

Freeing, Flexible, Frustrating: Hybrid and Remote Work in the Media Sector

A REPORT BY BETTER LEADERS LAB



LEARNINGS

CHALLENGES

SOLUTION ORIENTED APPROACHES



Better Leaders Lab



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MORE ABOUT *BETTER LEADERS LAB*

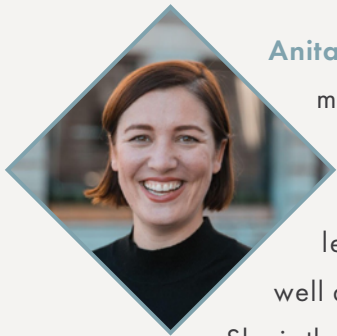


Better Leaders Lab

Better Leaders Lab is a Do-and-Think Tank and boutique consulting agency, specializing in good leadership and smart management. Founded in 2023 by Anita Zielina, the Lab offers customized leadership development, management training, business consulting and strategic support for leadership teams.

Better Leaders Academy – as part of the Lab – offers executive education courses with the aim to empower leaders to make better strategic decisions in order to sustainably transform their organizations. Its courses are designed as small group learning experiences that bring together leaders from the worlds of digital and media. In spring 2024, the first workshops on “Modern Leadership of Hybrid Teams and Organizations” and “Developing an Intelligent AI Business Strategy for Media Companies” took place.

YOUR CONTACTS



Anita Zielina is an experienced media manager, strategic consultant and board member, specializing in digital transformation, modern leadership and management, as well as product and business strategy.

She is the founder and CEO of *Better Leaders Lab*. Anita is an Executive in Residence at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at *CUNY* in New York City.

Prior to founding *Better Leaders Lab*, she headed the executive education department at *CUNY* and held leadership and C-level positions in change management, product development and innovation in various media organizations such as *NZZ Media Group*, *Stern* and *DER STANDARD*. Anita participated in the Knight Journalism Fellowship at Stanford University and the Reuters Visiting Fellowship at Oxford University.

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Pauline Tillmann is the founder and editor-in-chief of the digital magazine [DEINE KORRESPONDENTIN](#), a publication for which ten

female correspondents report on inspiring women from all around the world. From 2011 to 2015, she worked as a freelance foreign correspondent in St. Petersburg, Russia, providing the German national television and radio group *ARD* media with radio reports and features. Prior to that, she trained at *Bayerischer Rundfunk*. Pauline also works as a coach, consultant, presenter and speaker.

Recently, she also worked as a project manager for the *DW Akademie*, the research network *CORRECTIV*, the *Bonn Institute* and *DW Lab*, among others. Since 2023, she has been working as a program manager for *Better Leaders Lab*.

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1. LEARNINGS



INTRODUCTION

Working from anywhere. That's the dream of many workers in the media sector – and yet there are specific challenges and pitfalls, which we would like to draw attention to in this report. Hybrid working allows us to attract new employees, contributes to a better work-life balance and improves mental health. At the

same time, there are also the issues of loneliness and isolation of parts of the workforce. At *Better Leaders Lab* we are convinced that hybrid and remote working can be a key factor for adaptability and innovation. This report presents insights, perspectives and helpful tools to better equip you as a leader.

SUMMARY

In the preparation of this report, we conducted five qualitative interviews between December 2023 and February 2024. We chose representatives from media organizations that we deem to be particularly progressive. The interviews were supplemented with a standardized questionnaire and these provided a rare insight into hybrid or remote working, which will presumably be with us for a long time to come.

According to *StepStone*, one of the leading online job portals in Europe, hybrid working is understood to mean: *“A form of work that is independent of time and place. Literally, hybrid means ‚mixed‘ in German.*

This not only includes the option of working from home on a daily basis, for example, but also the ability to work from wherever you want and meet in virtual rooms for coordination and meetings.”

The future of work is becoming increasingly flexible. Recent studies show that around half of employees would like to carry out 30% to 60% of their work remotely. This means that hybrid working, home office arrangements and flexible working hours are desired by many employees and can be decisive factors when choosing an employer.

Job Aspect	Hybrid Working	Remote Working
Place of work	Change between office and location (e.g. home)	Exclusively outside the office (at home, co-working space)
Interaction with colleagues	Personal and virtual interactions possible	Mainly virtual interaction via digital means of communication
Flexibility and structure	Mixture of structure and flexibility	Maximum flexibility in working environment and working hours
Corporate culture	Promotes loyalty to the corporate culture through regular personal interactions	Requires special efforts for corporate culture and employee retention



OVERVIEW OF OUR FIVE INTERVIEWEES



Styli Charalambous is CEO and one of the co-founders of the *Daily Maverick*. He is responsible for the strategic direction, growth and operations of the South African online news publisher. He is actively involved in shaping business models that aim to sustainably fund investigative journalism.

Markus Horeld has been managing editor of *ZEIT ONLINE* since 2023. *ZEIT ONLINE* is one of the leading online media outlets in Germany and is the digital edition of the German weekly newspaper *DIE ZEIT*. The editorial team is particularly well-known for its interactive formats in data journalism and its successful podcasts.

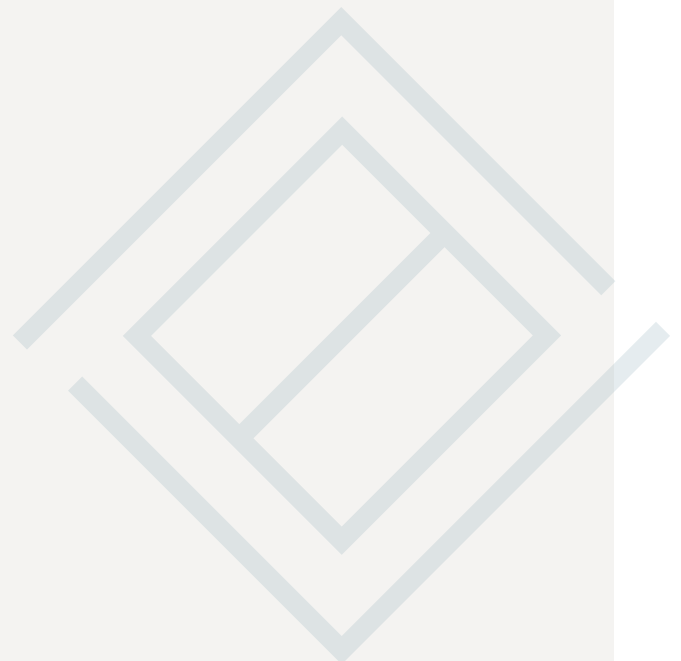


Justus von Daniels has been editor-in-chief of *CORRECTIV* since 2019. The non-profit media company uses journalism, media education and technology to strengthen democracy. *CORRECTIV* is an award-winning non-profit agency, which sheds light on grievances, checks facts and provides arguments and methods for all those who want to help shape their environment.

Jayo Miko Macasaquit is head of human resources at the non-profit newsroom *The 19th*. Four years ago, *The 19th* launched with a focus on gender, politics and policymaking. It aims to represent women, people of color and those who are marginalized in U.S. media.



Elisabeth Frenken has been working in the Learning & Development department at *Deutsche Welle (DW)* since 2019. In this role, she supports managers in the management of hybrid teams, among other things. The department plays a central role in the training and career development of employees.





TEN RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

All interviewees believe that in the future, they will work in a hybrid setting or remotely, at similar levels as they do currently (March 2024). New Work has therefore become an integral part of the working world. We have derived the following ten pieces of advice from our discussions.

1 Intensive Involvement with the Topic

The pandemic has accelerated the implementation of remote working. It is not possible to go back to the way things were before. It's therefore important to take a close look at the particular needs.

2 Good Technology Pays Off

Location-independent working requires significant investment in technological infrastructure. Even if many tools are already established, it is worth considering investing in better camera equipment or microphones. The difference is clearly beneficial for everyone involved.

3 Specific Skills are Required

The successful management of hybrid teams requires specific skills such as empathy, transparency, accessibility and the promotion of team spirit. The ability to communicate is particularly important. Those who have shortfalls in this regard can make up for this through further training.

4 Communication, Communication, Communication

There needs to be a lot more communication than before the pandemic. Managers should use tools which enable a quick exchange. In addition, our respondents recommend at least 15 minutes of exclusive time per employee per month to focus on individual needs.

5 Adapt Work Culture and Management Practices

New management approaches are needed to lead teams which are physically separated. This includes, for example, a stronger focus on trust and results rather than attendance. It is also crucial that every team member has access to all necessary documents and information from any location.

6 Improve Interaction and Team Spirit

If colleagues rarely see each other, it is essential to create other opportunities for interpersonal exchanges. Managers need more sensitivity in order to be able to recognize, from a distance, which employees may be in conflict with one another.

7 Improve Time Management

In a hybrid work environment, every manager realizes that good time management is becoming increasingly necessary. Among other things, clear guidelines need to be established in order that employees do not feel overworked and/or that their professional and private lives do not become too intertwined. Managers should set an example of a healthy work attitude.

8 Tension Between Flexibility and Presence

Arrangements for working from home are often individual. This allows maximum flexibility. At the same time, there is a desire on the part of the company to regularly bring all employees together on site. Managers have to constantly rebalance this area of tension.



9

Strengthening Personal Responsibility

The importance of personal responsibility becomes particularly clear when working remotely. It is therefore advisable to strengthen personal responsibility by involving employees even more than before in the entire process and to consistently promote an error culture in the company.

10

Provide Reliable Technical Support

Technical difficulties can be frustrating and time-consuming. Therefore, in a hybrid working environment, companies should invest in good technical support to quickly eliminate any issues that arise, to ensure better productivity.

BAD TIMES FOR MICROMANAGERS: ENTERING A NEW ERA OF TRUST-CENTRIC LEADERSHIP

Analysis by Anita Zielina

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the landscape of work has undergone a seismic shift, ushering in the era of hybrid work models in newsrooms and beyond. While some hail this evolution as a harbinger of unprecedented flexibility and productivity, others view it with trepidation, particularly micromanagers accustomed to maintaining an iron grip on their teams. However, it's time to recognize that the benefits of hybrid work far outweigh the discomfort it poses for some traditional-style leaders – heralding the necessity for a new generation of leaders who prioritize trust over control.

Newsrooms are complicated places: traditionally used to hierarchical management practices, they are now, piece by piece, being transformed by millennial and Gen Z leaders who prioritize collaboration, respect, feedback and freedom. And that seismic shift doesn't happen without conflict, as was to be expected.

Micromanagers thrive on exerting control over every aspect of their team's work, from dictating schedules to scrutinizing minutiae. For them, the shift to hybrid work



represents a felt loss of that control, as employees enjoy newfound autonomy and flexibility. The new work shift challenges micromanagers to relinquish their grip and place trust in their teams – a notion that often evokes discomfort and resistance. They tend to cling to the familiarity of physical proximity, mistakenly equating it with oversight and productivity.

Hybrid work has its advantages and disadvantages, as analyzed in this report. What's clear though is that hybrid and remote work are here to stay – and that simply willing or forcing employees back to the office will not be a solution. The recent push for a return to traditional office settings is, in part, fueled by the wrong reasons: The aforementioned perceived loss of control (“How do I know my employees are really working when I don't see them?”); expensive office space that needs to be filled somehow; or the lack of creativity and resources to figure out hybrid and modern work and leadership practices. However, this push ignores the profound benefits of hybrid work, including increased employee satisfaction, productivity, and work-life balance.



It's time to recognize and incorporate the fact that effective leadership transcends control – it rests on a foundation of trust. Trust-centric leadership empowers employees, fosters creativity, and cultivates a culture of accountability. In today's rapidly evolving landscape, where remote work is no longer an anomaly

but a necessity, leaders must adapt or risk stagnation. Embracing hybrid work and adopting a trust-centric leadership approach isn't just a passing trend – it's a strategic imperative for media organizations navigating the complexities of the modern workplace and a core component of staying attractive as an employer.



Photo: Shridhar Gupta / Unsplash

HYBRID WORKING FOR COMPANIES

Possible Advantages	Possible Disadvantages
Increase in employee motivation and satisfaction	Greater effort required to create structure (technical, geographical, organizational)
Increase of employee loyalty	Suitable video technology in conference rooms needed; technical equipment for employees
Potential cost savings (office space, operating costs etc.)	Difficulty in team building, possibly higher expenses for face-to-face events
	Increased complexity of the entire setting (creation of social spaces, regulations for absences, etc.)



Photo: Ian Dooley / Unsplash



2. CHALLENGES



SPECIFIC LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR HYBRID TEAMS

As a member of the Learning & Development team at *Deutsche Welle (DW)*, Elisabeth Frenken spends an increasing amount of time working with managers, helping them develop their skills in the area of hybrid working. She explains that *DW* has a rule that allows employees to work from home up to 60% of the time – if the job allows. This is not possible for some roles, such as directors or camera operators.

It is important to be at the office when others are there too and to hold joint meetings. Frenken explains that issues such as transparency and communication are particularly relevant for hybrid teams. “We always recommend that you should be transparent as to when you are available and when you are not, so that nobody has the feeling that they are interrupting when they approach colleagues.”

SENSITIVITY AND INTUITION REQUIRED

In her opinion, this requires a great deal of sensitivity and intuition to find out whether an employee is “lost” in the home office or whether they are doing well. Managers, in particular, should set a good example and deal with the technology. “This also includes giving yourself permission to take time out and try out new things, because that doesn’t happen overnight.”

Markus Horeld, managing editor of *ZEIT ONLINE*, is of the opinion that as a manager with a hybrid team, you should have a much tighter schedule. The reason: “Because you simply have a lot more appointments



Photo: Luke Chesser / Unsplash

with people you wouldn’t otherwise see.” Just sitting in the office and keeping the door open is therefore no longer an option. You have to „meet“ these people where they are – and more frequently, if you want to avoid the risk that they „disappear“.

There should also be more communication. Before the pandemic, the editorial team “only” used the Slack communication channel, but since then, numerous other tools have been added. „You really have to communicate on different channels – while having diaries bursting with appointments,” says Horeld.

CORRECTIV editor-in-chief Justus von Daniels also cites time management as a key challenge. “With hybrid working, you’ve got the feeling that you can make a lot more appointments than usual – but the timing is so tight that your concentration suffers.” That wouldn’t happen with face-to-face meetings. It would also be beneficial if managers developed a sensitivity towards people and took their specific needs into account.



TRUST AND PATIENCE ARE IMPORTANT SKILLS

Justus von Daniels cites trust as another key factor. At *CORRECTIV*, for example, care is taken to ensure that new teams first get to know each other in an analog way, before working together remotely over longer periods of time. There is no denying that nuances and interpersonal interactions are lost more quickly with digital communication. “Hybrid working is often very distanced,” states the editor-in-chief. It is therefore up to managers to consciously reduce this distance and create closeness.

For Styli Charalambous of the *Daily Maverick*, patience is one of the specific skills of leaders of hybrid teams. They also need to have the sensitivity to sense if someone is isolating themselves too much and avoiding contact with the team. To counteract this, an analog innovation session could be arranged, for example, further training or an evening with free drinks.

In any case, you should take action and not close your eyes to it. Because a problem like this doesn’t usually resolve itself. Incidentally, inspiring teams is an increasingly important function of leaders at the *Daily Maverick*. “We encourage them to set goals – not only to manage performance and results, but also to continually inspire their team and motivate them to perform at their best,” says Charalambous.

STRENGTHENING EMPLOYEE LOYALTY

How to retain good employees is a question that concerns many media companies. In times of hybrid work, this question arises more frequently. *CORRECTIV*, a media company orientated towards the common good, employs 80 people. Here is what is unusual about it: Most of them identify 100% with the company’s mission of bringing grievances to light and thus strengthening democracy.

It is a mission that is very plausible and relatively easy to understand. This helps with both external and internal communication. There is also the guiding principle that employees must take responsibility for their work. Justus von Daniels emphasizes: “Things actually happen after we have done certain research or when people react to our research or when we have created a product that is unusual.”

That is why every research project starts with the following questions: What should happen with the end product? What effect and what impact do the employees want to achieve? In what particular way will the story be told? “Giving your employees the confidence that they are in control of what comes out of the research is extremely motivating.”



Photo: Avi Richards / Unsplash



40 % OFFICE PRESENCE, 60 % HOME OFFICE

Elisabeth Frenken adds, with regard to the presence culture at DW: “We also see a bonding factor when you actually make your way to the broadcasting center because you see other colleagues and not just tiles.” One is more in touch with the subject matter when being in the building. It is also important in helping to maintain the team spirit.

She is convinced that: “When you work in a great team, that’s a big motivating factor.” That’s why it’s important to feel involved and effective, which specifically means exchanging ideas with others, getting to know each other better, looking for sparring partners and ideally recognizing and using each other’s strengths more and more.



Photo: Stocksy

HYBRID WORKING FOR EMPLOYEES

Possible Advantages	Possible Disadvantages
Better compatibility of work and family; better work-life balance	Lack of boundaries, work and leisure time may become too intertwined; unbalanced work-life balance
More flexible organization of the workplace and working environment; location-independent working	Feeling of having to be constantly available; development of a workaholic attitude
Increased productivity and concentration on work is better/easier without interruptions	Distractions due to children, housework, phone calls, etc.
Work can be adapted to personal productivity curve	"Zoom fatigue": Too much time in front of the computer due to the high number of online meetings and video conferences
Time savings due to reduced travel and commuting times and avoidance of peak times	Difficult onboarding and integrating new employees into the company
	Increased complexity of the entire setting



PROMOTING & MAINTAINING CONTENTMENT

Satisfied employees can be key to a functioning hybrid and remote culture. After all, success and innovative strength depend on them. It is therefore important to think fundamentally about how to find and retain committed employees and help them to develop further.

Organizational culture plays a key role in supporting flexibility, personal responsibility and the work-life balance of each individual. In addition, clear communication and a sense of community – despite physical distance – is vital. At *ZEIT ONLINE*, for example, around ten employees were hired, during the corona-

virus pandemic, who do not live in Berlin or Hamburg. They are living in Heidelberg, Munich and Cologne. And work entirely from home, only coming to the editorial office once a month.

When asked why the editorial team decided to do this, Markus Horeld replied: "Because we really wanted them and they weren't prepared to move to Berlin." At the time, it was still assumed that people would never work in the office again. But that changed after the pandemic. These new employees were given a special contract, which is limited to a maximum of two years.

"CHANGING NEWSROOMS: MEDIA LEADERS STRUGGLE TO EMBRACE DIVERSITY IN FULL AND REMAIN CAUTIOUS ON AI DISRUPTION" (2023)

- ◆ Study "[Changing Newsrooms](#)" by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism was first published in 2020
- ◆ The study analyzes the adaptation of news organizations to external changes and internal dynamics
- ◆ In 2023, the focus was on hybrid work
- ◆ Hybrid work is seen as an opportunity for a more diverse workforce
- ◆ 65% of respondents have introduced flexible and hybrid working models in their organizations
- ◆ 38% expressed concern about feelings of alienation and a weakened sense of belonging due to flexible forms of work
- ◆ 74% believe that generative AI can increase productivity and improve workflows
- ◆ Progress on diversity dimensions such as ethnic origin, socio-economic background or disability has yet to be made
- ◆ Recommendation: Media companies should take diversity more seriously in order to increase the diversity of talent





STRATEGIES TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS & AVOID MISUNDERSTANDINGS

For *ZEIT ONLINE*, little has changed with regard to the specific challenges of leading hybrid teams. Horeld explains: “It was clear to everyone right from the start that it’s easy to lose people if you don’t see them.” It is thus necessary to establish new organizational structures, such as more fixed meetings.

At the same time, experience shows that many employees can work very efficiently from home, if they can organize their private lives around it. What falls by the wayside is creativity. “If you don’t bump into people in the corridor and chat, you rarely come up with truly innovative ideas.” This is a problem in an industry where companies are in fierce competition with each other and vying for online users.



Styli Charalambous believes that clarity and leadership are crucial. “We want to give the teams plenty of room to maneuver, but we should also give them some kind of guidance on best practices.” This is the only way to prevent isolation, loneliness and constant remote working. This means that managers need to give a lot of thought to how they can promote personal interaction. In doing so, they provide guidelines that also allow maximum freedom of action.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION TRAINING

Most of the managers and team leaders at *Daily Maverick* have taken part in conflict resolution training. In general, however, everyone is “very goal-oriented and driven by the mission”, says Charalambous. That seems to be a good starting point. There is also a pronounced error culture. “When conflicts arise, we give employees space to overcome them and learn from them for the future.”

In his opinion, it is crucial to encourage people to give each other feedback – even to their superiors. It is helpful if everyone on the team is able to influence the strategic direction and thus share in the responsibility for the company’s development.

FACING ADDITIONAL RISKS

Daily Maverick is a South African online news publisher known for its investigative reporting. It was founded in 2009 and has since established itself as an important voice in the South African media landscape with growing to 100 employees. Styli Charalambous is one of the co-founders. He specializes in new business models, product innovation and technology.



Styli, how many people come to the office in Cape Town every day?



Our employees are spread across the two largest cities in South Africa, Cape Town and Johannesburg, a few work in other parts of the country – exclusively from home. We are an organization that started digitally. The reason: we couldn't afford an office in the beginning. Location-independent working is an integral part of our culture. It is often the case that we work late into the night or from the road. This means that it often makes no sense to come into the office. But of course, the more we grew, the more resources, sales and non-editorial staff we had, the more office space we needed. At the same time, our team members also have the opportunity to work in a co-working space. We like to use this as a supplement – and it offers employees further flexibility.

Is there a particular learning that you can pass on when it comes to hybrid working?

I was at the Splice Beta conference 2022 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, I talked a lot about actioning our vision and mission. We found out back then that only half of our staff

knew what they were. Yet, this is the foundation of all our work. So I would recommend other media organizations to really take the time to define and make crystal clear the vision and mission – and to refer to it internally again and again.

Do you think hybrid working is here to stay in the media world?

Yes, I think hybrid working will become the preferred way of working for people in media. Organizations that force staff to come into the office will probably be at a disadvantage. You hit some challenges when, for example, you have young people who want to learn from others, those who need mentoring or who don't have a stable internet connection. It should be recognized that a shared space is important for these people so that they can develop. At *Daily Maverick*, they have the freedom to work from wherever they can deliver the best work.

To what extent are the conditions for journalists in South Africa more difficult than in Germany or the USA, for example?

We face many additional risks. We currently have an energy crisis. This means that on some days we have no electricity for up to eight hours. There are also political risks. These range from ensuring physical safe-

ty to particular risks for the women in the team. And we have an economy that is not growing. We have one of the highest murder rates in the world and an extremely high unemployment rate.

In short, living in a society with maximum injustice and at the same time having no electricity for hours on end is quite challenging. If you compare this with other African countries, we are in a good position. But of course, our employees work in a stressful environment, so we want to help ensure that we don't add to the stress by telling them when to come into the office.

You currently have 100 people on your team. Are you actually planning to grow further? Perhaps to 200 employees in the next five years?

Absolutely! We have been looking for funding to expand further. Expansion would take us to about 250 people. We would like to employ people in the eight largest cities around South Africa. This means that hybrid work will play an even bigger role for us at *Daily Maverick* in the future. There's nothing definite at the moment, but we're working on it.





BETWEEN PERFORMANCE & FLEXIBILITY

At *CORRECTIV*, a key challenge is to motivate employees as much as possible while at the same time assuming leadership and control. “This is an area of tension in which we constantly find ourselves and I wouldn’t say it’s always conflict-free,” says Justus von Daniels. In his view, permanent expectation management and reviewing the original goals are key. In practice, this means readjusting and defining new milestones if necessary.

CURBING THE DESIRE FOR CONTROL

For *ZEIT ONLINE*, too, it is a balancing act between achieving the company’s goals and ensuring maximum flexibility at the same time. Markus Horeld emphasizes that it doesn’t matter when and where an article is completed. In the end, only the result counts, regardless of whether the text was written in the office or at a workstation on vacation.

As a result of hybrid working, managers have been given the additional task of ensuring that employees do not “disappear” and are no longer seen in the office. “We are very liberal when it comes to presence in the office; nobody would think of confronting employees if they worked from home for a while.” It is important to discuss this with line managers so that everyone is aware.

At *Daily Maverick*, success is measured not least by the numbers. To that end certain key performance indicators (KPIs) are defined in advance to help show how effective the organization is at achieving its most important business goals. These can be the number of articles published, member retention, member growth

MEASURABLE FIGURES AS AN INDICATOR OF SUCCESS

or time spent on the website. It is important to note that success means something different for every person and every team in the organization. Team leaders set their own goals in conjunction with their teams.

Jayo Miko Macasaquit from *The 19th* believes that it helps to get down to the results level. “It’s best if we focus on one of the main outcomes, to achieve the most important priorities for the role.” This means that managers coach on the one hand and partly let go of power on the other. The team talks about “giving away the logos”. The team is therefore given the freedom to tackle the challenges independently and at the same time given room to make mistakes.



Photo: Aditya Saxena / Unsplash



FACTS AND FIGURES FROM OUR SURVEY

Organization Size (by employee numbers)

4,000 Deutsche Welle

200 ZEIT ONLINE

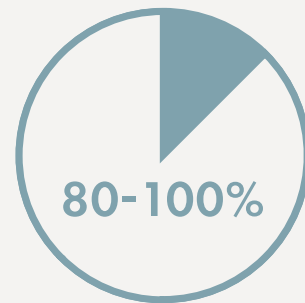
100 Daily Maverick

80 CORRECTIV

55 The 19th



Approximately what percentage of all employees currently work regularly from home or not in the office?



Do employees have the autonomy to decide for themselves when they want to work from home and when not?



Which days of the week do employees usually work from home or are not physically in the office?

It varies. In any case, not always on Fridays.



Is there one day a week or one/several day/s a month on which everyone must be present?

No overarching rules. Each team decides for itself. Possibly one day a month or a week on site to promote team spirit.



What technological tools and platforms are used in your organization for collaboration and communication in hybrid teams?

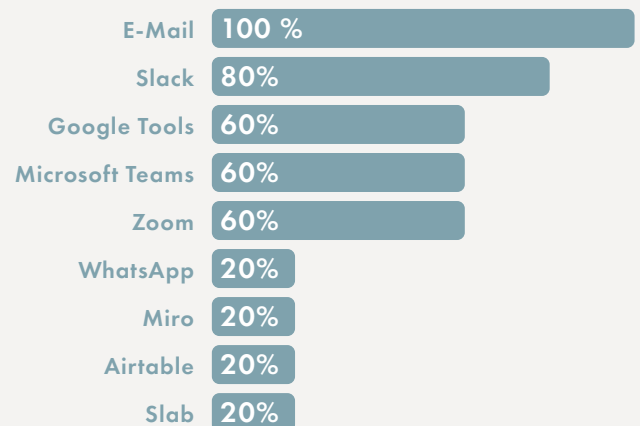




Photo: Giorgia Trovato / Unsplash



3. SOLUTION ORIENTED APPROACHES



MANAGING HYBRID AND REMOTE TEAMS

Elisabeth Frenken and her colleagues collected key challenges and solutions in 2022 and 2023. These provide a good basis for regular discussions with managers within Deutsche Welle. From this, they identified and discussed these four starting points:



Communication



Collaboration



Hybrid Technology



**Resilience &
mental health**

When it comes to **communication**, it is important that information is transparent and available to everyone and that the manager pays attention to each individual team member, even if he or she is not in the same office. Feedback and regular reflection should be a fixed part of everyday life and managers should be reliable and keep their word.

Collaboration is about offering equipment (where available), taking the pressure off, boldly trying out new things, entering absences in the booking system, putting together teams across locations and in hybrid work situations, arranging contact with in-house technical support and ensuring that learning is passed on.

The declared aim is to develop an error culture and to have an understanding for one another. This also includes establishing and maintaining a team spirit. Before the coronavirus pandemic, for example, there was a

disparity at *DW* between the two offices in Bonn and Berlin. „The two locations have grown closer together thanks to the new technologies,“ says Frenken.

DRAWING BOUNDARIES FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE WORKFORCE

The third key component she mentions is **technology**. Employees have to learn how to deal with it, and it can also mean taking people, who are less tech-savvy, by the hand. „There are simply more roles and dealing with them is – in my opinion – a challenge at first because it involves more work.“



3. SOLUTION ORIENTED APPROACHES

She sees **resilience & mental health** as the fourth and final factor. Managers in particular have a responsibility to ensure that employees do not burnout due to the constant changes and thus refuse to accept new

things. Separation of work and private life can also become a problem. People who are workaholics find it particularly difficult to create boundaries because technology is virtually always available.

CREATING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

“Communication is a huge challenge,” says Jayo Miko Macasaquit. In analog editorial offices, collaboration tends to happen casually. When working remotely, you have to coordinate much more in order to agree on a common line. This means that managers in particular have to communicate more than usual and be more proactive.

Another challenge is availability, because the editorial team at *The 19th* works in up to four time zones at the same time. “I always say that that ‘with great power comes great responsibility’.” By this, Macasaquit means that you have to talk to each other – even digitally – if everyone can make time for it. „The limit is reached when you hinder or impair others in their work.”

This often leads to smouldering conflicts when working remotely. Elisabeth Frenken (*DW*) recommends taking preventative action. In concrete terms, this means making an effort not to ignore anyone or pay too little attention to anyone. At the same time, transparent communication is a central pillar in preventing misunderstandings from arising in the first place.

For quite some time, the main conferences at *ZEIT ONLINE* – in the morning and at lunchtime – take place exclusively via video call. This means that everyone sits in front of their computers. It also means that no one is at a disadvantage when speaking, regardless of whether they are in the office or at home. The trick is that the moderator is also connected remotely so that no request to speak is ignored.

CORRECTIV has had good experience with conversation etiquette. “People’s dominant behavior is reinforced in the tiles because someone might be using the microphone the whole time,” explains Justus von Daniels. Also that you don’t just chat in between, but speak up and wait for your turn – “that be learned”.



Photo: Stocksy



DEVELOPING AN ADAPTABLE CORPORATE CULTURE

For hybrid meetings, Justus also recommends not starting with the agenda straight away, but creating a space where people can talk first. This establishes and strengthens team spirit. Check-ins serve as an introduction to this. Typical check-in questions are, for example: “How am I here today?” or “What gets my attention?”.

The magazine *Neue Narrative*, which is committed to New Work among other things, has developed [basic rules for better meetings](#). It states that good meetings should have a goal that is known to everyone, as well as a clear structure, good preparation and moderation.

At *CORRECTIV*, it has proven to be a good idea to incorporate several breaks in meetings to allow listeners to take a break. This also includes the principle that meetings should not last longer than 50 minutes, to give everyone a short breather before the next call. “We are not an editorial team where everyone can always be in the same place,” explains Justus von Daniels.

According to this, there is no compulsory attendance, but rather conference days where it is recommended to come to the editorial office. Nevertheless, there are always a number of people who do not take the “opportunity” to make their voice heard. Because that is undoubtedly the case – those who are present are noticed more and heard more.

Styli Charalambous recommends managers: “Figure out what works to get the best out of your team. And to do that, you need to ask them, very specifically: “How do you want to work?” There is a difference between producing journalism that people need and journalism that they want.



Photo: Corinne Kutz / Unsplash

PRODUCING JOURNALISM THAT PEOPLE NEED

This means that you have to understand your readership. Figures can be helpful for this, but so can personal conversations. According to Charalambous, it is also about the big picture – i.e. the social role of journalism for a functioning democracy. In the course of the pandemic, the South African news portal has limited the number and length of meetings and introduced the sharing of recordings and minutes.



INVESTING IN SUSTAINABLE RELATIONSHIPS

At *The 19th*, a digital meeting is held every week with all employees. Most of this is dedicated to building relationships. Everyone is assigned to breakout rooms where random questions are asked and birthdays or successes in the organization are celebrated. At the end, there is a moment of mindfulness. Sometimes there are comments made afterwards that one could have said that in an email, but being honest, that's not true.

INFORMAL MEETINGS ARE NOT A „NICE TO HAVE“

“Such relationship spaces are not a ‚nice to have‘ for us, but essential for working together with confidence, from anywhere,” says Head of HR Macasaquit. It is important not only to talk about work, but also about loved ones, hobbies and things that move you. It is an essential prerequisite for managers to be able to adapt to the needs of their employees.

That's why *The 19th* routinely has a meeting with the line manager once a month, which is a kind of “relationship meeting”. Instead of the usual approach of working through a list, they use most of the time to talk about the relationship and, for example, how they like to receive feedback or when their most productive time of the day is.

“That's exactly why we meet once a year for our retreat, which is mainly about building relationships.” In his opinion, this is a key investment for a remote-first company like *The 19th*. Macasaquit advises other executives to see the new flexibility as an opportunity. Most jobs in the media sector can also be done from home, as has become clear since the pandemic.

“FLEXIBLE WORK SURVEY: IS YOUR WORKPLACE READY?” (2023)

- ◆ The consulting firm McKinsey conducted a [survey](#) of 50 companies on workplace readiness for flexible working models
- ◆ Many companies are implementing flexible working, but challenges remain in adapting the space and creating a supportive culture
- ◆ It is recognized that hybrid working is the new normal, but real hybrid principles are missing (e.g. guidelines for workflows and documentation)
- ◆ Only 16 respondents have a playbook with documented workflows
- ◆ Organizations that invest in workplace flexibility are better positioned to attract and retain talent
- ◆ Recommendation: Develop strategies for flexible working; consider physical and cultural aspects of the workplace





“IT’S SO MUCH BETTER THAN ANYTHING WE HAD BEFORE”

Multitasking is a particular challenge for managers. In meetings, many are busy answering incoming emails or communicating via chat at the same time. If you’re also available on different platforms, it’s easy to lose focus. Some messages slip through, of course, but the biggest problem is: busy schedules. Above all, stress level have risen significantly because many things are running “in parallel”.

Is hybrid working the new status quo or the “new normal”? At *ZEIT ONLINE*, they are increasingly focusing on monthly meetings in person, without a digital connection, in order to boost creativity. This involves, for example, trend topics such as Artificial Intelligence. With 15-minute keynote speeches, the editorial team tries to create incentives and facilitate extensive discussions. Markus Horeld states: This sharpens focus and concentration.

In principle, he does not believe that hybrid working will become redundant. The reason: “It’s so much better than anything we had before.” Correspondents around the world and employees in Berlin, Hamburg and elsewhere are much better integrated than ever before. Location-independent working simply allows “unbelievable flexibility”.

HYBRID WORKING IS HERE TO STAY

If Horeld had to give advice to other managers, he would recommend investing in technology. They should also work on streamlining their schedules. “Don’t think



Photo: Stocksy

you can do several jobs at the same time. That doesn’t work for long.” Short communication channels should be maintained as much as possible – especially in a company that is growing rapidly.

COMMUNICATING A LOT MORE THAN USUAL

Justus von Daniels encourages other managers to communicate a lot more than usual: “We are very close to the team, both in terms of coordination and research.” It seems that this – alongside personal responsibility and freedom – is a key success factor for *CORRECTIV*.

What is clear from all the discussions is that hybrid working is here to stay. For this reason, it is definitely advisable for managers to engage with it more intensively than before.

If you need support with this – or with any other topics relating to leadership and strategic management – we at *Better Leaders Lab* would be delighted to hear from you.



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