



The WorkLab Guide

# How to Get Hybrid Meetings Right

Who needs to be there in person? Who can catch up later? Here are five types of hybrid meetings—and how to make every one count.

Illustration by David Sparshott

This guide covers the best way to approach five different types of hybrid meetings.

Great meetings are the bedrock of a thriving organization. But [our data shows](#) that today's employees expect to be able to meet from anywhere—the office, their home, in a coffee shop, or on the subway. And they need to meet less.

**The problem:** Since February 2020, the average Microsoft Teams user saw a 252 percent increase in their weekly meeting time, and the number of weekly meetings has increased by 153 percent.

Consider research from Microsoft's Human Factors Lab, which demonstrates how [back-to-backs cause stress and fatigue](#), and the link between too many meetings and a human energy crisis becomes clear.

**Make meetings count:** It starts with designing meetings intentionally—considering each step before, during, and after the meeting to maximize effectiveness and value.

Here's your guide to five types of hybrid meetings—and how to get each of them right.

## Five Types of Hybrid Meetings

	Brainstorm	Discuss & Decide	Design & Create	1:1 Connect	Team Building & Bonding
Prioritize In-person?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hybrid Work Modes	Sync / Async	Sync / Async	Sync / Async	Sync	Sync
Collaboration Experiences	Open collaboration space Enhanced meeting room	Medium conference room Large conference room	Open collaboration space Focus room	Focus room Small conference room	Open collaboration space Enhanced meeting room

A note on the WorkLab Guides:

Hybrid work is a work in progress—and no one has all the answers. At Microsoft, we take a learn-to-learn approach, looking to the data and research where we can, talking to our customers, and learning from our own employees as well. We've informed these guides with as much data and research as possible. But there's still much to learn—and we're committed to share new insights and discoveries as we go.

## Meeting Type: Brainstorm

**Can it Be Asynchronous?** Potentially

**Style to Prioritize:** In-person

**The key to any great brainstorm:** Create an atmosphere where people can freely throw out their thoughts without the pressure to be right.

**The need:** It's all about psychological safety, and that is harder to build in hybrid without the non-verbal cues that [support turn-taking](#) during in-person team time. But hybrid brainstorms have a key upside: anyone—busy executives, creative luminaries—can more easily beam in.

### Have Better Hybrid Brainstorms

- **Think Big**  
Who is a great "get" for this hybrid brainstorm who would otherwise be unavailable? Who will bring a fresh perspective or skillset?
- **Provide a Warm-up**  
Send a pre-read and some idea-generating exercises in advance to remote attendees that they can submit via video or writing.
- **Check Your Tech**  
Before the meeting, position the camera so everyone can see the whiteboard. And use [Whiteboard in Teams](#) to give everyone a shared doc in which to write, draw, and share images or emojis.
- **Foster Trust**  
Be intentional about building a positive and supportive atmosphere so that people can be vulnerable in sharing ideas and outside-the-box thinking.
- **Mind the Chat**  
Every meeting should have a dedicated note taker to capture insights and ideas, but all participants can use Teams live chat to capture thoughts and contribute ideas.
- **Summarize**  
When you share a thoughtful follow-up, you capture critical creative breakthroughs and show participants that you value their time and energy. Don't forget to include the meeting recording and transcript.

## Meeting Type: Discuss & Decide

**Can it Be Asynchronous?** Potentially

**Style to Prioritize:** Hybrid

Decision-making meetings usually need to be synchronous, as they require the group to work through challenges together, and they can often be hybrid.

### Keep "Discuss & Decide Meetings" on Track

#### Seek Out Diverse Perspectives

- Ensure key stakeholders are present and available.
- Consider including invitees that may not be part of the decision-making process but can offer unique points of view and insights—a new-to-the-workforce employee, a leader from another team, or a trusted external partner.

#### Share a Structured Agenda

A lively discussion can quickly get off track.

- Include a target length of time for each section.
- When no one is presenting slides, keep the agenda on-screen to remind everyone of the topics of discussion and the decisions that need to be made.

#### Prepare a Proposal

To focus the meeting, share a preliminary draft of a solution or plan that people can react to and improve upon.

#### Define the Decision-making Process

Does everyone need to agree? Does a majority need to agree? Who has veto power? Do votes and potential objections need to be recorded?

#### Review Proposal and Seek Inputs

Before implementing a decision, give attendees a chance to weigh in on the proposal and an action plan. Proactively seek out diverse perspectives during the discussion.

#### Document the Decision

Once feedback is incorporated, create and provide a detailed record of decisions, responsibilities, and actions.

## Meeting Type: Design & Create

**Can it Be Asynchronous?** Yes

**Style to Prioritize:** Hybrid

Projects in which people divide tasks and complete them independently can still require check-ins, standup meetings, and ad hoc syncs to align and solve problems and unlock new ideas.

**The right mindset:** Be intentional about these meetings—they can sometimes be replaced by a request for status updates in a chat channel, or by notes or flags shared in a collaborative document.

### Make Every Standup a Useful Standup

These check-ins are a chance for everyone on the team to discuss problems or blockers and call out creative opportunities. Here's how to make them effective.

#### Cadence

Experiment to determine the cadence that hits the right balance—you want to preserve focus time while making sure everyone stays in sync.

- Start with biweekly. If that's too infrequent, move to weekly, then daily, and so on.

#### Reliability

Stick with the same time of day or week, and prioritize it.

- Standups start to really frustrate people when the team lead moves them around all the time.

#### Duration

You want to keep it moving and keep it short—any thorny issues that emerge should be dealt with offline or in another meeting.

#### Dependencies

Who is waiting on whom for what so they can accomplish their next task?

#### Necessity

Does this meeting still need to happen? Or is the team just going through the paces? Be ruthless about ending a recurring meeting that no longer serves your team.

## Meeting Type: 1:1 Connect

**Can it Be Asynchronous?** No

**Style to Prioritize:** In-person

Data shows that in flexible models, regular connects between employees and their managers [build resilience and foster a culture of trust](#)—especially when it comes to new hires.

### Have Effective 1:1s

#### Start Today

A [study from Microsoft's Workplace Analytics](#) team found that it's never too late to create a new norm around having longer and more frequent one-on-ones—it actually helped to keep employee workloads manageable.

#### Use Viva Insights for Managers

Features in "My Team" will prompt you to schedule time to connect with your team, among other useful reminders and insights.

#### Show You Care

At Microsoft, we embrace a [management framework](#) of "Model, Coach, Care." And in the pandemic we [learned](#) just how critical the "care" component was.

- Reinforce that you care about people, show up to syncs on time and refrain from rescheduling if possible.

#### Make Space

It's easy to turn one-on-one into working sessions, but this is your time to put the person before the work.

- Ask curious questions about how people are doing, what they need, and how you can support their career goals.

#### Personalize It

You can't apply a one-size-fits-all approach to one-on-ones. An approach that energizes Jamal may exhaust Mary.

- Workplace experts like [Frances Frei](#) point out that remote employees may need more one-on-one time.
- With each individual, experiment with cadence, approach, duration, and location to hone in on the most effective approach.

## Meeting Type: Team Building & Bonding

**Can it Be Asynchronous?** No

**Style to Prioritize:** In-person

Team building is about becoming more efficient, effective problem solvers together. Team bonding is about creating trust and building [social capital](#).

**Key idea:** And both actions are important: employees who have thriving relationships with their immediate team members [report](#) better wellbeing and higher productivity.

- To learn more about designing a team on-site, [check out this guide](#).

**Org-wide meetings** intended to build social capital and communicate company culture should be synchronous, and leaders should encourage in-person attendance when possible.

- Occasional off-site events are an option, but so is designating a single day of the month on which as many people as possible come to the office.

**For team meetings**, an hour is a good time frame, but bonding activities can be as short as 15 minutes.

- A gathering of almost any size can serve to build social capital, although care must be taken to be inclusive so that no one feels left out.
- Leaders will need to leverage their creativity and sensitivity to design experiences that are enjoyable for everyone.

### Organize Effective Team-building and Bonding Exercises

- Think about what **outcome** you'd like to achieve. Want people to get to know each other better? Want them to tackle unique, fun challenges and work together in novel ways?
- Consider activities that allow employees to **share something they've learned** with the team. It's informative for everyone and develops communication skills for the presenter.
- **Encourage**, rather than require, attendance by making events enticing in the first place. (As Microsoft CVP Jared Spataro points out in [this recent keynote](#), free food can go a long way.)
- Find times that **don't disadvantage parents** or other people with evening obligations and think beyond happy-hour drinks—trivia challenges and other games are more inclusive ice breakers.
- **Go first** when it's time to share or contribute something personal to encourage others to participate.
- Look for opportunities to **pair up** employees who don't normally work together. Ask them to gather info about each other and then share it with the group.

## Takeaway

Flexibility is a cornerstone of this new era of work, and optimal meeting arrangements won't always be possible. But it's helpful to know what approaches are most likely to yield the best results, and to strive for an ideal form of collaboration.