

WHITE PAPER

A NEW EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE FOR 2025

Findings from a Hybrid Experience Survey on how to make a positive employee experience, improving effectiveness, attraction and retention

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Executive Summary

This white paper explores what organisations are doing to create a positive employee experience, based on a survey of the hybrid experiences of 19 organisations in late 2024. Well-designed hybrid experiences enhance employee satisfaction, engagement, productivity and retention. However, many organisations struggle with the practicalities of hybrid work. Key challenges include balancing flexibility with consistency - with mandated office time being the most common means of creating some form of structure - though this is not particularly popular or an efficient use of time. **Skills gaps, particularly around digital collaboration tools**, are significant barriers to an effective hybrid experience. Hybrid meetings are another challenge, with a desire towards more intentional office use for collaboration and team building. Organisations are also struggling to **facilitate informal connections between employees and maintain open communication and trust**, particularly with remote workers. The research also found that a lack of clear goals for hybrid work can cause confusion, and traditional measurements of time spent at work aren't helping.

To improve hybrid experiences, it is recommended **focusing on enhancing digital literacy and promoting open and honest communication**, including transparency about availability and work activities. It is also important to provide teams with the autonomy to design their own working norms. The Modern Team Design Framework is introduced as a tool to empower teams to agree on ways of working and how they use workplace technology.

Hybrid working is a tool to enable people to **meet their work goals in a way that is flexible enough to improve wellbeing and that prioritises collaboration and meaningful productivity**. Many of the findings are also applicable to employee experience for those who are unable to work remotely, with digital literacy and communication key to any role. If organisations don't adapt in this way, it will become harder to attract and retain key talent. By highlighting key trends and actionable strategies, **this paper offers guidance for organisations striving to improve their hybrid, remote and office-based work environments**.

19
Organisations

Responded to the survey

Seven 25,000+

Employee organisations

Seven respondents were large organisations, comprising over 25,000 employees

Eight sectors

Were represented in the survey

A New Employee Experience for 2025

Findings from our Hybrid Experience Survey on what organisations need to create a positive employee experience

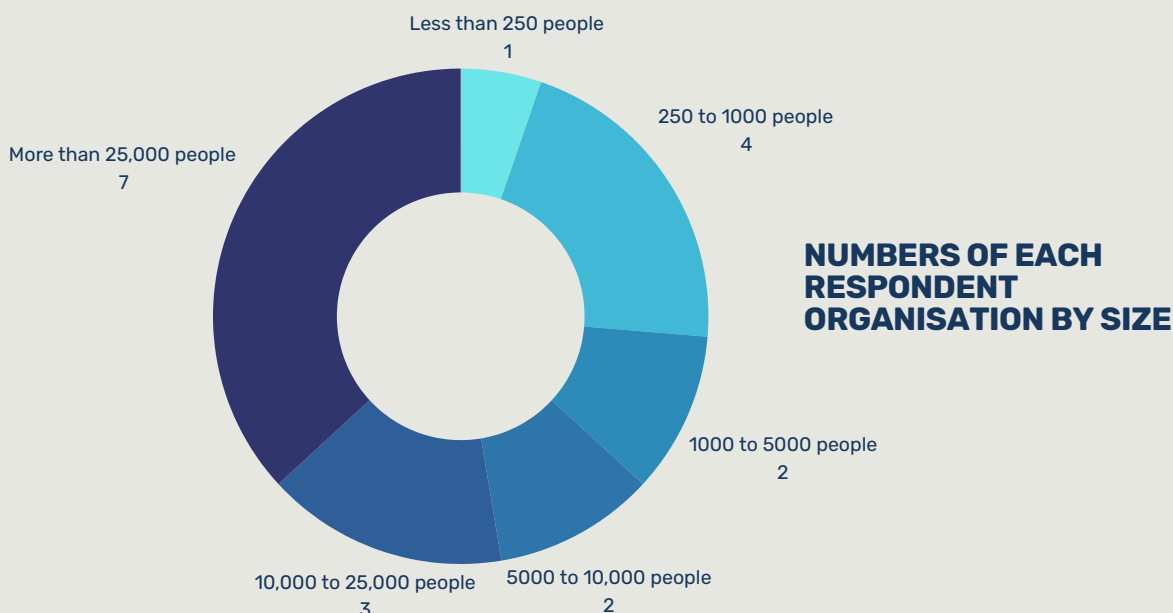
Introduction

The shift to hybrid work has transformed modern workplaces, although many organisations are struggling to support their employees to work flexibly and consistently. In 2025 as our workforces grapple with generative AI, collaboration demands, productivity pressure, building meaningful relationships and maintaining wellbeing, an employee experience that empowers our people to make smart choices on how *they* work is essential.

A well-designed hybrid experience fosters employee satisfaction, engagement, productivity, and retention. Conversely, poor experiences can increase stress, reduce performance, and limit growth opportunities.

According to [WFH Research](#), as of 2023, nearly 29% of full-time American employees operated in a hybrid model, and 12% worked entirely remotely. Yet, the hybrid experience extends beyond these groups. Employees in distributed teams and those working alongside hybrid colleagues also feel its impact – even if they are based entirely in the office. As hybrid work continues to shape organisational dynamics, its influence on collaboration, productivity, and employee satisfaction cannot be ignored, shaping today's employee experience.

This white paper presents findings from the Hybrid Experience Survey, conducted during September and October 2024, to explore how organisations worldwide are navigating these changes. The survey sought to uncover diverse perspectives by posing open-ended questions, enabling respondents to share insights, challenges, and strategies for building positive hybrid experiences. Nineteen organisations from eight different sectors participated, most with more than 25,000 employees, providing a broad dataset.



Hybrid experience is defined as the **quality of an employee's interactions and environment within their workplace, regardless of location**. It includes physical workspaces, remote interactions, digital tools, company culture, relationships with colleagues and opportunities for growth and development.

Technology is an enabler, but we lack the skills to optimise for hybrid

Organisations typically possess the right tools, but not the skills or behaviours to use them appropriately for hybrid work

The most cited barrier to improving the hybrid experience among all respondents is the lack of skills to optimise digital collaboration tools. Most respondents were using Microsoft 365; and Microsoft Teams, in particular, was mentioned throughout as essential for hybrid work to succeed. It is significant that **most respondents were satisfied that their existing technology was suitable for hybrid work, with a lack of skills and behaviours being the barriers to using the technology successfully.**



Technology barriers were largely broken down as follows:

- **Skill gaps:** Many respondents indicated that their employees lack the skills or confidence to fully leverage the digital tools available for hybrid collaboration. They expressed a need for more training and support in this area.
- **Tool integration:** There is a clear lack of integration between different tools, creating a barrier to effective collaboration.
- **Which tool when:** Respondents highlighted the lack of understanding of when to use which tool in a hybrid context, resulting in an excessive number of tools being used.
- **Lack of confidence:** Confidence to use new tools, or existing ones in different ways was reported in the survey as being both important and missing in many teams. This will also be key for teams experimenting with generative AI tools as work continues to evolve.
- **Hybrid meeting challenges:** Respondents specifically mentioned challenges in running effective hybrid meetings, engaging remote participants fully and knowing how to use existing technology to ensure a positive meeting experience.
- **Time wasted:** Poor technology adoption was also referenced as causing time wasted through difficulty in finding remote employees, as well as working in multiple tools and switching between them.



Microsoft Teams

Was found by most respondents to be essential for hybrid work, though employees often lack the skills to use effectively

Technology is an enabler, but we lack the skills to optimise for hybrid

Knowing how and why to use workplace technology is a key requirement to improving the hybrid experience. Yet digital skills are only half of the matter. Behaviours and habits around how we use the technology are just as important. Organisations responding to the survey that were found to be using technology well for hybrid work cited the **following activities that make a positive impact:**

TOP
TIPS



- **Training on what tool when:** Employees knowing the role of specific tools for teamworking and collaboration.
- **Asynchronous working:** Using technology to drive more asynchronous working practices, such as holding meetings as threaded conversations rather than live video meetings.
- **Agreeing adoption of tools:** Designing and agreeing the use of technology as a team, based on specific needs. The survey indicated that many employees do not understand how to use the technology for their own benefit.
- **Enterprise networks:** Using broader digital social networks, such as Viva Engage, to connect more widely with colleagues across the organisation.
- **Smart meeting rooms:** Providing meeting rooms that improve the hybrid meeting experience through elements such as tracking cameras and sound-proofing.
- **Task management and goal tracking:** Using visible planning and task management tools to improve transparency and keep the team informed as to what others are working on.
- **Company-wide Q&A:** Providing tools and spaces to ask questions of subject matter experts who may not be well known to the employee.



“There is no shortage of technology. The trick is to know what to use and when, and have the capability to use it effectively. Businesses could do more to consider overall digital literacy and what their baseline is for employees, then focus on providing the support to attain that level”

Intentional office design

Office time was largely seen as wasted if there is no intentional collaborative activity

Organisations responding were very clear on their desire to use office space for specific purposes, such as collaboration and team building, rather than requiring employees to be in the office on a regular basis. Yet it is proving difficult to communicate and coordinate *intentional* office activities. As such, arbitrary office days become a key mechanism to try to ensure people connect in the office – regardless of whether they actually do so or not.

And herein exists the challenge: office time is largely seen as wasted if there is no intentional collaborative activity, if there is no clear purpose for commuting in. A number of respondents, however, shared **measures they had implemented to support flexible, intentional office time**. These included:

TOP
TIPS



- **Mentoring and networking:** Offering face-to-face time with leaders in the office.
- **Community and interest group meetings:** Holding in-person interest groups or communities in the office.
- **Specific meetings that require deeper collaboration:** Agreeing specific meeting types that need to be face-to-face to best meet outcomes.
- **Team days and events:** Holding in-person events that are strategic in nature or simply fun, such as team days and club events.
- **Desirability:** Making the office a desirable place to work with a focus on having social areas.
- **Communicating when people are in the office:** Using technology to ensure that office days are clearly marked and shared with colleagues.

The role of the office is almost uniformly described as being a desirable space for intentional interactions with colleagues – without being mandated. The challenge lies in coordinating how we get-together in this way. **There is still a disconnect in how team members work together**, which is making organising office time in a flexible, yet valuable way, a difficult proposition.



“We need to design ways of interacting with each other that add value (let’s do together what we can’t do when we are working remotely)”

Informal connection over ineffective meetings

Hybrid meetings aren't working. Our people need better formal and informal connections.

Hybrid meetings simply aren't working. That's the clear message from respondents. Whether all meeting attendees are remote, or there is a mix of office and remote attendees, the meeting experience is poor for those not in the office. The survey highlighted the following factors in this:



- **Managers lacking key skills:** Managers leading meetings are often found to be lacking the skills to facilitate hybrid meetings effectively, resulting in some attendees not participating as much as they want to, or feeling excluded.
- **Over-reliance on meetings:** Too often, meetings are used as the default means to coordinate work, and are over-used to distribute information rather than to bring people together and collaborate. This is despite other techniques being available, such as asynchronous meetings or using features in meetings such as meeting notes, chat and polls to bring in the views of those not participating. There is a desire to move away from mass meetings and to more carefully consider who needs to attend and participate.
- **Meeting room technology:** Technology is also a key enabler to improving the hybrid experience, with a number of respondents citing the presence or absence of effective meeting room technology as a crucial factor.
- **Facilitate informal connections:** The majority of respondents clearly referenced the need to facilitate informal connections between people as a factor to improve the hybrid experience. Whether face-to-face or via social network tools like Viva Engage, encouraging people to converse with colleagues outside of the immediate team and on spontaneous matters - rather than structured topics - was rated as highly important. One respondent found that some employees can feel isolated at home, which won't be improved if their main form of communication is through formal meetings.



"We already have a defined a minimum of 3 days a week in the office, but no goals around when essential on-site meetings are to be held, so it's a free for all for on-site meetups, which then ruins the remote work system"

Informal connection over ineffective meetings

Meeting practices and a lack of connection present a challenge to respondents, and indeed to most modern organisations, on how to assist their people to develop networks and build relationships in a way that is less formal than current practices. One respondent shared that they are moving from traditional performance measurements to understanding causal relationships that improve efficiency, productivity, collaborative learning and innovation.

Indeed, it would appear that the role of the office for some organisations is now shaping to be a social space rather than a focused working environment. This, however, ignores those who are less able to access the office and miss out on the opportunities offered by in-person interactions, or those who don't have a quiet space to work from at home and require quiet office space. There is evidently **a clear role for our digital tools to play here**, in a mix with the office space, for example:



- **Virtual communities and employee groups** in tools such as Viva Engage for inter-team interactions in combination with in-person events.
- **Leadership style** where leaders adopt a more open and personal style in their digital communications to help encourage remote workers to engage with them.
- **Intentional meetups** where in-person events are held specifically for relationship building and networking, or where there is a very clear purpose, leaving most routine meetings as virtual.
- **Asynchronous meetings** for routine or information-sharing meetings that don't require a conversation.
- **Regular team rituals** that are virtual as well as in-person, such as recognition events. Auto-randomised events were also suggested that bring unknown colleagues together.
- **Using the most appropriate communication medium**, knowing which tool would suit the need best and when to move a conversation to a different tool, such as from a chat into a video or phone conversation.



“Regular and structured contact with line managers alongside informal engagement”

The importance of open communication and trust

Hybrid experiences are different for everybody. Open communication is an essential tool to bring people together

A surprising number of respondents cited an issue around how colleagues working remotely tend to be less contactable, or less contacted than those in the office. That respecting the focus time of those working remotely has become an unwritten norm. This is introducing a significant barrier to collaboration and delivery, with one respondent stating that colleagues working from home can be forgotten. Another respondent shared that there is a reluctance to reach out to colleagues who are remote when needing help with an issue.

Yet, uniformly, it was observed that having open and clear communication within teams as well as a strong culture of trust is key to achieving a better hybrid experience. Communication is not just key to effective collaboration and teambuilding, with the survey also highlighting that **a lack of appropriate contact contributes to feelings of isolation and exclusion.**

The following were suggested as important practices to help **drive improved communication:**



- **Communicating honestly** about planned movements, such as time unavailable during the working day.
- **Celebrations**, such as celebrating meeting goals and recognition for colleagues.
- **Agreement and clear expectations** on behaviours and common ways of working.
- **Management skills** where managers are able to communicate openly and honestly to encourage the same from their team members, as well as being able to actively listen.
- **Check-ins** where managers hold both informal and formal check-ins with the team.

To improve communication practices, it is necessary to consider consistent use of communication channels, the digital skills needed, and to know when and how to adopt asynchronous working methods. It is important to note that hybrid experiences are different for everyone, and that any communication strategy needs to be sensitive to the diverse needs of different teams and individuals.



“Having Trust amongst colleagues that they’ll do the work they’re responsible for. And feeling free enough to say ‘I’m just ducking out to collect the kids’ or ‘I’m going to go for a walk’ ”

What are we measuring?

Clear goals for hybrid work are largely missing, though this is hindered by measuring time rather than output

Most respondents didn't have specific goals relating to hybrid work, other than those who had mandated office days. One respondent explicitly stated that the absence of clear goals for hybrid work is causing confusion between flexible and hybrid working. Any measurements taken in support of the hybrid work experience were typically surveys around employee engagement and satisfaction. Two respondents did mention a move to measuring relationships and networks, however most felt that it was hard to identify business metrics that they could measure relating to hybrid work.

One respondent stated that having goals for focus time would be helpful, along with goal-based working on tasks. Another respondent commented using Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) can correlate delivery to ways of working. But in general, there wasn't a sense of any clear goals that help to drive a better hybrid work experience. This is largely hindered by a **tradition of measuring time spent at work, rather than measuring work outputs.**

The survey also posed to the question: 'Looking ahead, what do you envision as the ideal hybrid experience for your department? What steps do you believe we should take to achieve that vision?' Interestingly, this question led to respondents **suggesting valuable goals for improving the hybrid experience** that aren't currently adopted. Some of the responses included:



- **In-person arrangements are agreed**, ensuring that a team is clear on when they need to be in the office.
- **Hybrid becomes a tool of work** rather than an aspirational goal, becoming embedded as a standard practice.
- **Intentional work design** - on how, where and when we work - is adopted by teams
- **Autonomy** on choosing ways of work where possible.
- **Open communication and transparency** on working activities ensuring visibility and coordination of work as well as sharing of informal activities to help drive network and relationship building.
- **Improved discipline on how to run meetings**, such as using meeting notes, asynchronous meetings and learning how to facilitate hybrid meetings.
- **Understanding what the workforce actually wants** from their hybrid experience, such as understanding intergenerational needs, to help provide an improved experience.



"If we utilize dashboards that are tracking OKRs and projects - particularly those that are interdepartmental - you can correlate process, progress, time to launch, successes, and failures related to ways of working."

The best of both worlds: connected and engaged regardless of location

The whole employee experience, even if remote work is not a possibility, can be improved by improving digital literacy, improving communication and introducing more autonomy

By far, the dominant narrative from the responses was that the desired state of hybrid working should be **a connected and engaged workforce regardless of location**. Challenges persist due to pressures to get people into the office as well as unequal opportunities. Not every role can be remote, and there will be a sense of unfairness from those unable to have more flexible choices.

However, even if a role dictates a specific location and/or working hours, there are still opportunities to improve the employee experience and to drive more connected and engaged employees. The hybrid experience encompasses more than just remote work; it includes the quality of interactions and the overall work environment. This is why, through the steps below, **we can improve the overall employee experience whether hybrid, remote or office based**.

Three practices were clearly articulated in the survey responses as key to this. They are as follows:

1: Improved digital literacy



Mastering the digital basics is essential to improving the hybrid experience. Our **digital teamworking and collaboration tools are the only consistent place of work across hybrid roles**, and having the skills to effectively use them as the default place of work is essential. This is not to say that all work has to be performed virtually, just the basics that ensure everyone has the same access to certain core knowledge, information, goals and tasks.

For example, this could be understanding how to use Microsoft Teams for more than just meetings and chat, moving away from email or sharing goals and tasks more visibly.

The technology that respondents have access to was largely remarked as being well suited for hybrid work, however, it is clear that employees lack the skills they need to use these tools appropriately for their own working requirements.



“Onboarding sessions dedicated to training people on how to use the digital workplace tools and what the norms are for collaboration, etc are very valuable”

The best of both worlds: connected and engaged regardless of location

2: Improved communication



Whether senior leaders connecting with the wider workforce, managers reaching their teams or peers interacting with each other, **open and honest communication is fundamental to driving a positive hybrid experience.**

Truly flexible hybrid work is more complicated, with a lack of consistent working practices making it harder to get a handle on what is going on. Honest and regular communication helps cut through this. Communication on what we're working on, where we are, when we're available (and, crucially, when we're not available) and who we're working with.

Communication also needs to reach the right people in the right places. For enterprise-wide communication, this may need to be multi-channel, but for team communication, this needs to be consistent – in one place where the team are usually performing their work, such as in Microsoft Teams channels. Communication across a wide spread of tools only adds to confusion and creates more notification stress.

There is also a need to understand the need for both formal communication and informal, or backchannel communication, and how both are important to effective hybrid working. The needs of a hybrid workforce are best met when they have opportunities for both, with ideally a clearly delineated space for each type. This could be both physical and digital spaces where informal conversations are encouraged.

Understanding the value of asynchronous communication, and how to apply it is also a powerful tool for hybrid working. With meetings proving to be a challenge, moving some to asynchronous formats is proving to help improve the meeting experience for repeating or update-style meetings, whilst also supporting more flexible ways of work.

Defining expectations on when to respond to certain types of communication can help to manage the demands of hybrid work, especially when there is an almost continuous demand of our attention.

Employees need both formal and informal (e.g. backchannel) communication with physical or digital space for both

The best of both worlds: connected and engaged regardless of location

3: Trust and autonomy



Optimising the hybrid experience is not to impose one solution on every team, but to **empower each team with the autonomy to design their own experience**. Every team has their own unique needs, personalities, rhythms and practices and should be able to design how they work around these.

The benefits of having a structure to how we work is clear. Structure helps create consistency, and that was clearly identified as essential for modern hybrid work. But heavy, top-down structure imposes too many restrictions that appear to limit the hybrid experience for most respondents. We lose the flexibility that hybrid work should offer. Top-down practices also can convey a lack of trust in the capabilities of individual teams, which can create disaffected people.

Clearly, there is a need for some form of structure to align colleagues and create a degree of consistency in how we work – but combining this with a flexible, more autonomous way of work is proving to be a challenge with top-down directives. However, **respondents who had adopted frameworks at a team level, such as team charters or team agreements, as a way to design ways of working were seeing positive results.**

One respondent wrote that *“we are working hybrid, which is different than how we did it before. So, we should look at our work practices to see if they need to change”*. And this is key to developing frameworks. It’s not just about agreeing ways of work, but holding a **discussion about what needs to change**. Continually evolving work by adding new technology and practices without taking a step back and intentionally designing how we could work is incredibly inefficient.



“Everyone works where they work, when it suits them best. And we have some scheduled days where all are in the office. Add in some planned bonding activities to build team trust and engagement.”

The best of both worlds: connected and engaged regardless of location

A core part of any framework is agreeing what the role of the office is. Another respondent shared that the most important factors that contribute to a positive hybrid experience include “... *reason to be in the office vs a reason not to be. Acceptance of flexibility, with a shared commitment to showing up (because if I don't, why would you?) and letting people know*”.

How teams collaborate is also an essential part of any framework, setting out some expectations around collaboration practices and tools. A respondent stated they saw four elements being crucial to a positive hybrid experience: storytelling, team agreements, collaboration practices and social learning. Another found that onboarding sessions dedicated to training people on how to use the digital workplace tools and what the norms are for collaboration were very valuable.

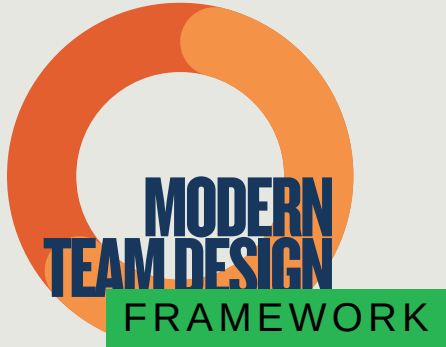
Lastly, creating some norms on the use of technology, as agreed by the team ensures more consistency in the digital experience. This may require some **digital maturity to ensure an understanding of 'which tool when'**. However, the value of doing this is huge, as this can simplify ways of working, get people working together in the same place (digital and physical) and get more productivity gains out of our technology.



“My goal is that everyone feels empowered and trusted to make the best decision for how to solve their work”

A framework to design how we work

A positive employee experience comes from empowering teams to design their work. This comes from providing a simple framework to guide their choices



It was evident from the survey responses that empowering teams to design their working norms is one part of the puzzle. The other part is providing them with the tools to do so. This requires a framework, whereby simple but effective choices can be made.

From the responses in the survey, industry best practices and our own practical experiences, we have developed the Modern Team Design Framework. This framework empowers teams to prioritise what's important to them and provides a set of ways of work practices on which to agree and adopt. This framework covers:

Autonomy

Measures that promote more autonomy without sacrificing the needs of the team and the customer.

Competencies

Prioritising and pursuing key competencies that will be key to a positive hybrid experience, such as digital literacy and asynchronous working.

Relationships

Measures that support people developing relationships key to professional and personal development using digital and non-digital tools.

Purpose

Techniques that ensure a clear purpose exists for hybrid work, on where and when people work, and that what is being worked on is clearly communicated within and between teams.

Belonging

Measures that support a greater sense of belonging and motivation at work through rituals and behaviours.



"If we utilize dashboards that are tracking OKRs and projects - particularly those that are interdepartmental - you can correlate process, progress, time to launch, successes, and failures related to ways of working."

A framework to design how we work

Trust

Specific activities that help foster a culture of trust within and between hybrid teams, helping to drive a safe and equitable work experience as well as improving wellbeing.

Engagement

Measures to ensure that people are engaged in activities, such as meetings, so that learning, collaboration, decision making and knowledge sharing are well practiced.

Infrastructure

Agreeing tools and spaces that are important to support a positive hybrid experience, as well as building consistency in how these are used.

Communication

Moving communication into the right channels for the benefit of the team, ensuring formal and informal communication help align working activities.

Designing better work rather than continuing bad habits

Flexible hybrid work is yielding more loyal and motivated people, yet the absence of a simple framework or clear goals is making it seem more complicated than it could be. This is a missed opportunity to provide a better experience for our people, and ultimately, customers and stakeholders.

Organisations that invest in training and techniques to help their people develop new ways of work are seeing benefits in terms of retention and performance. With Generative AI now disrupting and driving modern work, **teams that can design how they work will be better placed to make good use of AI rather than lack the confidence or purpose to get started.** This is the biggest opportunity yet to improve the hybrid experience, although it is one that will require teams with the skills and behaviours outlined above to succeed.

If no investment is made to adapt and support our people to build smarter, more effective ways of working that meet their needs, we risk losing our best people as well as being unable to attract people that thrive in settings of trust and empowerment.



Try out the
framework



Please contact
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for more information
on the Modern Team
Design Framework,
and if you would like
to be involved in
initial trials.

Who are we?



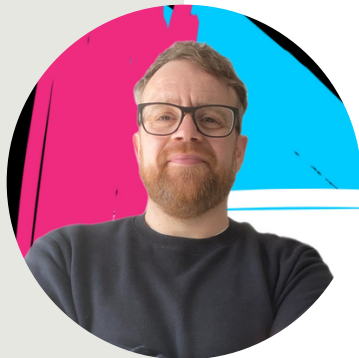
Andrew Pope

Owner, Designing Collaboration

Andrew is owner and consultant at Designing Collaboration, where he builds modern and collaborative working practices in Microsoft 365. He coaches leaders and teams practical skills and develops the behaviours to build healthy, productive and connected ways of work.

He also designs human-centric strategies to optimise workplace technology to meet goals, needs or solve problems. This also includes hybrid and modern working frameworks. Andrew has advised and coached UK and Australian government departments as well as large multinationals on how to better leverage Microsoft 365 and to empower today's teams.

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Will brings 18 years of expertise in workplace, property, and facilities management. He has been at the forefront of integrating design thinking and authentic user experience into discussions about ways of working. This approach has led him across diverse sectors and industries, equipping him with a unique perspective on how workplace experience can drive broader business outcomes.

He now partners with cutting-edge SME businesses, offering guidance on best practices and helping organisations understand, implement, and optimise workplace experiences.

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