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Finding Their Feet

Line Managers' Toolkit for
supporting young hybrid workers





Your role matters more than you might think

As a line manager, you are often the most important point of reference in a young employees' working life. You set the tone of interactions, you can open doors and be the first to notice when something is not quite right. This matters more than ever in hybrid workspaces, where many of the informal moments of learning are likely to occur less frequently: unplanned introductions next to the coffee machine, observation of colleagues in action and impromptu feedback while walking to the desk together. Young staff starting their careers in hybrid environments are coping with multiple challenges at once: they are learning not just a new job, but how to navigate hybrid work, how to build professional relationships in person and online and how to make themselves visible.

A young man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a light blue shirt and a tan blazer, is smiling and holding a smartphone. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

How can this toolkit help you in your role?

This toolkit is designed to support you in that role, not with a prescriptive recipe for success, but with a set of reflective questions to help you think about what your team members might need and how you can create the conditions for them to thrive. You are the one who understands the context and the people involved and will need to use your judgement about what might work when.

This guide was created based on cross-sector research we carried out with young hybrid workers who have shared with us their challenges as well as things that made a difference for them. We have captured the core take-away points in our BOND framework. BOND focuses specifically on supporting young starters in hybrid work. It highlights four areas of focus: Belonging, Opportunities for Connection, New Routines, and Dedicated Support.

How to use the toolkit?

We recognise that you are already likely juggling many competing demands and this toolkit is not designed to add to your workload but to help you reflect on your current practices and identify where targeted changes could make a real difference for you team. We have organised the toolkit around the employee lifecycle. To help you develop in your role, we have prepared a set of self-reflective questions. These are designed to prompt you to review your own practices and to consider what you might adapt or develop. You can also consult our checklist with specific tips, separately or as a companion to this toolkit. You can expand the questions as your practice evolves and when talking to your peers. Think of it as an invitation to be more intentional about something you might already be doing.

BOND Framework



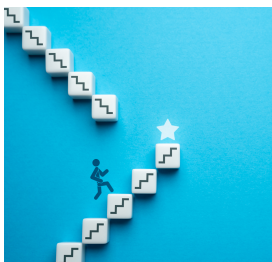
The BOND framework translates evidence into action, using a set of mutually reinforcing commitments to embed across the employee lifecycle.



B – Belonging: Fostering connection to others and to the purpose and values of the organisation.



O – Opportunities for Connection: Proactively designing both digital and physical spaces for collaborative activities to reduce isolation, with connection as an ongoing commitment.



N – New Routines and Skills: Developing specific hybrid-working skills among young employees to help them develop sustainable working practices and perform their best.



D – Dedicated Support: Providing tailored support that makes a difference rather than "one-size-fits-all" packages.



Induction and Onboarding

What does good induction look like in a hybrid environment?

Starting a new job is daunting for anyone, but for young graduates entering a hybrid environment, the challenges are compounded as they have so much more to learn and might be dealing with more precarious living conditions. Without the natural rhythm of daily office life, it is easier to feel disconnected from colleagues and harder to understand how one's role fits within the wider organisation. Our research shows that this sense of disorientation and anxiety can linger well beyond the first few weeks, particularly when hybrid arrangements are unclear or when new starters lack the connections to ask for help informally.

What can you do to help?

The questions on the next pages invite you to think about how you can actively reduce newcomer anxiety and build trust from the outset: through the welcome you create, the connections you might help to broker, the clarity you provide about hybrid expectations and the effort you invest in helping new starters understand the purpose behind their work. Some of the most effective actions our research participants described were small and deliberate: a well-timed introduction, a conversation that opened the door to honest dialogue, or a manager who made themselves consistently present and approachable.

Reflective Questions 1

Creating a welcome

Think about what the first days and weeks will feel like for your new employee. What signals will they receive about whether they are genuinely wanted and valued? Are there inclusive welcome actions you can take early on, or even before they start? A welcome message to the wider team costs little but can make a significant difference. If you are planning any social activities, consider whether they are accessible to everyone: a lunch, for example, tends to be more inclusive than after-work drinks.

Building connections

How can you ensure that you and your team are consistently present, both digitally and in person, during the early weeks? Who in the wider organisation would be useful for your new employee to know, and can you help broker some of those introductions rather than leaving them to chance? Have you considered assigning a buddy? A peer who can answer informal questions reduces reliance on you and helps new starters feel less alone. Think also about your role as their advocate: are there meetings or projects where you could begin to give them visibility beyond your immediate team?



Reflective Questions 2

Setting clear expectations

Have you had an explicit conversation about how hybrid working operates in your team? New graduates may not feel comfortable asking about this unprompted. Are expectations around in-office attendance, digital presence and response times clearly communicated? Ambiguity here is a common source of anxiety. How can you create enough trust and openness that your new employee feels comfortable raising early challenges or preferences with you?

Connecting them to purpose

Have you considered how you might helping your new employee understand the purpose of the organisation and where their role fits within it? Could a series of informal conversations with colleagues from other departments help them build a broader picture early on? Have you talked with them about what meaningful work looks like for them personally?

Thinking ahead

How long do you expect induction and onboarding to last, and does this align with your new employee's own expectations? Our research suggests this period often extends beyond what organisations formally plan for. How will you know if they need more support as the weeks progress, and what would prompt you to check in?

Learning and Development

What if hybrid working was seen as an opportunity for development?

Learning and development looks different in a hybrid environment but not simply because it is harder. Done thoughtfully, hybrid working can expand the opportunities available to young graduates: digital tools can connect them with colleagues across the organisation more readily than a traditional office setting might allow and deliberately designed learning activities can be more equitable than the informal, proximity-based learning that has always tended to favour those who happened to be in the right place at the right time. Some participants in our research described hybrid working as genuinely enabling their development, particularly when they had managers who were proactive about creating structured opportunities for feedback, connection and growth.

Where can you make the biggest difference?

One dimension of learning that does require more active attention in a hybrid context is tacit knowledge: the informal understanding of how things work, whom to ask and what the unwritten norms are. This tends not to travel as naturally across digital channels and may need to be made more explicit. The questions on the next pages encourage you to reflect on different learning needs, how you might create space for peer learning and how you ensure that development opportunities are allocated fairly across your team, including to those who might be less visible due to their work patterns and more junior position.



Reflective Questions 3

Try to make the invisible just a bit more visible

Much of what young graduates need to learn in a new role is never written down. Is there a way can you help make the unwritten rules of your team more explicit: who to go to with different kinds of questions, how meetings tend to work, what good looks like in practice? Are there opportunities for peer shadowing or structured observation that could help? Would encouraging a culture of 'ask early, ask often'; help your new employee feel more confident about seeking guidance when they need it?

Creating spaces (in person and online) to learn together

Learning in a hybrid environment does not have to be a solitary experience. Can you create additional opportunities for mutual learning, feedback and connection that bring together employees working in different ways and places? Think beyond formal training: shared projects, informal lunchtime sessions or conversations across teams can all open up new avenues for development. Who else in your organisation could contribute meaningfully to your graduate employees' growth?



Reflective Questions 4

Being seen as approachable and responsive

Do your young staff know when and how to reach you, both online and in person? Making your availability clear removes a barrier that can prevent new starters from asking for help when they need it. It is useful to invest in understanding how your new employee learns best. Do you know what kind of support they are looking for? Being genuinely responsive to different learning styles and needs does not require significant extra effort but it can make a big difference in how supported someone feels.

Making sure no one is overlooked

Development opportunities are not always distributed evenly and in a hybrid environment those who are less physically present can easily miss out on informal mentoring, stretch assignments or timely feedback. How are opportunities allocated in your team, both formally and informally? Are there ways of increasing the visibility of your young staff's work through digital means, such as virtual coffee meetings, lunchtime talks or contributions to wider team discussions? It is worth regularly asking yourself whether everyone in your team has genuinely equal access to the opportunities that will help them grow.



Performance, Reward & Recognition

What makes a difference to performance management of young hybrid workers?

Many young staff enter the workforce with a strong desire to prove themselves and in a hybrid setting, where visibility is less difficult to secure, that desire can easily turn into overworking or anxiety about whether their contributions are being noticed. However, as many participants in our study explained, the autonomy of hybrid working can be genuinely enabling: it can give young employees space to develop their own work rhythm, take ownership of their work and build confidence. What makes the difference, in most cases, is the quality of the relationship with their line manager, and particularly whether feedback, recognition and honest dialogue are consistently present.

What signals are you (inadvertently) sending?

In a hybrid environment, the way performance is assessed and recognised takes on added significance. Mistakes that might once have been resolved quietly in a corridor conversation can feel more permanent and more exposing when they happen online. Contributions that go unacknowledged can feel invisible in ways that erode motivation. The questions on the next pages invite you to reflect on how you recognise effort and progress, how you respond when things do not go to plan, and how you create the conditions for feedback to flow in both directions. They also ask you to think about what your young employees specifically need from you at this stage of their careers and how you can support them to grow without inadvertently adding to the pressure they already place on themselves.



Reflective Questions 5

Recognising the pressure to perform

Findings a job can be very challenging for young people. It is therefore not surprising that they will want to put their best foot forward, often at a high cost to themselves. How do you monitor the wellbeing of your team alongside their output? Are there signs that someone might be doing too much rather than too little? How can you create a culture where working sustainably is genuinely valued, not just working hard?

Giving and receiving feedback

Regular, specific feedback is one of the most powerful tools available to you as a line manager and it matters particularly for young employees who may not yet have a reliable sense of their own progress. How consistently do you offer feedback on what is going well, not just on what needs to improve? Have you created the right conditions for upward feedback too, so that your employees feel comfortable telling you honestly what they need and how they experience your management? How do you respond when they do?



Reflective Questions 6

Recognising contribution beyond task delivery

Performance in a hybrid environment, as in others, is rarely just about output. How do you recognise and reward employees who invest in building connections, supporting colleagues or contributing to a positive team culture? Are there ways to make that kind of contribution more visible, both within your team and across the wider organisation?

Understanding what your employees need

Young hybrid workers are not a homogeneous group and the support they need is likely to evolve over time. What have you observed about the specific needs of the young people in your team? Do you have a clear sense of where each of them is in their development and what the next stage of growth looks like for them? Is there a way of involving them more actively in shaping their own development so that they can help you help them?

Responding to mistakes to communicate the right message

How do you respond when mistakes happen? In a hybrid environment, where things that go wrong online can feel more permanent and more exposing, the tone you set has a significant impact. Can you recall a critical incident and reflect honestly on what it revealed about your instincts as a manager? What would you do differently and what does that tell you about the kind of environment you are trying to create?



Inclusion and Wellbeing

How can hybrid working be an opportunity for both inclusion and employee wellbeing?

The flexibility hybrid working offers can be enabling for employees managing health conditions, caring responsibilities or personal circumstances that a rigid office culture would not easily accommodate. Digital tools can open up new ways for people to contribute and be heard, making it possible to design participation that does not always require speaking up in large groups or being physically present at the right moment. However, inclusion and well-being often does not happen automatically. Our research shows that staff benefitted a lot from line managers who used hybrid working as a prompt to think more deliberately about how their team operated, rather than employed tried and tested solutions from more traditional work contexts.

What does it take to embed inclusion and wellbeing into your everyday management practice?

Creating an inclusive hybrid team is less about grand gestures and more about the cumulative effect of consistent, considered decisions: how meetings are run, whose contributions are acknowledged, whether social activities are genuinely open to everyone and how attuned you are to wellbeing issues in your team. This requires a degree of strategic awareness about your own management style and the culture you are building, including the signals your behaviour sends, the dynamics you notice or miss and how you handle the tensions that can arise when people are working in different ways and places.



Reflective Questions 7

What signals does your own behaviour send?

The culture of your team is shaped in large part by what you model, what you reward and what you allow to pass without comment. How do your own working habits and routines communicate what you value? Do you think that they typically send the messages you have intended about healthy working practices, boundaries and inclusion? Do you have a chance to create space in your week to step back and reflect on how people are experiencing the environment you are helping to build, not just on whether the work is getting done?

Are there patterns of exclusion in your team that you might be missing?

Small moments of exclusion rarely feel significant in isolation but they accumulate. A social activity that not everyone can join, a pattern of conversations that tends to involve the same voices, an assumption made about someone's background or personal circumstances: these are easy to miss if you are not actively looking for them. Can you identify someone in your team who may be finding hybrid working harder to navigate? What steps are needed to better support their integration, both within your team and in the wider organisation? You do not have to solve all problems yourself. You are, however, are probably best positioned to notice them and take action.



Reflective Questions 8

How do people show up online and offline?

People often engage differently across digital and in-person settings, and those differences can reveal a great deal about how comfortable and included they feel. Have you noticed patterns in how your team members contribute in different contexts? How do you adapt your management style across different channels to ensure that everyone has a genuine opportunity to be heard? Are there employees whose contribution might be more visible in one setting than another and how do you account for that?

What inclusive routines have you built and which ones might be missing?

Think about the regular rhythms of your team: how you run meetings, how you mark achievements, how people connect with one another day to day. Which of these routines actively support inclusion and wellbeing and are there some that might inadvertently work against them? How could you use your influence to introduce small, consistent changes that gradually shift the everyday culture of your team? If you were to name inclusive practices already in place, what would it be and how could you build on it?

How do you handle tensions and conflicts?

Tensions and conflicts are a normal part of any team. In a hybrid environment they can be sometimes harder to spot and resolve when some interactions happen online. Looking back, how have you handled situations where relationships in your team became strained? How do you feel about the outcomes? Are there approaches you would take differently and what would better support for working relationships in your team look like going forward?



Dr Sylwia Ciuk & Dr Kay Galpin - July 2026

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For more resources see www.navigatinghybridwork.com

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