



Objective Setting in Hybrid Teams

Guidance

Guidance – Setting SMART Objectives

Introduction

Hybrid working, like any new way of working, can deliver many benefits but requires additional thought and planning to explore how outputs can be maintained to ensure success.

Every role is different, but for the majority of hybrid workers an output-based approach to work is likely to work well, ensuring that outputs (and their quality) matter more than where or when work is carried out. This places a greater emphasis on objective setting (and progress updates at regular meetings such as one-to-ones) and managers/teams should consider objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART).

Managers should work with their teams to establish clear objectives and timescales then ensure these are reviewed periodically and that regular feedback is provided as required. This is encapsulated in the annual Performance and Development Review, but the same principles can apply to shorter-term aims and objectives in support of longer-term goals.

This guide is intended to support managers in setting SMART objectives, with a particular focus on their implementation in a hybrid environment.

Further resources can be found in the [Hybrid Working Toolkit](#).

What are SMART Objectives?

Objectives are defined by a beginning and an end point. They go beyond day-to-day tasks and in essence are a clear statement of something that needs to be accomplished by a specific date. Objectives can be set for individuals, or shared across teams.

‘SMART’ is simply an acronym to guide those involved in setting objectives to ensure that the objectives are:

- S** Specific
- M** Measurable
- A** Achievable
- R** Relevant
- T** Time-Bound

Each letter in the acronym can be used to prompt further consideration of key issues and some examples of relevant considerations for managers are noted below along with specific notes to consider for hybrid working in particular:

Specific

- Ensure objectives have a clear focus and outcome

- Provide a clear explanation of what needs to be achieved, ensuring that the discussion is two-way and that colleagues are involved in shaping their objectives and how they are to be achieved
- Take time to check and confirm understanding (this may be over the course of more than one discussion)

'Specific' in a hybrid environment

When managing a hybrid team it is particularly important to ensure the specifics of any objective are set out clearly and are recorded so that both the manager and the employee have a point of reference, readily accessible either on or off campus. The casual and informal conversations, whereby an employee might check their understanding of an objective, are not as likely to happen when the team is working from different locations over the course of a typical working week.

Hybrid working presents an opportunity for people to enjoy increased autonomy and a sense of ownership of their objectives, however this means that the initial discussions around the specifics and details are even more important.

Measurable

- Discuss and agree a set of concrete criteria for measuring progress towards, as well as the overall achievement of, an objective
- Measurements should leave little room for dubiety over whether or not an objective has been met (this is easier if the objective is 'specific' as per above).
- These measurements (and how they will be recorded, reported and communicated) should be agreed by the managers and individuals/teams to avoid any doubt as to whether progress is on track
- The manager and individual/team should agree the frequency of reporting on progress, how/where this will be done and any digital tools to be used
- One-to-one meetings to review progress and provide feedback must be frequent, particularly for hybrid teams

'Measurable' in a hybrid environment

Establishing clear measures and arrangements for reviewing progress are essential for the effective management of hybrid teams. If employees have concrete measures and clear parameters set, then they can work autonomously whether they are in the physical workplace or working remotely. The use of digital tools for recording, communicating and reviewing progress becomes critical to successful operational management.

As well as frequent one to one meetings, managers of hybrid teams should consider holding frequent team meetings to communicate progress against a range of objectives. This helps to give visibility, foster a sense of belonging and maintain team cohesion, which might otherwise be reduced when teams are working at different locations.

Achievable

- Objectives should present adequate stretch and challenge for someone, in order to be motivational, but not to the extent that they feel incapable
- The manager should ensure that the employee has the necessary knowledge, skills, experience and time to be able to achieve the objective
- Any support required should be arranged and put in place, both in relation to development interventions but also in terms of the necessary equipment and resources.

‘Achievable’ in a hybrid environment

In the context of hybrid working there may be a requirement for additional IT resources to be made available for colleagues. Managers should also think about the nature of work - if this has changed due to working remotely there may be a requirement for development of skills and/or knowledge.

When discussing how someone feels in terms of their capability and confidence in relation to a project it may be advisable to do this face to face as often managers can find it easier to read someone’s body language when they are face to face rather than during a virtual meeting. If a face-to-face meeting cannot be arranged then managers should at least allow employees a reasonable amount of time to consider an objective before confirming their commitment.

Relevant

- Individual objectives should be relevant to and aligned with the team’s overall strategy and operational plan (*if hybrid working has altered the overall remit or direction of the function/team it may be that some long-standing objectives are no longer relevant*)
- Bearing in mind that a sense of purpose is a key motivational driver, managers should devote adequate time to discussing the alignment between individual & team objectives and the overall functional priorities. Colleagues are more likely to engage in and commit to objectives when the relevance is clear and understood

‘Relevant’ in a hybrid environment

When leading hybrid teams it becomes even more important for managers to communicate operational plans and clarify how each team member’s objectives align to these. Electronic platforms/tools should be used for this so that individual and team objectives and projects are visible and accessible at all times and from any work location. This can also help to nurture team cohesion which might not occur as naturally as when everyone is working together in the physical workplace.

Time-Bound

- Managers and individuals/teams should discuss and agree on dates for the completion of the overall objective, as well as for key milestones along the way
- It is important that any constraints or influencing factors are identified and accommodated when agreeing on timeframes
- Flexibility should be built into timeframes to allow for iteration and increased agility

'Time-bound' in a hybrid environment

It is important for the impact of hybrid working to be considered when agreeing timeframes. Hybrid working can often provide more focused working time without interruption, so impacts on timescales may be positive in some types of role however as with any new way of working it is often prudent to pay particular attention to early progress and to test, trial and adapt as needed to ensure that agreed timescales are appropriate.