



# PROMOTING COLLABORATION AND INNOVATION IN THE HYBRID WORKPLACE

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## Promoting collaboration and innovation in the hybrid workplace

*This article was written by Roger Camrass, Director of Research for CIONET International, and is based on the conversations held during an event on 6th December sponsored by Adobe and Insight and entitled 'promoting collaboration and innovation in the hybrid workplace.'*

The hybrid workplace is now a fact of life. We have the basic tools to conduct day-to-day work such as Office 365 and Teams, but many organisations ask if our ability to collaborate and innovate is compromised in this new environment? Few companies can quantify economic impact, but most await developments in collaborative working to close gaps.

Adobe and Insight have many of the tools and capabilities to address possible gaps in collaboration and innovation. In this discussion evening we focused on:

- Post the pandemic, has productivity been affected in a hybrid work environment?
- Is the workforce more or less creative and are collaborative tools effective?
- How has digital transformation been affected by hybrid working?
- What are the implications for hiring and retaining talent in the new world?
- How can businesses better understand the personas within their organisations to enhance their working experiences?

A representative group of delegates from financial services, retail, healthcare and construction gathered to explore their experiences relating to hybrid working.

### Collaboration and innovation remain a challenge

Given that most employees will continue to work 60% plus of their time at home, communications in this environment will remain focused largely on progressing workflow through Teams or Zoom calls. Such calls are effective in orchestrating formal processes but provide little scope for ad hoc discussion. The additional difficulty of synchronising teams who may be spread between home and office suggests the need for a 'level playing field' where neither side suffers any disadvantages due to split locations.

Such hybrid work environments can often fail to encourage the 'side' chat that challenges conventional wisdom and helps to identify areas of improvement (e.g., the WhatsApp groups). The overall conclusion of delegates was that productivity as measured by standard workflows is likely to be maintained at historic levels. However, the ability to improve productivity may be limited by current collaboration methods.



## Tackling cultural and learning issues

For experienced professionals, the hybrid environment offers a more flexible lifestyle. Some delegates did prefer to commute as a means of separating work from domestic duties. However, most were happy with current hybrid arrangements. Some of the organisations represented had exploited remote working to source qualified staff from outside large metropolitan areas such as London. This has helped address the war on talent and has enabled a more equitable distribution of wages across the UK.

However, all delegates noted that such work conditions put new joiners (e.g., graduates) at a disadvantage given the lack of onsite mentoring. Only by working in physical proximity with experienced staff can such newcomers to the workforce start to build experience and confidence. It is difficult to conceive of a sustainable culture in such conditions, especially when most staff work from home. Some delegates mentioned that ambitious staff could curry favour with their bosses by synchronising their time in the office together. This could put others at a disadvantage.

## Selecting the most appropriate tool kits

Most of the delegates were using a range of collaboration tools such as Slack and Yammer. The difficulty came in making choices. One delegate said that choosing a collaboration tool that was spread thinly across an organisation could lead to isolation from mainstream thought and activity. The general view was that regardless of the choice of tool, benefits arose when everyone used the same collaboration platform.

The key requirements for collaboration tools include:

- Getting people together to solve business problems and develop innovative solutions
- Enabling different members of staff to share experiences and to provide mentoring to juniors.

Much talk was made about emerging techniques such as the Metaverse and use of augmented and virtual reality. The ability to capture human motion as well as visual images could help to take communication to the next level. Business decisions rely often on observing body language. It is likely that immersive environments will become common place once progress is made in terminal design. The iPhone was the catalyst to accelerate mobile applications. There is room today for another breakthrough relating to virtual reality and the metaverse.

## Towards an optimal environment

Delegates were convinced that tools alone would not solve the current gaps in collaboration and innovation. A more structured approach would be needed to ensure that teams work productively. Some specific areas of improvement mentioned included:

- **Presentation skills applicable to hybrid working** – how to be more effective in communicating between remote teams
- **Bonding and cultural development** – how to instil a sense of community and related values across a disparate workforce
- **Security issues that arise when people work in different places such as home and office** – how to protect intellectual property.

One possible framework that was developed for BA's new headquarters at Lakeside some years ago could be relevant to a hybrid work environment. Work patterns were segmented into three different categories:

- **Heads up** – time when workers met with external parties such as customers. This favoured purpose designed, face-to-face meeting areas
- **Heads together** – team-based activities that favoured shared workspaces where people could congregate together and share ideas
- **Heads down** – time spent alone, responding to email, writing reports, and processing information on corporate systems.

A comprehensive solution to hybrid working will need to provide solutions for each of these categories.

## What to do next

Delegates concluded that there were some immediate steps to improve the effectiveness of hybrid working:

- Review and standardise on specific collaboration tools to ensure inclusivity of all staff, office and remote
- Explore developments in new tools, including computer vision, virtual and augmented reality, all of which could enrich the work experience
- Ensure that security measures are fit for purpose in a hybrid work environment, especially around connectivity and physical documentation.





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