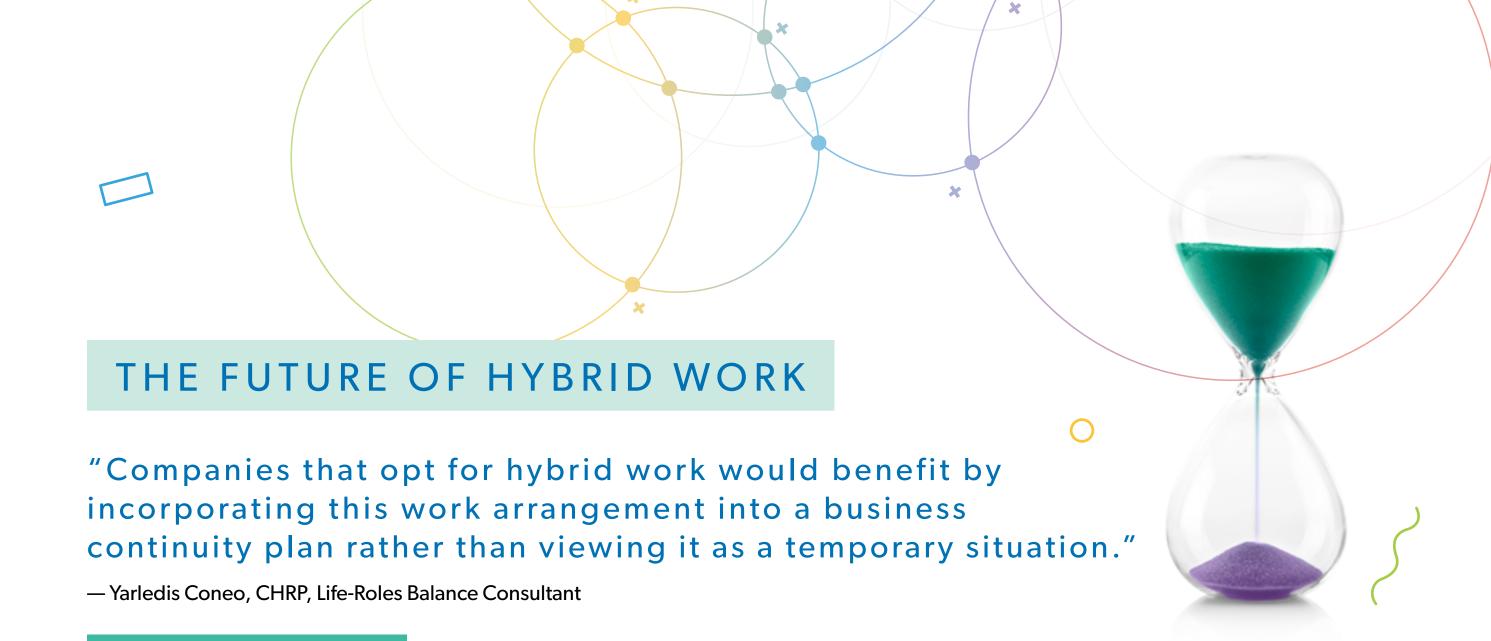
"I've never worked as much as I have since I started working remotely," says Marie-Hélène, a manager for a parapublic agency. From the moment she wakes up in the morning, notifications pop up on her phone to remind her that emails are waiting to be read. In the evening, when the kids are in bed, she catches up on work by answering more messages, planning the next day, and reviewing documents—a habit that follows her even on weekends.

"In fact, as soon as I sit down, my reflex is to pick up my phone and answer messages. Instead of reading a novel, I read papers and drag my stack to my bedside table."

Marie-Hélène is not alone. According to an Angus Reid/ADP Canada **survey** of 1,501 remote workers conducted in May 2021:

44%	of respondents, or twice as many as in the previous year (21%), said they were working more overtime during the pandemic.

THE FUTURE OF HYBRID WORK

"Companies that opt for hybrid work would benefit by incorporating this work arrangement into a business continuity plan rather than viewing it as a temporary situation."

— Yarledis Coneo, CHRP, Life-Roles Balance Consultant

Coneo favours the establishment of a clear and uniform policy so that the boundaries between private life and work are the same for all employees in the organization. Managers should regularly follow up to ensure that their team members are finding a balance between their work and home life.

"As an HR leader, lead by example and encourage your managers to do so as well," emphasizes Coneo. "If you have disconnection policies in place, make sure the culture of the organization supports them."

There should be a clear policy about technology, such as establishing hours for sending and receiving emails and text messages, and even encouraging delayed sending. It is also advisable to limit the number of communication platforms and to optimize the ones the organization already uses.

"Inform your employees that all internal company policies also apply when they telecommute," Coneo stresses.

Organizations can take inspiration from the **bill tabled by Québec solidaire in the National Assembly in June 2020**. The party proposed that employers provide, among other things, a protocol for the use of work tools as well as control of access time for work-related features. They should also be aware of respecting rest time and instill these values in all their executives, managers, and employees.

With this bill on the parliamentary agenda and the relaxation of public health measures, organizations should quickly implement a policy that includes disconnection provisions.

In March 2021, Bruno-Pierre Allard, CIRC, lawyer at CHABOT médiateurs avocats, **urged companies** to take the bull by the horns. "Waiting until the last minute to prepare to comply with future legal obligations or to negotiate collective agreements containing these types of obligations could lead employers to realize, too late, the difficulty of introducing the right to disconnect in the workplace," he writes.

"If you have disconnection policies in place, make sure the culture of the organization supports them."

— Yarledis Coneo

The French example

In 2017, France was one of the first countries to introduce the right to disconnect into its labour code. "The French labour code strongly emphasizes the importance of establishing a clear working framework that considers the time that employees devote to the other spheres and components of their lives," Bruno-Pierre Allard points out.
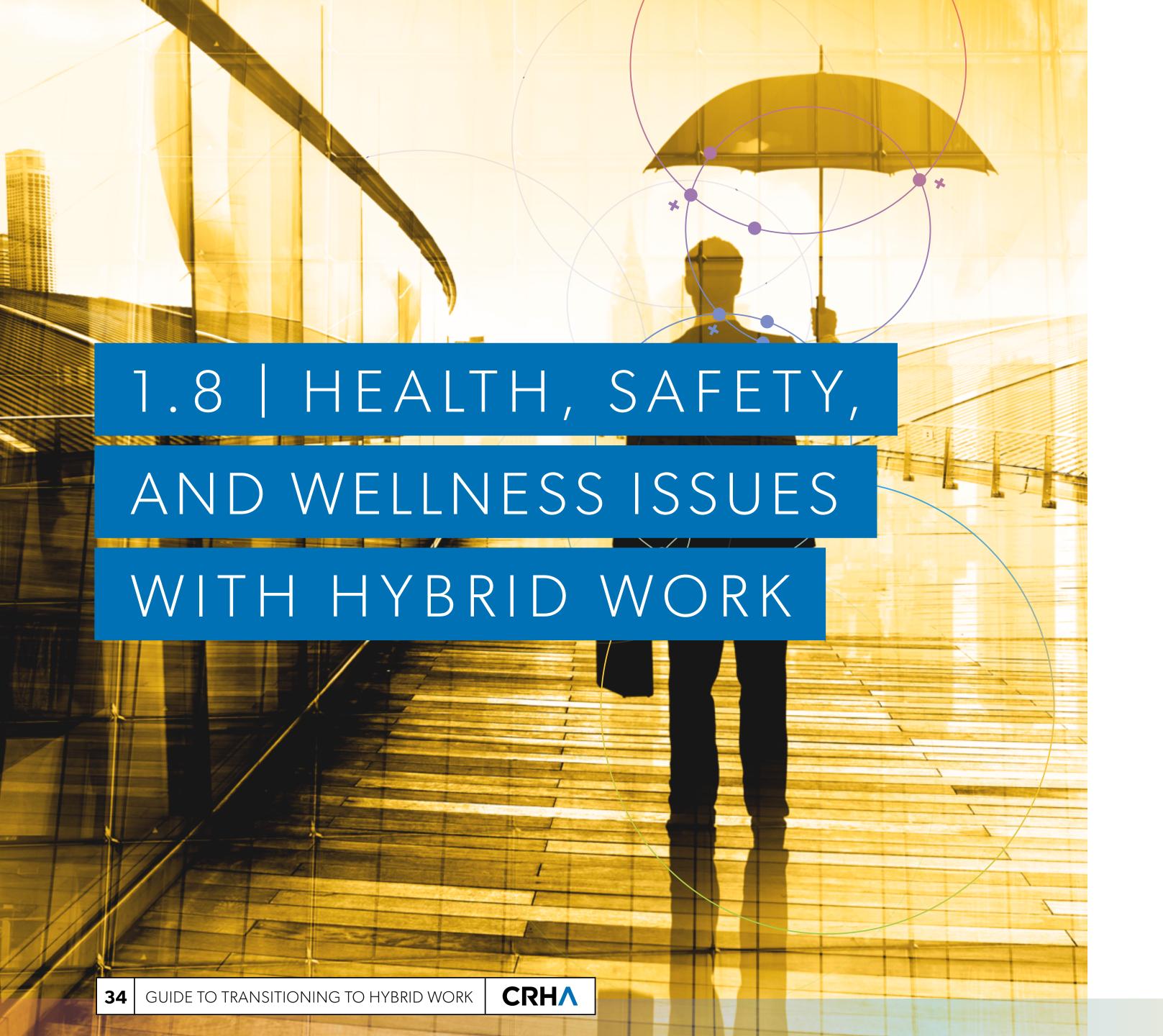
Hybrid work, a recruitment asset

According to a **survey** of 500 Canadian employees conducted by Robert Half in March 2021:

Nearly **33%**	of workers are willing to quit their job if their boss asks them to work on company premises full-time.
51%	of the respondents expressed the desire to work both at the office and at home.

Hybrid work is a great way to hire and retain talent. It allows you to expand your borders and recruit from abroad, in addition to offering employees a better quality of life. Beyond salary and working conditions, many workers are attracted by the values conveyed by the organization.

1.8 | HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELLNESS ISSUES WITH HYBRID WORK

Hybrid work provides its share of physical and psychological challenges, which can turn into conflict or health problems if not addressed in time. How can you ensure a smooth return to the office for your employees, and ultimately, that they maintain their productivity while working at home as well as in the office?

After months of lockdown, there is finally a light at the end of the tunnel. "However, the physical risks are great with the makeshift set-ups at home and the changing layouts that will replace the former assigned workstations. As for the greatest psychological threats, these are related to the actual return of the teams to the workplace," warns Marie-Ève Champagne, CIRC, Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellness Consultant at Nucléiconseils.

CRH

PREVENTING INJURIES

Marie-Ève Champagne, CIRC, likes to describe the new hybrid workers as digital nomads because they work in a variety of environments, have little control over these settings, and must physically adapt to them. "You shouldn't think twice about offering ergonomic training even remotely to your employees so they can be independent in adjusting their workstation wherever they go," she advises.

A poor work configuration can quickly cause stress on the musculoskeletal system and lead to discomfort which will turn into conditions such as:
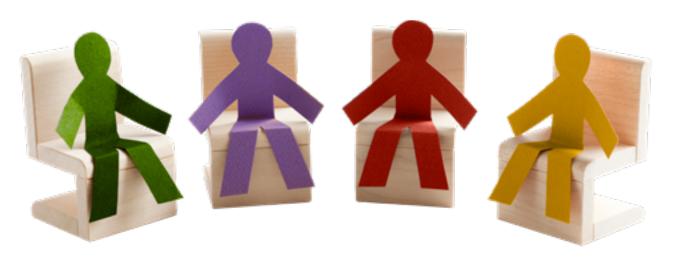
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Back pain
- Neck pain
- Various types of tendinitis
- Headaches

Some tips:

- AVOID EYE STRAIN BY NOT WORKING IN FRONT OF A WINDOW.

- STRETCH FREQUENTLY AND ALTERNATE BETWEEN STANDING AND SITTING TO PREVENT POSTURAL STIFFNESS AND MOST RELATED AILMENTS.

- "EMPLOYERS HAVE A VESTED INTEREST IN GIVING EMPLOYEES THE EQUIPMENT THEY NEED TO ENSURE THAT THEY HAVE AN APPROPRIATE SET-UP AT HOME", says Champagne.

- The fall hazards associated with computer wires and other equipment lying around should also be considered. If the employer gives the go-ahead for returning to the workplace, the employer must also ensure that the new facilities allowing for more mobility are safe and ergonomic.

"The new hybrid workers are digital nomads because they work in a variety of environments, have little control over these settings, and must physically adapt to them."

— Marie-Ève Champagne, CIRC, Occupational Health, Safety and Wellness Consultant at Nucléiconseils

QUICKLY NOTE

ANY PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES

"After months of isolation, returning to the office will almost be like a group therapy session that must be closely facilitated," says Marie-Ève Champagne. "Relationships will need mending, people will experience confrontation, and latent conflicts will have to be resolved. This is because these problems, which may have developed or intensified during remote work, would continue during hybrid work, often without the employer being aware of it."

To ease these tensions, managers can offer employees the use of discussion spaces. "The best thing is to allow employees to work it out on their own, to make them responsible for their own wellness," says the consultant. However, managers should talk to them as a matter of courtesy and should provide support, knowing what their employees find personally stressful about returning to the office. "Managers who focus on performance rather than relationships might want to attend leadership development sessions so the return to the office can be successful."

DEVELOPING A HYBRID

WORK POLICY

Successful hybrid work requires careful preparation that addresses the individual experiences of employees. For example, many employees might be worried about using public transportation. In this case, employers can find a way to encourage active transportation, offer flexible arrival and departure times to avoid rush hour, or opt for a gradual return to work based on workers' needs.

"For a long time to come, employees will remember not only the pandemic but also how their managers treated them during and after the health emergency," notes the consultant. The key here is to be considerate of all team members and to be available to each of them, because there are as many individual experiences as there are employees.

Finally, managing a return to the office while adopting a hybrid work arrangement requires a great deal of skill, a good communication plan, and leadership. Managers will have to wear several hats to ensure their employee's wellness, health, and safety, from the way they welcome them back to the office to introducing the new ergonomic layout, mediating disagreements, and rebuilding the ties that were broken during the pandemic.

CONCLUSION

Now that the Québec government is ending the lockdown period, companies can envision how they will emerge from the public health emergency. The COVID-19 pandemic has left an indelible mark on workplaces, and the call for a new balance between on-site and remote work is proof of it.

The additional challenge created by the pandemic experience will require agility. Companies must ensure, above all else, to be strategically positioned to take advantage of the new way of working. Those that summon their employees back to the office must give back something positive in return, if only by providing an environment where employees can interact, be creative as a group, and strengthen their team spirit.

Planning is as vital as ever. Senior managers should consider a hybrid work policy, how the space will be used for offices, how they will manage their staff, and what the preferred mode of communication will be.

Employee well-being must be at the heart of their plans, which should include establishing boundaries between employees' personal and professional lives and working to preserve their physical and psychological health, which was sorely tested during the public health emergency.

The question on everyone's mind is: how many days a week should employees be in the office? This is for employers to decide, preferably in collaboration with their teams. Thanks to technology, hybrid work can take many forms and be suitably adapted to the company's culture, structure, and general setting.

The flexibility that managers will give their employees should result in engagement, stimulation, and even a galvanized team. It should lead to increased productivity and retention in the organization. In addition, it will be a magnet to attract new talent.

It is now up to each company to decide how they will set up their post-pandemic workplace.

REFERENCES AND USEFUL LINKS

Gouvernment of Canada

- Civilian flexible work Guidance
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

L'Association nationale des DRH (ANDRH) |PWC

- ANDRH | PWC - Nouvelles méthodes de travail

PwC

- In the office today, at home tomorrow: The impact of a hybrid workplace on Canadian real estate hybride

World Economic Forum

- Hybrid working is here to stay. But what does that mean in your office?
- 6 things to know about the future of skills and workplace learning
- Home-office, HQ, hybrid or work-from-anywhere? This is what businesses are planning

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

- Line manager guide on supporting hybrid working
- Flexible working practices

Ordre des CRHA

- Telecommuting: A guide for employees and employers
- Hybrid Work: Diagnostic and decision-making tool
- Guide sur la cybersécurité - Obligations et pistes d'action

Forbes

- The Unintended Consequences Of The Hybrid-Work Model
- How Small Businesses Can Build Team Culture In A Hybrid Work Model

McKinsey & Company

- What employees are saying about the future of remote work

Telus

- Planning for a hybrid workforce

HR Reporter

- Wanted: Hybrid work model

La Presse.ca

- Bye, télétravail, bienvenue, mode hybride

Newswire.ca

- Over three in four Canadians like the idea of a hybrid model: A workplace reboot

Conseiller.ca

- Plus de souplesse au travail : les Canadiens préfèrent les modèles hybrides

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