# How Should We Collaborate in a Hybrid World?

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As organizations navigate an increasingly fragmented business environment, optimizing hybrid collaboration will be imperative to future success. To enable more effective collaboration, CHROs should consider these key practices to cultivate team intentionality, reciprocity and autonomy.
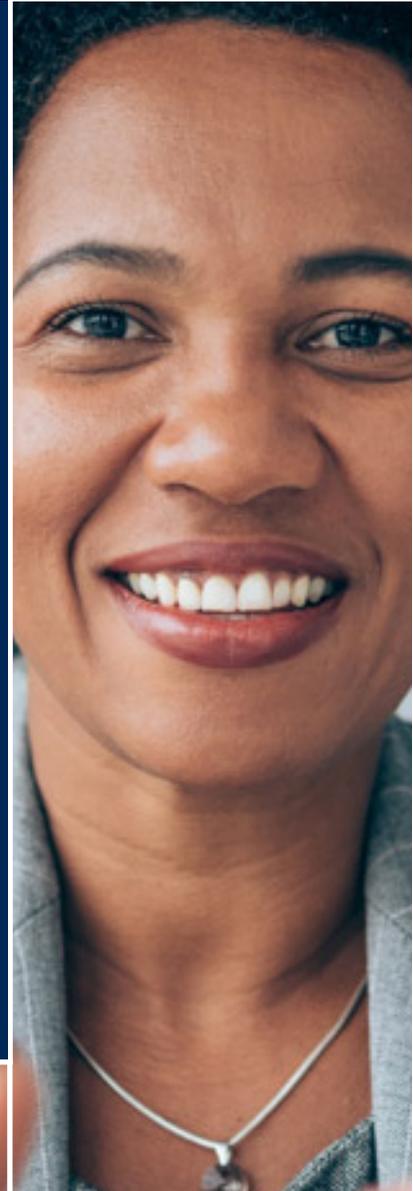
Throughout the pandemic, unprecedented levels of fragmentation and work flexibility have redefined the team experience. Hybrid work is here to stay — but with countless new variables shaping collaboration in a hybrid world, leaders may simply lean back into prepandemic work modes that no longer effectively serve their organizations. CHROs have a unique opportunity to explore new ways to drive smarter hybrid collaboration. All they need is the right formula.

Currently, most organizations experience hybrid work in one or more of the following four modes:

- Working together, together
- Working alone, together
- Working together, apart
- Working alone, apart

These modes represent how work was done before and during the onset of the pandemic, measured by where and how teams work together (see Figure 1). As we see on the top row, prepandemic work was often colocated. Employees worked on-site, either collaborating in-person or working individually in the same space. However, on the bottom row, work during the onset of the pandemic became more distributed. Employees worked remotely, either collaborating virtually or working individually in their own swm working on-site alongside their peers, while caregivers may find that collaborating virtually best accommodates their schedules.

Teams that can easily switch between their preferred work modes are better able to

Figure 1. Four Collaboration Modes Charted by Location and Time Spend
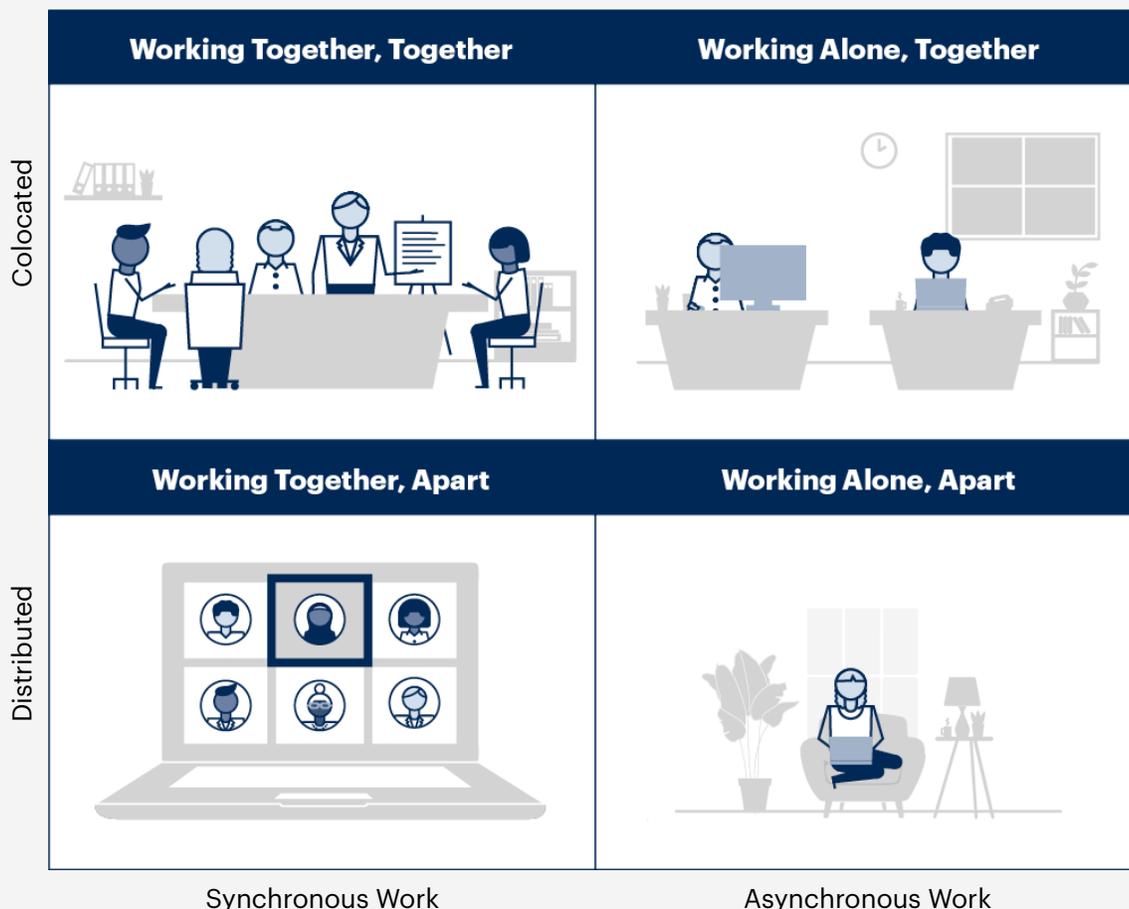
Source: Gartner

Figure 2. Impact of Asynchronous Versus Synchronous Work on Team Innovation
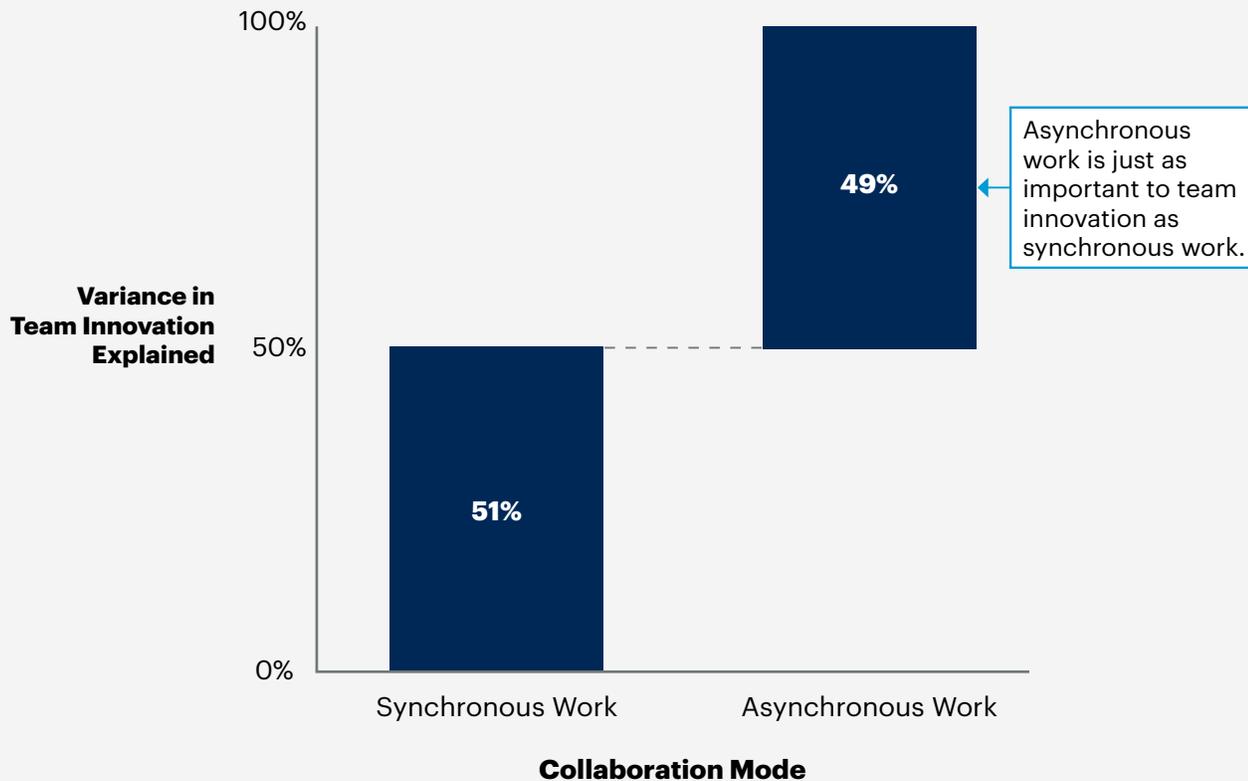
n = 2,410 hybrid/remote knowledge workers

Source: 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work Employee Survey

Note: This chart shows the result of a dominance analysis demonstrating the relative impact of synchronous and asynchronous work on team innovation.

conduct both asynchronous and synchronous work in the ways that serve them best. Leaders may still believe teams should work together in person to generate innovative work, but in fact, asynchronous work has nearly the same impact on team innovation as synchronous work (see Figure 2).

For CHROs looking to stay ahead of the curve, it will be critical to capitalize on their team's work preferences and the unique opportunities hybrid work provides. Leaders should focus on three core attributes necessary for high employee performance: capability, mindset and environment.

Our 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work Employee Survey and 2022 Gartner Culture in a Hybrid World Employee Survey found that each of these three team attributes had one specific characteristic that enabled hybrid collaborations:

- **Capability: Team Intentionality —** Teams should be intentional about how they collaborate based on their intended outcome.
- **Mindset: Team Reciprocity —** Teams should be reciprocal in sharing and accommodating each other's work patterns.
- **Environment: Team Autonomy —** Teams should be encouraged to set their own team culture and include it in their day-to-day work.

Team Intentionality

The essential capability employees must have to collaborate in a hybrid world is intentionality. As measured in the survey, this means the team is intentional about how they collaborate, that they adapt meeting structure based on the intended outcomes, and that their approach to collaboration is guided by their ongoing needs.

Intentionality allows teams to think carefully about which work modes are best suited for the type of work being done and the employees who are doing it. Not only is it a more inclusive method for determining how to collaborate, but it also drives higher employee performance. Our Gartner 2021 Hybrid Work Employee Survey found 61% of employees whose teams had a high level of intentional collaboration demonstrated high performance (see Figure 3).[1]

Team Reciprocity

The essential mindset for employees to collaborate in a hybrid world is reciprocity. This means the team is diligent about ensuring their work patterns are visible to each other and accommodating their teammates' working preferences.

This combination of transparency and accommodation enables team members to move painlessly across multiple work modes. In a hybrid world, employees are likely to operate simultaneously within and across different work modes, often at their own pace and discretion. Guiding teams to have a reciprocal mindset

makes sure no one gets left behind — and, as with intentionality, it drives higher performance. Sixty-one percent of employees working on teams with high levels of reciprocity are high performers.[1]

Team Autonomy

The essential environment for employees to collaborate in a hybrid world is one of team autonomy. This means teams are encouraged to set their own behavioral norms or choose their own values. Employees should feel their team culture plays a large part in their everyday employee experience and that there is a strong team culture on their team.

In a hybrid world, each experience — whether on-site or remote — is ultimately a team experience. For instance, employees now have more interactions with the people they work with directly, such as their managers and teammates. Interactions within these microcultures make up the bulk of their employee experience. Having team autonomy asks that employees are made accountable for ensuring each of these experiences is a positive one for their teammates, regardless of where or how the team collaborates.

Figure 3. Impact of Intentionality on Performance
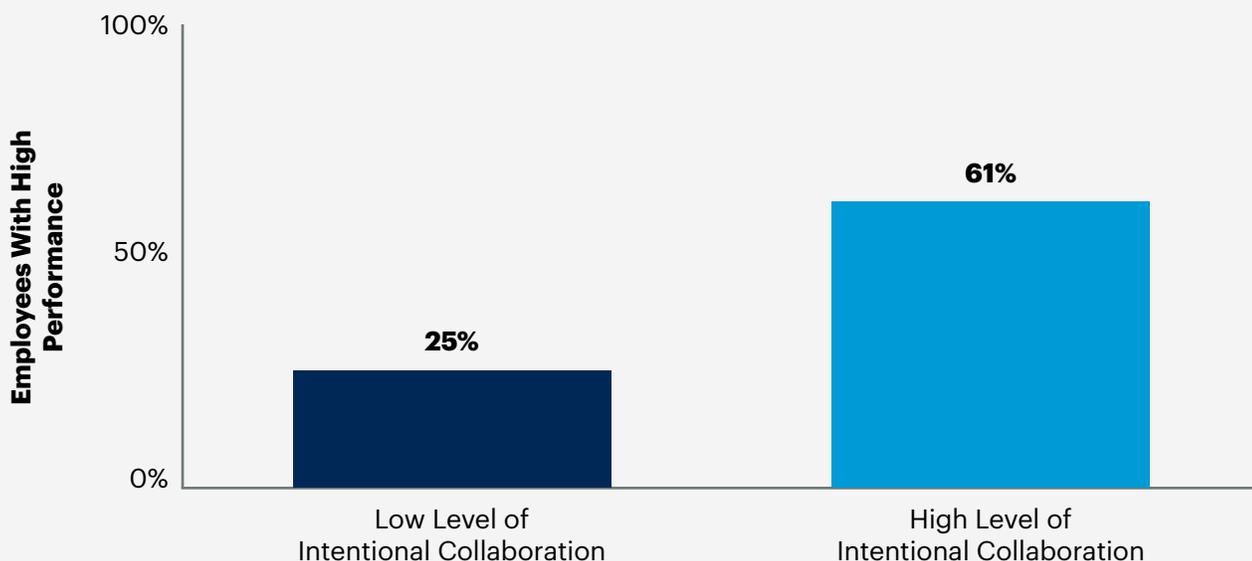
n = 2,318 hybrid/remote knowledge workers
Source: 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work Employee Survey

In addition, team autonomy is a significant driver of performance. In teams with a high level of team autonomy, 76% of employees are identified as high performers.[2]

Three Best Practices for Hybrid Collaboration

To develop the core attributes outlined above, CHROs need to keep two things in mind. First, virtual work is imperfect. While most employees prefer to have work flexibility that accommodates remote working preferences, there is still plenty of room for improvement in how that work is done. For instance:

- **Forty-five percent of employees say most virtual interactions feel similar.**[2] This may be because of a lack of distinct markers in the virtual environment, which prevents employees from being able to differentiate experiences.

- **Thirty-four percent of employees say they don't always know what attendees are doing during virtual meetings.**[2] This may mean that employees experience reduced psychological safety when not sharing physical space.

- **Thirty-six percent of employees say virtual experiences all seem to blend into one.**[2] This may indicate a lack of processing time between back-to-back virtual experiences, which prevents cultural memories from forming.

Second, each organization's needs will vary, and finding a solution that adequately serves them will take trial and error. However, to simplify this process, our research uncovered three norms that, when applied by hybrid employees, were statistically significant indicators of employee performance.

1. Ensure a Minimum Number of In-Person Gatherings per Year (Not per Week)

Many organizations are leaning toward mandating a minimum number of in-office days per week. However, this model did not prove statistically significant in driving performance. This could be because it fails to incorporate the three attributes identified above. In this model, employees lack intentionality, as a weekly mandate removes the need for employees to intentionally think about when and where to come together. They also lack reciprocity, as they cannot accommodate their own or their team's working preferences. In addition, it removes the opportunity for teams to have autonomy over how they collaborate.

A minimum number of in-person days per year, however, proved statistically significant. These are more likely to be structured intentionally around the work the team is doing. For instance, if the team is working on a project with five phases over the course of six months, they will

Figure 4. Model for Annual In-Person Team Days

Common Approach
Mandate a specific number of days
in office in the week
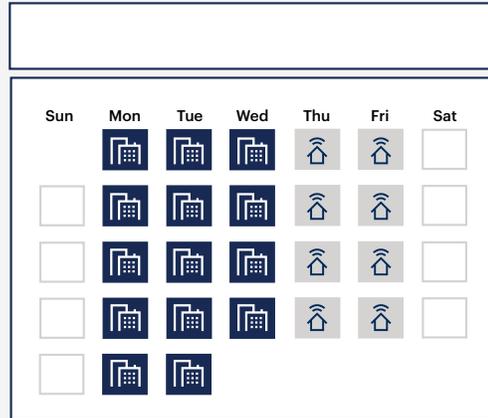
Progressive Approach
Determine days by project lifecycle

Source: **Gartner**
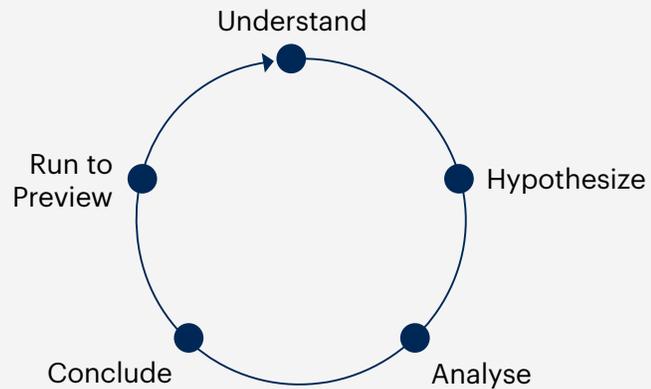
be able to structure their in-person collaboration days at the points that make the most sense for them to tackle different checkpoints in the process (see Figure 4).

2. Restrict the Number of Meetings on Camera

Screen fatigue can be a significant pitfall in virtual work, especially when teams are frequently attending meetings with their cameras on. While on-screen virtual engagement can provide positive connection opportunities, it can also be distracting; most employees find themselves looking at their own images, rather than their teams'.

To avoid these pain points, teams must think intentionally about how many daily meetings must be on-camera. A simple solution would be to enforce a quota; for instance, by requiring 20% of meetings to be done off-camera. Not only can this improve employees' ability to focus on their voice and tone, but it can provide more inclusive and less intimidating experiences for employees.

3. Provide Regular Off-Site Opportunities

Most organizations are focusing on when to meet inside the office. However, one norm that proved statistically significant in driving

performance was for teams to gather regularly outside the office. Teams looking to build authentic connections may feel stifled not only by the repetitiveness and indistinctness of virtual environments, but also by the formality of working in the office, where they feel the most monitored.

Providing off-site opportunities to meet in-person allows genuine connections to form at employees' own discretion. Investing in these off-sites annually or bi-annually can establish a foundation for employees to develop authentic interpersonal connections and an autonomous team culture.

[1] **2021 Gartner Hybrid Work Employee Survey** (n = 2,318 hybrid/remote knowledge workers). This survey was conducted to better understand how employees are adapting to a new remote-work-dominant context. The research was conducted online from 4 December through 21 December 2021 with over 4,000 employees with representation from various geographies, industries and functions. The survey was designed and developed by Gartner's HR Practice research team.

[2] **2022 Gartner Culture in a Hybrid World Employee Survey** (n = 3,917 hybrid/remote knowledge workers). This survey was conducted in December 2021. It included responses from 6,758 employees. The survey focused on employees' experiences and opinions related to their organization's culture and their connectedness to it, with representation from various geographies, industries and functions. The survey was designed and developed by Gartner's HR Practice research team.