

30 STEPS TO A MORE HARMONIOUS HYBRID WORKPLACE



By Saranne Segal

Disclaimer:

This eBook contains information from the author's point of view. Some of it covers how best to deal with bullying complaints in the workplace. It is not intended to represent a comprehensive overview of the law as it applies to bullying in the workplace, nor is it intended as a substitute for legal advice.

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About Saranne Segal

Saranne Segal is a workplace legal expert, investigator, mediator, trainer, workplace bullying authority and conflict resolution advocate on a mission to create more harmonious workplaces in Australia.

Born and raised in Pietersburg, South Africa, she observed the impact of unmitigated conflict, developing strong empathy and a drive to promote equality.



Saranne practised law for 25 years before starting Segal Conflict Solutions. As Managing Partner, Saranne draws on her extensive experience and formal qualifications in psychology, law, industrial relations and human resources to help clients understand their workplace culture and manage conflict creatively and confidently.

Her clients include government, universities, global corporations, religious organisations and SMEs.

Saranne equips businesses with knowledge, tools, and strategies to navigate the post-pandemic workplace. Helping them to minimise legal liability, maintain reputational risk, and foster a harmonious workplace culture through open communication and accountability.

Saranne is very interested in hearing your comments and invites you to email her at:
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Introduction

Remote work has been around for centuries, but hybrid workplaces - where employees work fully remote, fully in-office or a mix of both is a relatively new concept, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

It is forcing organisations to reimagine their workplaces, test and learn to discover what works and what doesn't as they try to navigate a way forward post-lockdowns. It can be an uncomfortable process that employees may find difficult, leading to greater dissatisfaction, conflict, and higher turnover.

This e-book aims to help organisations work towards creating more harmony in their hybrid workplace. By going through and implementing each step, they will be able to build a culture that balances employees' expectations and preferences with business needs and goals.

30 Steps To A More Harmonious Hybrid Workplace

1. Know the kind of workplace culture you want to develop

Your organisation's culture relates to its principles, policies, code of conduct and values. It is what you expect your employees to follow and incorporate into their everyday work environment. It manifests in how decisions are made and actions are taken.

A good workplace culture prioritises the wellbeing of its employees and improves performance, retention and competitiveness in the marketplace. Hybrid workplaces require employers to be more mindful, consistent and intentional so that all employees feel they belong, regardless of where they physically work.



Complete my scorecard to discover how your organisation measures up.

2. Lead with empathy

Soft skills have never been more critical in management than they are today. After years of change, upheaval and trauma caused by the pandemic, leaders must demonstrate emotional intelligence, self-awareness, respect, and trust.

Employees also want and expect it. Research shows that empathy at work can have a transformational impact.



- 89% of employees agree that empathy leads to better leadership
- 88% feel that empathetic leadership inspires positive change within the workplace
- 85% report that empathetic leadership increases productivity among employees.

What does empathic leadership look like? Organisations can start by listening to staff and hearing what they are saying and asking—implementing policies, guidelines and initiatives in response, and over-communicating their actions to create awareness, buy-in and build trust.



Learn to understand how emotions drive your own and others' behaviour.



3. Know and communicate your values

You may already have your organisation’s values recorded, but they may need tweaking in light of hybrid-working. Your company values enable your employees to function together as a team and work toward common

business goals. They should be visible in everyday actions, employees' attitudes and ethics, and how leaders behave, think and make decisions.

For example, you may have trust as a value. How does this reflect in a hybrid work environment? le. You trust your employees to do their job autonomously. Once you have your values, communicate them far and wide within your organisation. They will only become embedded in your organisation through regular discussion and acknowledgement.



Share this article to demonstrate the case for visible values.

4. Be flexible

Research from Gallup shows 54% of workers currently working exclusively from home said they would look for another job if that option were removed. And 38% of hybrid workers said the same. In fact, when employees are required to work fully on-site, but they would prefer to work hybrid or fully remote, employees experience:

- significantly lower engagement
- significantly lower wellbeing
- significantly higher intent to leave
- significantly higher levels of burnout

While there is no one-size-fits-all, leaders should evaluate which type of guidelines work best for their team, given the type of work they do, support needed and team culture.



Read the EY survey.

5. Be intentional with inclusion

Individual employees should feel accepted, included and valued within their workplace, regardless of physical location. It is the responsibility of leaders and managers to create that sense of belonging, connection and engagement. This can feel harder to achieve when we are not all face-to-face, so you need to be more intentional.

Consider guidelines that promote inclusivity. For example, no special extras for those in the office, no work-chat or project decision making in offline environments, allowing space at the start or end of meetings for a bit of social chat can all help ensure an inclusive environment.



Access information and resources from the **[Diversity Council Australia](#)**.

6. Set healthy boundaries

It is well documented that boundaries between work and home lives have become blurred during the pandemic. People report working longer hours than before, experiencing burnout and disengagement.

Boundaries provide safety and clarity for all. There are always unwritten rules around behaviours and expectations, which will differ from team to team. They are often set by the leader. If they usually work late hours or send emails early in the morning or late at night, employees will feel obliged to as well. It's important to set healthy limits, lead by example and encourage all to follow your lead.



Read my article: **[How healthy boundaries build trust in the workplace](#)**.

7. Prioritise employee well-being

The pandemic has caused severe emotional strain to most of us, and leaders and managers should be focusing on meeting and supporting their employees' emotional wellbeing. Employees are no longer prepared to compromise their mental health anymore through over-working.

Employers must provide psychological safety for employees. That means creating an environment (backed by policies and guidelines) where employees can voice an opinion safe in the knowledge that others on the team will not embarrass, reject, or punish them for speaking up. It is no longer sufficient to just provide your staff with the operational tools and resources to function.



Employee well-being must be on the strategic plans of every organisation.



Access this useful **health and wellbeing framework** from Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC), UK.

8. Work-life balance or work-life integration?

Work-life balance allows a separation between work and personal responsibilities.

- It sets aside business hours (Typically 8hrs a day 5 days a week).
- Employees are expected to log in, report for work meetings, make decisions, and strategise. After logging out, they need not respond to action items and messages.
- Prevents employees from working off the clock or running personal errands while on the clock.
- It is ideal for larger, more traditionally structured companies and people who want to unplug from work and not put in unusual hours.

Work-life integration doesn't categorise personal time and work time separately.

- It focuses on the 'best' time to do work
- For example, the employee may work late at night to meet an upcoming deadline and still respond to emails during the daytime.
- Includes diarising everything coming under the term 'life,' i.e., work, family, caregiving and socialising
- It is ideal for start-ups or lean organisations and people capable of multitasking and shaping their workday around several personal and professional projects.



Consider which approach works best for your organisation. Read **this article** to understand the concepts, pros and cons.

9. Embrace diversity

One significant benefit of the shift to hybrid work is that it allows organisations to be more diverse than they were previously. Now it is possible to hire top talent nationally and globally, bringing people of different educational backgrounds, professional experiences and from all walks of life together to broaden the company's collective knowledge.



A harmonious culture embraces and celebrates diversity. Encourage employees to get to know each other by sharing their backgrounds, cultural roots and traditions. But only if they feel comfortable doing so, so the best thing to do is ask first. If you get pushback or a lukewarm reception, be prepared to let these initiatives go. The point is to show that you care about your staff.



Create a Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) calendar that includes cultural, religious, and secular events and holidays. Plan ahead, collaborating on ideas so employees can understand and celebrate these traditions.

10. Prioritise onboarding

For employees starting their new jobs remotely, onboarding can feel daunting and, if poorly done, can impact retention. HR should create processes and systems for managers to assist recruits through the difficult initiation phase and help them understand their role in the organisation.

They must have clarity on what their job is, who they should go to for what, and when, and giving them the tools to do their job from day one is vital. A mentor or buddy system can work well and ensure frequent communication and daily check-ins, especially in the first few weeks.



Interview a recent new recruit. Ask them what worked, what didn't and what you can put in the place that would help future new employees feel more prepared and welcomed.

11. Get confident about conflict prevention and resolution

While businesses may have held this kind of training pre-COVID, managing conflict online or in a hybrid environment is different. Leaders may not feel as well equipped to nip small issues in the bud before they become big problems.

Knowing how to resolve personality clashes, performance issues, harassment and bullying, or ineffective leadership styles virtually can feel overwhelming HR or managers haven't been given specific guidance.

If an issue remains unresolved despite attempts by HR or managers, it is likely to impact the rest of the team and contribute to a toxic workplace environment. In these situations, it is recommended to bring in a trained mediator.



Equip staff with the skills needed by **booking a conflict prevention and resolution online workshop.**

12. Have a zero-tolerance stance on bullying & harassment

If these behaviours are allowed to fester, anger and resentment will grow, and ultimately, this kind of behaviour will become the norm. So always aim to stop these situations immediately and apply your bullying and harassment policy equally throughout the organisation, including at senior levels. Remember, no one is irreplaceable!

Some ways these behaviours can show up in an online environment are:

- excessive supervision and monitoring
- unduly critical, singles out or cuts off an employee mid-conversation when they comment or speak up at team meetings
- ignoring or excluding an employee from team meetings or certain emails
- setting impossible targets and objectives or changing their targets without first making them aware.
- calling out an employee's poor performance or mistakes in front of others—for example, in chat groups
- ignoring an employee's requests for help or guidance.



Read our White Paper- **How to Solve Bullying Complaints in 30 Days**

13. Handle complex grievances appropriately

Australian workplaces are legally obliged to protect employees from inappropriate and unlawful conduct in the workplace. Unfortunately, when bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment are not handled correctly by organisations, they are widening their legal exposure.

In most cases where complaints are made, we recommend that organisations hire an external investigator to handle the grievance rather than manage the matter internally. Our research found 89.5% of participants stated that they lost trust in the company during the internal complaints process. Most feel their grievance is not properly addressed, which is heightened in a hybrid or online environment. Engaging an external investigator immediately shows that the grievance is being taken seriously and will be dealt with quickly, fairly and in an unbiased manner.



Book an **external investigator** for any grievances that have been going on for more than a month.

14. Conduct regular check-ins

Most employees who work remotely all or most of the time need to know they are being supported beyond regular weekly or monthly meetings. These check-ins don't need to have a traditional work-type agenda. Think of them more like a virtual pop by your desk and see how you are going kind of check-in.

While it's best practice to have too much communication vs too little, it's also essential to offer support in line with employee preferences. So ask them what kind of cadence they are comfortable with.



Ask your staff today how often they would like to check-in with you. Over and above this, ASK them how they are doing on a regular basis, don't only save it for diarised catch-ups.

15. Promote autonomy

In many organisations, an employees' level of autonomy is based on their individual manager. Research from Blind reported a 42% increase in micromanagement during the pandemic due to managers believing that working from home means not doing real work. In a hybrid-environment, these managers should receive training to unlearn negative associations with working from home, so their employees are not unfairly disadvantaged.

Organisations must instead focus on output. If an employee is not meeting those expectations, then performance management processes can be implemented. However, trust and autonomy should be a given until proven otherwise.



Read **7 tips to master employee autonomy in the remote workplace.**

16. Nip conflict in the bud

Don't let interpersonal conflict fester with the hope that it will go away y itself or will be resolved organically. This rarely happens and the result will be that the conflict spreads and before you know it, the rest of the organisation has become infected and you are left with a toxic workplace.



Bring in an external mediator to resolve disputes between warring employees. When there are a myriad of issues occurring, bring in an external unbiased investigator to sort out the issues. Most staff will not trust an internal investigation due to perceptions of bias.



Book an **external mediator** to resolve any ongoing or complex disputes

17. Equality in performance review and appraisals

When we all spent equal time in the office, performance reviews were held on more of an equal footing. But, with some staff fully remote, others fully in-office and the rest splitting their time, managers must pay special attention to ensure they have no unconscious bias towards an employee regardless of the physical location of work.

This is on top of ensuring appraisals are conducted without discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, ethnicity, age or disabilities.



Read this paper from Harvard Business review: **Why Most Performance Evaluations Are Biased, and How to Fix Them**

18. Competitive & equal pay

Part of creating a healthy workplace culture where employees can thrive is paying a fair and competitive wage. As of August 2021, the national gender pay gap is 14.20%. Across all industries, men earn more than women.

While equal pay is a legal requirement under the Fair Work Act 2009, the gender pay gap results from unintended gender biases in hiring, promotion, performance, and pay decisions.



The opportunity for bias is expanded as offices are split into those that work from home and those that work in the office. HR should consider updating policies and guidelines that reflect this.



Identify and analyse the causes of gender pay gaps within your organisation using this **gender pay gap calculator**.

19. Provide regular training

Continued learning is a must for all employees to feel that they are gaining knowledge and skills to use in your organisation and beyond. They will thrive, and performance increases when an organisation prioritises professional development, informal learning and knowledge sharing.

In addition, employees should be offered regular training to do their roles effectively, including technology and systems training, soft skills, communication, unconscious bias, how to conduct virtual performance reviews and conflict resolution.



Set training goals at an organisational level and use a calendar to plot it across the year. **Book workshops** for leaders on conflict resolution, effective performance feedback, and understanding and managing difficult personalities and behaviours.

20. Opportunities for advancement

A 2021 US survey of over 2000 workers showed 80% of those planning to leave their current job were doing so because of a lack of career progression. Providing your employees with clear expectations for advancement and the tools, training and opportunities for success will help you create a positive workplace culture and retain staff.



This can look like on-the-job training programs, documenting specific goals and plans for employees to achieve them, and mentorship and sponsorship programs.



Download this **Career Development Framework e-Book** from the Career Development Institute.

21. Conduct regular culture reviews

The first step to changing a poor culture at work is to define your current culture and discuss what practices, behaviours, and values need to change. This requires an unflinching self-analysis and gathering information from your staff - the people that live, breathe and work in your organisation.



It's best to hire an external consultant to run a culture review to obtain more truthful feedback from employees. Information will be collected through surveys, focus groups and confidential interviews with staff.

A written report will describe how employees see the organisation and its

leaders, whether the organisation lives up to its stated values, and what aspects of the current culture may hamper the growth and innovation that must accompany transformation. When developing a strategy to change workplace culture, your current culture should be defined as well as how you want it to look in the future.



Book a culture review.

22. Give employees a voice

Research from employees in the U.K found those with very high senses of belonging and engagement (both 96%) are significantly more likely to feel heard than those with very low engagement (33%) or belonging (14%).

Regularly listening to employees on their feelings about your organisation helps build a culture of trust, feeds innovation through new ideas, improves engagement and retention. Pulse surveys, collaboration, 1:1 check-ins, open-door policies and crowdsourcing are all useful channels for employee voice.

It's worth noting these efforts will be in vain if psychological safety is not present in your workplace.



In the cases where feedback is not anonymous, thank employees individually for their feedback. Offer to chat with them further about it, with the aim to understand more deeply.

23. Implement actions on the back of feedback

Organisations will only reap the benefits of employee voice when they take feedback onboard and translate it into actionable items, policy, process and system changes.

It is best to set up a task force responsible for communicating and implementing the changes directly from employee feedback. This allows staff to feel valued and that their voice and opinion matter.

Ensure at least one senior leader is sponsoring the actionable outcomes. Otherwise, it just becomes an exercise in the people who are paid the least doing more work.



Show and tell employees how you have implemented changes as a result of their feedback. Broadcast these stories across your organisation and via team leaders.

24. Use the right technology the right way

How can you meaningfully communicate, collaborate, and connect in a hybrid or environment so that employees are not just equipped to do their job—whether in the office, at home or a combination and can thrive and feel a sense of belonging through the use of technology.

The actual platforms and tools you use will be different for every organisation, but what HR can do is guide employees on how the tech should be used. For example, creating channels for each project that teams have on the go can help those in different time zones easily keep track of conversations. Discussing everything out in the open - on the appropriate channel instead of in DMs avoids water-cooler type conversations.



Provide leaders with a set of examples and options so they can collectively come to an agreement within their team around how they specifically will use technology to foster the right outcomes.

25. It's OK to over-communicate

One of the biggest complaints from employees during the pandemic was too little communication from their employer. When there is silence, gossip and rumour can fill the void.



Communication is one of the things that will make or break your workplace culture. Regular and transparent communication must come from senior leaders to team managers. Regularly talking about how the organisation is doing, where it's going and recognising wins (and losses) all help build trust and create the notion that you are all in this together.



Make the time to communicate by arranging a mixture of regular formal interactions such as training, coaching and performance management, with informal conversations such as a coffee, lunch or general chat.

26. Create open spaces

Without the guaranteed cross over in the kitchen or at the photocopier, organisations must reimagine these snippets of human conversation so they can still take place in a hybrid environment.

Consider leaving space at the beginning or end (or both) of meetings for social conversations. It allows colleagues, wherever they are dialling in from, to catch up and connect, talk about what you've done on the weekend or what's going on for you.

When it's all work and no play, it's hard for teammates to form connections beyond their project.



Listen to our **webinar** which discusses the best ways to design a hybrid workplace.

27. Acknowledge good work

Everyone appreciates positive feedback. It costs nothing to give recognition, yet it pays in dividends. It makes employees feel motivated, accomplished and valued for their work. It boosts employee engagement and has been found to increase productivity, loyalty and higher retention.

Remember, you can't praise too much. You don't need to save call outs for large meetings. These can be done at weekly or even daily meetings. Managers can record improvements from 1:1 check-ins and present those to the employee, celebrating their progress.

Appreciating high performers keeps them engaged, makes it clear to all employees where you stand on performance, rewards for quality work, and gives other staff something to aim for.



Give regular shout-outs at team meetings, in a group email or in other company-wide communications. Public recognition is also a great way to inspire and motivate the rest of the team while rewarding one employee for a job well done.

28. Be social

Many organisations struggled with this during lockdowns, and hybrid working doesn't make it any easier. If budget and staff locations allow, aim to have one in-person team day per year. These can be a mixture of fun, development and socialising, whatever works for your organisation.



Encourage smaller teams to find their own social rhythm. Maybe it's a Friday virtual lunch, quarterly quiz night or online scavenger hunt. The important thing is to allow individuals to decide if they want to participate. And if they don't, there are no hard feelings. Not everyone enjoys socialising, but organisations should make space for those that do.



Get inspired with these [**Virtual Event Ideas**](#).

29. Update policies and procedures

The appropriate policies and procedures underpin any good workplace culture. These should be regularly updated (with employee input) to take into account changing working environments and changes to legislation and regulations.



Employee standards of behaviour and an organisation's policies and procedures must be well-communicated and easily accessible for all. Senior management should also be well-acquainted with all policies and procedures.



Ensure you have the **relevant policies and procedures** for your business and diarise to update them at least once per year.

30. Practice what you preach

None of these means anything if senior management does not "walk the talk." It's vital they do what they say when they say they'll do it. Be on time. Follow the rules. Show respect. Hold themselves accountable. Commit to communication, transparency, hearing from and responding to employees.

An ideal workplace culture will only spread through an organisation when it is modelled by senior leadership and management every day.



Watch **Simon Sinek's take on great leadership**

Is it time for a workplace culture makeover?

Were you nodding along as you read these steps? Do you already have everything in place? Or are there many things missing, and you know things need to change?

Finding your feet and establishing a harmonious hybrid workplace culture can seem daunting. But prioritising the people in your organisation not only boosts morale, but it's also critical for growth and is what will take your company from ordinary to extraordinary.

At Segal Conflict Solutions, we're experts in workplace culture and can support your efforts to improve the work experience of your employees.

[Book a complimentary obligation-free consultation today](#)

