# Effective Hybrid Team Communication

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## Communication within and across the team

Communication within a hybrid team, where some staff are working from home, requires intentional planning. With the absence of physical proximity there are reduced opportunities for incidental or informal communication. Communication when it takes place can often be focused on transactional matters and staff can miss out on the relationship building communication activities that happen across shared physical workplaces.

The aim for hybrid team managers is to establish equitable and accessible communication across the team.

## Communication Channels

Clear and consistent communication requires establishing "fit for purpose" communication channels at the outset.

"Communication channels" refers to different media/apps/platforms such as: in-person, email, zoom, WhatsApp, Slack, Trello, University shared drive, OneDrive, Teams, phone, text etc. It can be useful to ask the team what they use within the team.

Managers need to ensure that:

 a) everyone knows the expectations about when/how to communicate and where to store information; and

b) that all staff have equipment, software and skills required.

This forms part of induction for new staff as well as undertaking regular "pulse check" reviews with the whole team to ensure that the current processes are working.

## Developing a plan

When developing a plan for communication and information storage consider:

- What is the purpose of the communication and what approach suits this best? (e.g. making decisions, sharing information, brainstorming)
- To what extent communication needs to be synchronous/asynchronous for certain activities?
- What do people "need to know for their roles" and what is "nice to know"?
- When to include all team members in emails or just email selected people?
- When and how to notify the team that staff are not available for calls/meetings?
- How to create the opportunities for staff to connect together in ways that replace the serendipitous "watercooler" or corridor conversations?
- How will the team communicate about urgent issues and in an emergency?
- What information needs to be accessible and in what form(s) for staff?

The goal is to "keep it simple" and avoid "collaboration overload" where staff are using multiple channels as this can lead to the risk that information gets buried because staff are stretched and tired trying to keep up with too many channels.

Planning intentional team communication channels

This can be done by completing an audit:

a) current communication channel /information storage use, when and how each are used
b) reviewing whether these are fit for purpose for the team activities
c) noting any team functions and activities that do not have a designated communication channel/information storage arrangement
d) identifying any necessary changes and developing a plan.

The manager could undertake an initial audit and then discuss it with the team to gather feedback and form a final plan that is documented and available to the team.

Example Audit tool

| Channel currently used | Purpose/activity/function required in the team | Comments about effectiveness/risks/ "fit for purpose" |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

Example draft plan

| Communication Channel | Purpose |
|---|---|
| Teams | Formal meetings and supporting documents added to teams prior to meeting.<br><br>Informal meetings  between individual staff members<br><br>Questions about processes and workflow recorded in chat |
| Slack | Informal social conversations amongst the team |
| Email | Information sharing, formal requests and handover of tasks. |
| Information storage | Purpose |
| Team HRD-Storage area | Emails with decisions made with students accessible to all staff |
| Draft documents the team is working on | Teams – files in designated folders identifying topic |

After a period of hybrid teamwork, it may be useful to revisit this.

## Meetings

Consider the meetings that the team holds. If any team member is not physically present, consider holding the meeting online. "Presence disparity" is where people experience the meeting differently and this can have negative effects and communication disruption.

Build in time for team members to share not only what they are working on, but to ask for extra resources or information. A useful question to add to a team meeting is the round the table discussion around 'what I need from other people'.

Consider using zoom backgrounds to create a virtual shared environment for the team meetings so that people seem to be occupying the same space.

## Social events

Social events whether a virtual afternoon tea or group quiz, maintain social connections within the team and focus on the whole person. Consider ways to build these into your schedule.

## Sharing your time

Consider the time spent with the individuals in your team and whether this is equitable.  It can be natural to connect with people when you share the office but how might you build in the same level of one on one connect with people working from home.

## Anchor Days

An anchor day is when the individuals within the team all come into the office on a specific day for a period of time. The purpose of these is to enable connection, information sharing and to maintain the sense of 'the team'. These could be weekly, fortnightly, monthly or arranged on a less formal basis.