DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF INCLUSION IN ORGANISATIONS **MOVING TOWARDS HYBRID WORKING**

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adopt a co-design approach - getting staff input to help identify the challenges and how to overcome them
- Scope what is unique about your organisation and include your employees' preferences and your organisation's capacity for change
- Dig deeper with an iterative series of honest and open focus groups that represent the make-up of the organisation
- Consider what changes need to be made to -
  - the organisational purpose and goals
  - people's roles and responsibilities
  - resource allocation such as capital, time and people
- Generate a hybrid working blueprint and obtain feedback
- Trial hybrid working in practice and review over time

WHO IS THIS FOR?

Primary audience:
SMEs, Voluntary sector

Secondary audience:
Larger organisations, Public sector

COVID 19 HAS CHANGED THE WAY WE WORK

The Covid-19 pandemic has without doubt changed the way we view work, modern 'offices' as well as ourselves as a workforce. Much of our current knowledge about work cultures that are not 'traditional' (i.e. not 'office work') predates the pandemic and is based primarily on research that has been specifically into 'remote' working. However, the pandemic has demonstrated the need to look beyond the dichotomy of office work and remote work, to considering blended ways of working. This may be because some tasks or roles cannot be performed remotely and would need to be performed on location, or require staff to be 'co-located' (i.e. work in the same physical location). In other cases, workers may have expressed the need to make bespoke choices around location and time flexibility at work. This creates the need to design a work culture that incorporates elements of both remote and office-based work in a manner that is fair, delivers the organisation's objectives and responds to people's desire to choose how they work while maximising outcomes.

Hybrid working is an arrangement where in-person work and remote work co-exist, and workers use at-work spaces and at-home spaces for work as needed. It offers an opportunity for organisations as well as individuals to re-imagine the workplace and work culture to best suit their needs. While initially used as a necessary response to the pandemic, it is now clear that workers and employers are increasingly keen to explore new ways of working. For workers, it allows them flexibility with time and location, with opportunities for enhanced work-life balance. For organisations, it enables them to minimise overheads associated with running office spaces. This has propelled organisations across sectors to explore a transformation in work culture.

These changing trends are reflected in the data gathered from the employment sector over the last two years. **Microsoft surveyed over 30,000 employees in 31 countries as part of their 2021 Work Trend Index and found that over 70% of respondents wanted flexible, remote work options to continue beyond the pandemic, while over 65% sought in-person interaction with their teams. On the other hand, they found that teams became more siloed during this period,** posing a threat to bonding and connectivity within teams as well as with external, geographically distant networks.[1]

In the subsequent 2022 Work Trend Index survey investigating the lived experience of hybrid work, **Microsoft analysed data from 31,000 employees in 31 countries, as well as labour trends on LinkedIn and productivity signals in Microsoft 365. They found that over half of those surveyed were considering hybrid or remote work in the year ahead. Further, more than half of the respondents were more likely to prioritise health and well-being over work,** and the most important aspects of work that employees look for now are positive culture and mental/health and wellbeing benefits.[2] This demonstrates a clear shift in priorities for the workforce as they navigate the 'new normal'.

In the UK, a 2020 survey by YouGov of 4933 adults found that 57% of those working prior to Covid-19 wanted the option to work from home to continue, of which 18% wanted to work fully remotely and 39% wanted the option to work from home some of the time.[3] These statistics remained unchanged in YouGov's 2021 survey of 1671 adults in the UK suggesting that the workforce is unlikely to want to return to physical workplaces to the same extent as pre-pandemic times.[4]

In 2021, YouGov surveyed 1061 senior business decision makers to understand the business response to the pandemic. They found that only one in five businesses (19%) will mandate all their employees to return to the office full-time, suggesting that businesses are responding to the workforce's changing need,[5] as well as recognising that home working can be productive as well as reduce office costs and overheads. **Results from a poll surveying 50 of UK's biggest employers (collectively employing 1.1 million people) also found that almost all of those surveyed have said that they do not plan to bring their workforce back to the office full-time.**[6] Most importantly, the changing culture of work continues to be in flux, with new data constantly emerging from around the globe. It is to be seen how the world will adapt to these changes, but it is clear that both the workforce as well as businesses in the UK are keen to embrace a hybrid model of work.

Due to the unprecedented rise of Covid-19 infections during the pandemic, organisations large and small had to adapt rapidly to the resulting 'shocks' in order to stay in business. **To some extent, this has meant that they have dealt with challenges as they arise, without a clear strategy or plan in place to navigate the transition to a longer-term hybrid work culture.**

As a result, businesses may struggle to recruit and retain staff and meet their organisational goals and outcomes sustainably and effectively. **In early 2021, research from Sony Professional Solutions found that 4 in 5 employees believed that their employers were not adequately prepared to make a sustainable transition to a hybrid model of work.[7,8] A mid-2021 report by UK's Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that at least 46% of UK employees did not have flexible working arrangements in their current roles.[9]**

More recently, **a survey of 17000 employees conducted by SAP Concur found that over 3 in 5 employees continue to find their companies' policies and technologies inadequate to enable flexible work.[10]** The lack of technological readiness has been cited as a concern as the uptake for hybrid models of work rises, especially in the manufacturing industry.[11]

Beyond the practical challenges around technology and other infrastructure, other 'human-focused' challenges that come with the culture shift include the need to cultivate new and creative ways to communicate and collaborate, fostering sustainable engagement between team members while safeguarding employee health and wellbeing.

HELPING SMALL BUSINESSES WITH THEIR CULTURE CHANGE STRATEGY

A majority of large private as well as public sector organisations like Microsoft, Amazon, Google, NatWest, and the Bank of England have announced plans to reconfigure and formalise policies of flexibility that are geared towards making hybrid working models the norm, aimed at giving workers the freedom and support to work based on their individual needs.[12] It is clear that the successful execution of this process is largely contingent on adequate planning and availability of capacity and resources, as well as a mindset and will to achieve change.

However, smaller organisations or those in the third sector in particular may not have access to this type and extent of resources, be it time, funds or human capital to plan and execute policies that can help them emerge from the shocks of the pandemic. Third sector organisations such as voluntary entities and registered charities have been equally impacted by a shift in work culture. Following the pandemic, there has been a change in attitudes towards flexible working in the third sector, with more urging for and embracing flexible working for all roles in the sector.[13] **The 2021 Charity Digital Skills report found that 68% of charities were preparing to adopt a hybrid model of work.[14]**

However, transitioning the workforce to hybrid working could seem like an additional burden at a time when resources and funds are significantly stretched due to the pandemic, with much of the workforce in the third sector already working beyond their regular hours to meet the needs of the individuals they serve. Many employees working for charities, voluntary organisations or in parts of the public sector such as the National Health Service and local councils have experienced heightened stress, compassion fatigue and burnout as a result of their intensified frontline duties during the pandemic.[15] **An unplanned and unsystematic approach to transitioning an already overwhelmed workforce to hybrid work without planning for potential challenges and pitfalls could pose threats to both individuals as well as an organisation's health and wellbeing.**

This resource aims to support small-and-medium enterprises (SMEs) and the voluntary/third sector to prepare for, be responsive to, and navigate the uncertainty and change that comes with transitioning to a hybrid model of work. Based on our experience of developing and implementing this process with a frontline charity in Cornwall and The Isles of Scilly, we offer an approach to co-designing a hybrid workplace culture that is fair, equitable and addresses the needs of the workforce. This process may be used as a template for other organisations of a similar size, structure and nature of work to plan and execute their own hybrid work model.

There are multiple reasons for co-designing a work culture in the organisation through consultation with the workforce. Although the need for remote and hybrid working arose due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it can also serve as a thoughtful response to other crises such as climate change globally, or the UK's current cost of living crisis.

Crises are often unprecedented, but the aim of disseminating a process that can be easily adapted is to 'future-proof' the organisation and build resilience to shocks and crises over time. Covid-19 and the emergence of hybrid working has taught us that this can only be done successfully through collaborating and consulting with the workforce.

To this effect, the process we have designed can be adapted to, and executed as a response to any crisis or to ensure that businesses are on par with the evolving culture and environment of work. For instance, re-imagining flexibility in the workplace is as much a potential solution to Covid-19, as it is to the rising cost of living in the UK. It allows employees to fit work around their personal needs such as caring responsibilities, instead of vice versa. These needs may be unique and varied across individuals and depending on the type of role and organisation they work for. However, it is clear that prioritising the wellbeing of the workforce is key to the survival of businesses in the face of crises. The process we have designed and recommend is a means to achieve this end.

THE INCLUSIVITY PROJECT

The Inclusivity Project is a joint piece of work, funded by the European Regional Development Fund and the South West Academic Health and Science Network. The project brings together research from the European Centre of Environment and Human Health at the University of Exeter in collaboration with our partners, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP, disAbility Cornwall, Age UK Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, to support small and micro businesses in Cornwall.

The Inclusivity Project has worked to generate a better understanding of some of the challenges and opportunities facing employers in creating inclusive places to work, particularly for people who are 50+, disabled, or have a long-term health condition.

We have conducted research into unconscious bias, organisational resilience as well as a systems approach to understanding recruitment and retention of older and disabled workers in Cornwall. Further, the project's Knowledge Exchange service has empowered SMEs to overcome the challenges and barriers they have faced in their aim to be a more inclusive workplace, both pre and post pandemic.

Since March 2021, the team has been working closely with a local, independent charity based in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The charity works with the local community to support older people through a range of products and services with the aim of promoting their interests, independence and wellbeing.

- UK charity with regionalised operations
- 140 staff based in Cornwall and Isles of Scilly
- 300+ active volunteers

AIM

This resource is aimed at organisations that are seeking to develop a collaborative process of culture change. This process aims to support these organisations to -

- Develop a flexible and hybrid culture of work that is explicit, fair and equitable with enhanced positive connection and inclusion
- Adopt a planned, systematic approach while navigating the transition to hybrid working
- Utilise the opportunity to make work more accessible, more inclusive, and more enriching to our lives

APPROACH: CO-DESIGN

Co-designing the processes, policies and culture change with all members of the workforce is essential towards understanding how to democratically embed an enriched culture of work that doesn't introduce new inequalities, but instead responds to the unique and diverse needs of the workforce. The co-design process also creates individual accountability and participation in the culture change process.

> **Co-design, also known as participatory design, is an approach that seeks to actively involve all stakeholders in the design of a process or a service that seeks to benefit them.**

Global surveys have indicated that employees are prioritising their health, wellbeing, and autonomy around how they work in a post-pandemic world. In order to be responsive to this change in the mindset of the workforce, a consultative and collaborative approach is recommended when designing an inclusive work culture. In their practical guidance to hybrid working, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) recommends including input from the workforce on both the organisational considerations and potential benefits to workers from the start of the process of transition (CIPD, 2021).

This involves actively seeking the participation of all employees in every step of the transition process, from understanding what the barriers, challenges and gaps are, to identifying potential solutions, to trialing any new policies and practices that are developed.

The key to understanding the co-design process is that it is an iterative, feedback loop and begins and ends with the participation of the workforce. A sample co-design loop is presented below and can be adapted and used as a framework.
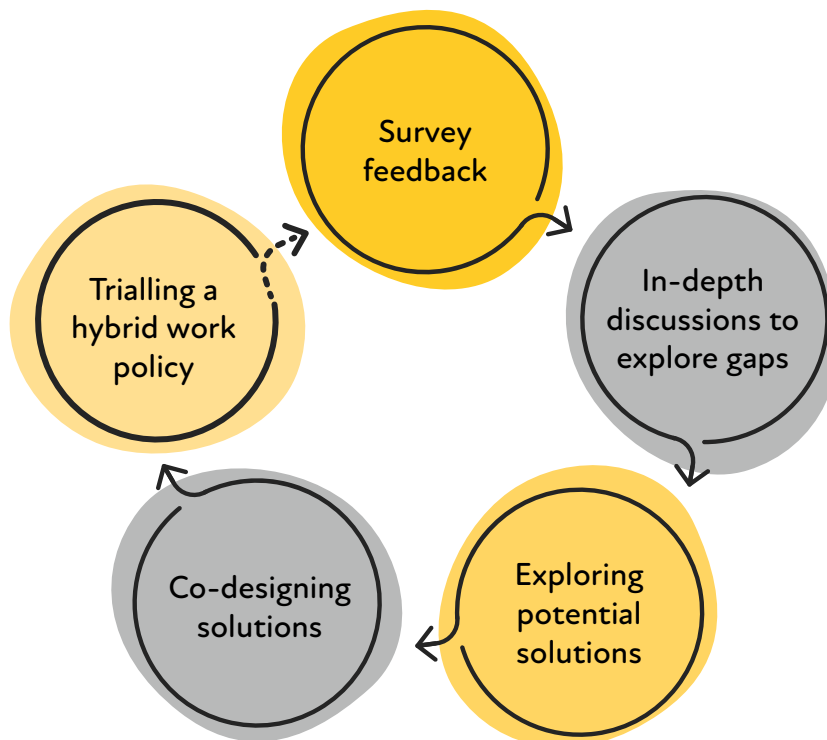
PHASE 1: SURVEY FEEDBACK

The first phase of the co-design loop is scoping the organisation's unique needs and preferences. There are several ways of doing this, but the most resource-efficient way is using survey methods. A survey typically consists of a set of questions that can be closed-ended (multiple-choice responses) or open-ended (free text boxes), aimed at receiving large-scale feedback on a specific issue. Anonymising the responses can be an effective way of ensuring honest feedback.

The survey is intended to be a quick and easy way to gather large amounts of data to make way for elaboration in the group discussion. We've created a template for the survey on our website. As with any template, you should ensure the questions you are relevant to your organisation, workforce and operations, so we recommend you adapt questions rather than adopt a one size fits all approach.

Click here for the survey template >

Preparing the organisation for a dramatic cultural shift to accommodate hybrid work models can be overwhelming both for staff as well as organisational resources. Experts have warned that access to physical workspaces must not be removed completely in a strict enforcement of remote working.[2] Equally, office-based work and hybrid work models must not be enforced without a scoping exercise to gauge workforce needs and preferences, as well as the organisation's objectives and resource availability; all of which may be prone to change. For example, hybrid is not simply a blend of remote and office-based work, but may be used dynamically by employees as their needs and preferences evolve. It may be useful to think of work culture as a spectrum, wherein a survey can help gauge where on the spectrum the preferences of the workforce as well as the organisation's capacity for change lie.

Remote work   Office-based work

Hybrid work
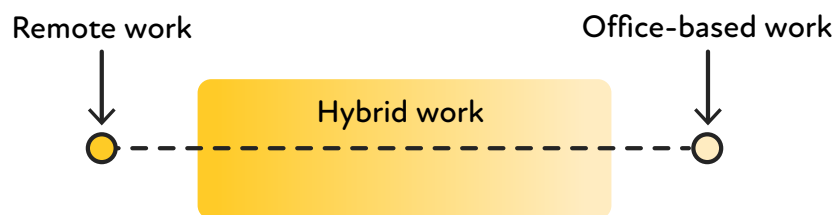
For instance, the charity we worked with conducted a survey in 2020 with the aim of understanding how their staff were coping with Covid19 and adjusting to working remotely. The results from their mid-pandemic survey were encouraging and showed that staff were adapting well to the changing workplace and indicated that they were keen to explore ways of retaining some degree of flexibility after the lockdown. This prompted the charity to dig deeper to explore ways of re-imagining their culture of work in a post-pandemic world in response to some of the concerns raised in the survey.

PHASE 2: IN-DEPTH DISCUSSIONS TO EXPLORE GAPS

Insights from a survey filled in by a large section of the workforce can provide key discussion points for a more focused, in-depth dialogue with a small sub-section of the workforce.

Modelled around a focus-group framework, in-depth discussions can provide insight into diverse perspectives through open and active dialogue between staff. This gives the organisation the opportunity to dig deeper into issues that are important from an operational perspective, while the workforce has a chance to elaborate on any concerns, roadblocks or gaps that they may have identified through the initial survey.

Adequate representation from all levels of the management and staff can help foreground the issues of everyone in the workforce equally. While this may depend on the preferences/skills of the facilitator, we recommend between 10 and 12 participants in each discussion to ensure everyone has a chance to voice their perspective. A duration of 60-90 minutes would offer the facilitator sufficient time to cover key discussion points, while engaging with all participants equally. The number of facilitated discussions may depend on the size of the organisation as well as the staff's appetite for participation. Using an iterative approach, wherein insights from each discussion are

used to inform the revision of the discussion guide for each subsequent discussion is a resource-efficient way to achieve both depth and focus. Consulting with the workforce by sharing and using insights from previous discussions also ensures adherence to the co-design feedback loop.

It is essential that these discussions provide a safe space for employees with wide- ranging roles and responsibilities to air any concerns or apprehensions that they may have regarding the transition to hybrid working. Using an external facilitator at this stage could help streamline the discussion in a fair and equitable manner, while ensuring honest and authentic participation. The 'bottom line' is to offer the workforce the opportunity to have a say in, and influence the way the culture change process and a subsequent hybrid work model are designed and executed.

Discussion to gain insight

Checking and feedback from the workforce

Discussion guide revision
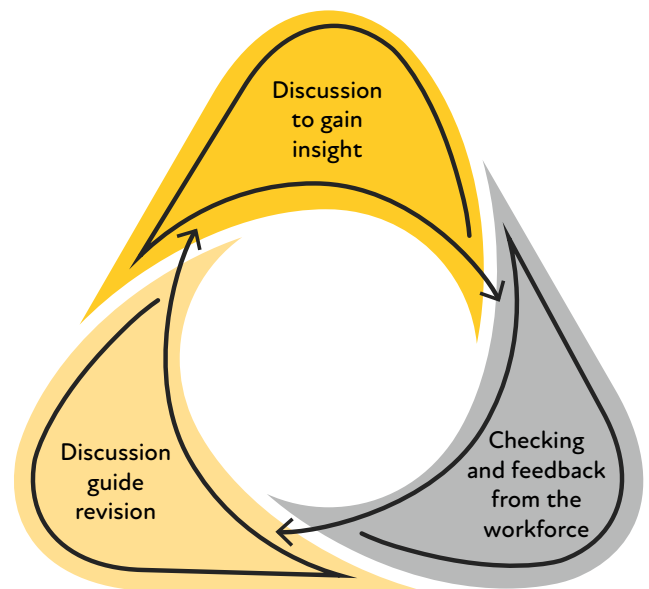
While we do not intend to share a complete discussion guide template, since all organisations differ and questions should be bespoke and in response to survey outcomes, there are some more generic question that give you a flavour of how the discussions can be facilitated with staff and line managers.

1. **What are some of the changes you have experienced as a result of Covid-19 [or other relevant crises] and subsequent lockdown?**
   a. What has worked well?
   b. Have you been negatively impacted in any way? If yes, how?

2. **How can the organisation support you in your attempt to blend your work with your personal life?**
   i. What are your perceptions of flexibility?
   ii. How best can the organisation supporting out of hours work for employees?

3. **What can the organisation do to improve cohesiveness within the workforce?**
   a. Have there been opportunities to engage with colleagues during the lockdown?
   b. Collective interaction: Have you reached out to others in your sub-team or other colleagues for an informal catch-up? If not, what has stopped you? (Probe: time constraints, difficulty connecting virtually)
   c. How important is it to know about other activities and projects going on within the organisation? Why?
   d. What efforts can be made to improve the above?

4. **[For a line manager or a team leader]. How are you finding your management responsibilities in this new situation where some of your team members work from home and others in the office at different times?**
   a. It has been more challenging
   b. It has been easier
   c. Unsure

5. **[For a line manager or a team leader]. Which of the below resources do you think you need to be able to support your team better through this changing work culture?**
   a. Training
   b. Practical equipment (computer equipment, broadband and WiFi etc.)
   c. Peer support from other managers
   d. Anything else: _____

PHASE 3: EXPLORING POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Once no new insights are being identified or when everyone has felt represented or has participated, or where there are limited resources in terms of time or funds, the next phase commences. This phase involves the following steps –

**1. Revisiting organisational purpose and goals to set the context for the transition**

Are there any changes to the services offered, responsibilities to funders/investors, or other organisational goals and output as a result of the impact of the pandemic (or other pressures) or borne out the dialogue with the workforce? What changes need to be implemented in the short-term, and what are the long-term goals of the organisation in the context of work culture?

2. Re-examining the individual roles and responsibilities of staff

Are there any major changes or constraints to how certain staff operate and the duties or roles they perform within the organisation as a result of the change in work culture? How can the organisation take on board team/ individual reassessment of their working environment, role and priorities?

3. Reassessing or re-allocating organisational resources

What is realistically and pragmatically possible within the constraints of capital, funds, time and human resources in terms of a change in work culture? How and when can additional resources be mobilised to meet the demands of transition to hybrid work?
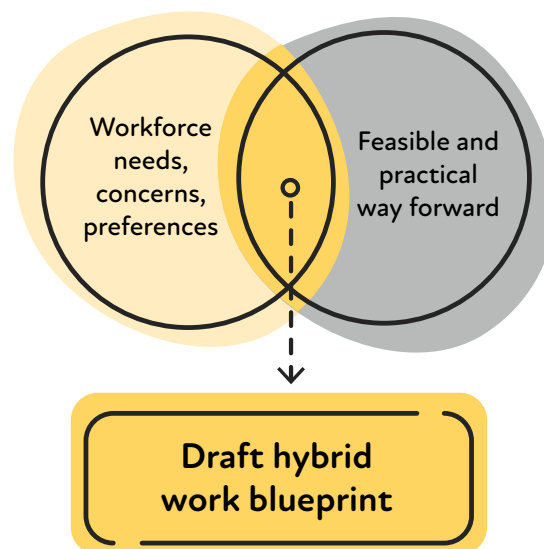
It is essential that the above process is executed carefully and in response to the insights from the facilitated discussions. Once complete, a roadmap or blueprint for a hybrid work policy can be formulated. This could be in the form of explicit operating principles for a hybrid policy that is transparent and implementable. Additionally, organisations may choose to respond to specific concerns raised by the workforce through discussions by developing processes, services, or products to facilitate the transition process. Once a draft blueprint is ready, the next step is to invite feedback from the workforce to determine the overlap between what is needed and what is possible.

PHASE 4: CO-DESIGNING SOLUTIONS

It is important that a draft hybrid blueprint is flexible, adaptable, and amendable to feedback from the workforce. This means that it is explicit, yet not prescriptive. Importantly, the first draft of the hybrid work blueprint only offers the organisational perspective of what is realistically feasible. In this phase, a further round of facilitated, in-depth discussions with the workforce using the same structure and format as in phase 2 can augment the draft blueprint with the workforce perspective of how well their needs are being met. As in phase 2, the discussions

will cease once data saturation or adequate participation is achieved. It is then back to the drawing board, to further revise, refine, and develop the organisation's hybrid work policy.

PHASE 5: TRIALLING A HYBRID WORK POLICY

Once a process, practice or service is sufficiently refined and developed, it is important to trial it with a small team. In a frontline organisation, it may be prudent to trial short-term policy changes or practices with staff who don't have frontline roles or responsibilities. When policies and practices are trialed and tested with smaller teams, they can be refined and rolled out through the organisation. Building opportunities for review, feedback and revision within the trial process is key to ensuring quick recovery from a potentially failed process or change.

The number of times feedback is sought, and refinements are made to the hybrid work policy is unique to each organisation. In fact, some organisations may adopt the facilitated discussion format as a regular way to connect with and invite feedback from the workforce on a variety of issues not restricted to hybrid work. It is important to note that a hybrid work policy is not a static document, but a live and constantly evolving process or practice.

A one size fits all approach cannot be implemented as various factors such as organisational size, capacity, goals, roles, and responsibilities will influence the transition process in a multitude of ways. Culture change is a slow process, and in the third sector, the availability of funds and other resources often determines the speed and intensity of a transformation of this scale. Similarly, when using co-design techniques, it is not possible to incorporate every view and desire into the organisational strategy or culture, as some solutions will have to be generalised, often using a middle ground approach. Therefore, creating expectations of adjustments over time is crucial to ensuring that the workforce feels supported while continuing to engage with the culture change process.
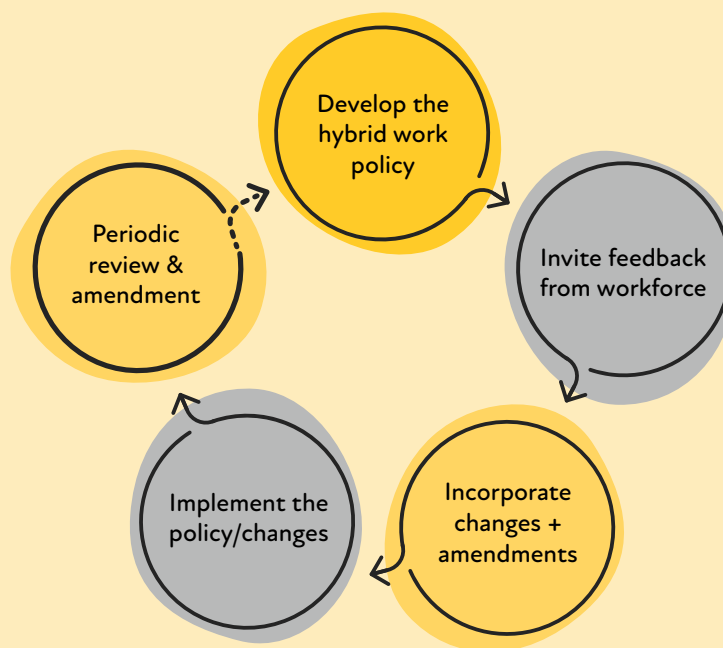
When the hybrid work policy and any subsequent organisational changes become finalised and start to show results, building in periodic reviews and amendments is crucial to closing the feedback loop. The process of planning for and implementing short-term changes that are feasible, adaptable and address immediate gaps can help facilitate organisations with limited resources to achieve the long-term goal of transforming their workplace culture to embed hybrid work. Over time, hybrid work may become the norm but acknowledging that the process is iterative, relies on workforce participation and engagement, and is constantly evolving is key to successful implementation. In sum, is clear that organisations need to adopt a thoughtful, collective response to the changing context of work in order to make work more accessible, more inclusive, and more enriching to the lives of their workforce.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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