

2022 LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SURVEY

# Healthy Teams *in a Hybrid Workplace*



Simmons University  
**Institute for  
Inclusive Leadership**



# Executive Summary

For knowledge workers, the future is indeed hybrid. Members of the Simmons University Institute for Inclusive Leadership Strategic Advisory Board wanted to know more about healthy teams in a hybrid workplace. In the spring of 2022, we surveyed our Simmons Leadership Conference participants and the findings were both confirming and enlightening.

Employees who work in a healthy hybrid team say that they are more productive and more effective. They also say they are more engaged, happier, and more able to do their best work.

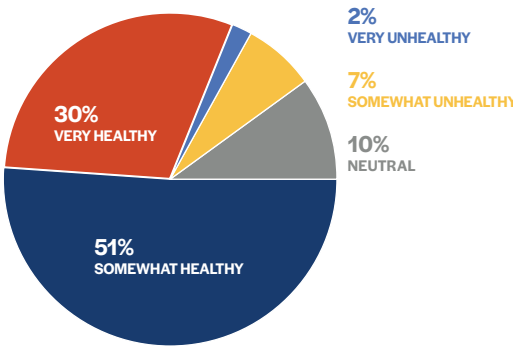
Most survey respondents say their team is healthy: 81% of our respondents characterize their team as very (30%) or somewhat (51%) healthy. Although there are slight differences among respondents depending on their race/ethnicity, none were statistically significant.

Flexibility, communication, and interpersonal connection are the most important characteristics of healthy hybrid teams.

How would you characterize your team today?

**81% of survey respondents say their team is healthy.**

721 participants from the Simmons Leadership Conference in April of 2022 completed our survey.



“This is the way of the future; organizations need to intentionally and proactively modify their processes and train their leaders and teams to work together in this new way.”

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**85% of respondents believe their organization is committed** to having healthy hybrid teams.

**Fostering psychological safety and belonging** are the most important actions managers can take to create a healthy environment.

**Teammates can also contribute to team health by communicating frequently and clearly:** This is the most important behavior both for the survey respondents' colleagues and for themselves.

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We defined a **hybrid team** as any team where some people are co-located some of the time, and a **healthy team** as one with a positive environment that allows team members to do their best work and engage with each other in positive ways. Further, we reminded survey participants that healthy teams also support the mental and physical well-being of team members.

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## WHY

# The benefits of working in a healthy hybrid team



**Key finding:** Employees who work in a healthy hybrid team say that they are more productive and happier.

### Healthy teams benefit the organization

According to our respondents, when they are working in a healthy hybrid team, they are more productive, more effective, and more able to do their best work. They also report being more likely to go “above and beyond” and to speak well of their organization to others.

### They also benefit the individual

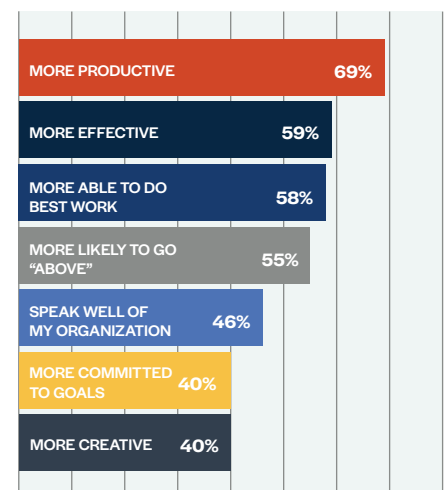
Our respondents also report positive impacts for themselves. The top answers to “When you work in a healthy team in a hybrid workplace, how do you feel?” are:

- I am more engaged
- I feel happier
- I feel better about where I work
- I feel more confident
- I feel more connected to my colleagues

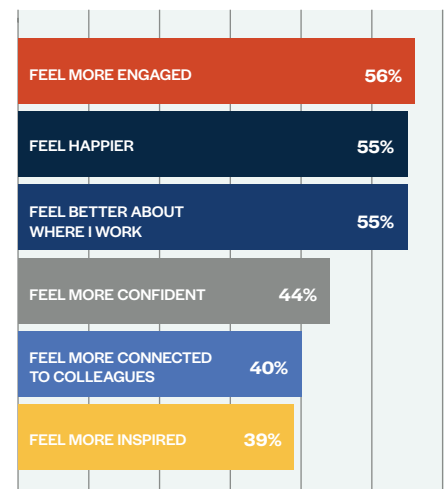
These positive outcomes reinforce the importance stated by many of our respondents that “hybrid is definitely the way of the future” and that healthy hybrid teams are “imperative for success.”

**“Healthy hybrid teams are more efficient, effective, productive, and collaborative.”**

What is the impact when you work in a healthy hybrid team?



How do you feel when you work in a healthy hybrid team?



# What does it mean to have a healthy hybrid team?



**Key finding:** People define a healthy hybrid team as one that offers flexibility in where and how work is done and where there is effective communication and interpersonal connection.

### The top three qualities that describe a healthy hybrid team:

#### 1. Flexibility

Being able to choose how and where work is done is the most frequently cited quality. This includes being able to set boundaries and balance work and life, giving people the freedom to work in the way that makes the most sense to them, and accommodating all working styles.

#### 2. Communication

Communicating frequently, effectively, and openly is the next most frequent attribute. Respondents noted the need to be able to communicate well despite differences in location, time zone, and comfort with virtual communication. They also value a mix of work-related and more personal communication.

#### 3. Interpersonal Connection

Related to communication, the third most cited quality is meaningful connections to build relationships and provide support for each other.

Although these three characteristics rose to the top by a significant margin, many of our respondents also cited the ability to work collaboratively and cohesively, the ability to “get the job done,” and the ability to choose what works best for them as important aspects of a healthy hybrid team (among many others).

**“When people have the flexibility they need to thrive at work and at home, the balance created allows them to focus on what is most important at that time and bring their best self to the table.”**



These findings are from an analysis of an open-ended question “How do you describe a healthy hybrid team?” When we asked respondents to rank order a set of characteristics that we provided (rather than write in their own definitions), the top answer was “Team members are comfortable sharing thoughts and opinions, even ones that may be unpopular or challenging.” The importance of psychological safety will be explored later in this report when we discuss the role of managers in creating healthy hybrid teams. The second choice was “Team members have a clear understanding of expectations,” which speaks to communication. “Team members have a sense of personal connection” was the third choice, again reinforcing the findings above.

In short, the characteristics of a healthy hybrid team are very similar to those of any healthy team, with the added need to manage the complexity of a hybrid environment.<sup>1</sup>

**“It doesn’t look the same for each person. It needs to be flexible and not just a mandate of “you must come into work on this day and be there from 9 to 5PM.” So much has been gained in job satisfaction when we can avoid long commutes, not feel guilty if on Thursdays we leave a little early for a child’s soccer game, etc.”**



1) This survey was conducted in April of 2022. At that time, nearly half of respondents reported that they choose where to work, with another 23% choosing which days to come into the office.

# Fostering healthy hybrid teams



**Key finding:** Managers who help people feel they belong and make it safe for people to take risks create a healthy environment.

**“The leader has such an enormous role in team health.”**

While managerial behavior plays a critical role (and lack of managerial support can make a healthy hybrid team essentially impossible), organizations, individuals and teammates all have a role to play.

### **Most respondents say their organization is committed to having healthy hybrid teams.**

This finding holds true across all demographic groups, although individual contributors and people in entry-level positions are more likely to strongly agree with the statement than people in middle and senior level positions.<sup>2</sup> Although we don't have the data to explain why this might be so, one possibility might be that people at the base of the organization are under less pressure and therefore more likely to experience their organization's support for healthy teams. Alternatively, perhaps front-line managers are paying more attention to this for their teams than their managers are for them.

### **Commitment is demonstrated through communication and training**

When we asked respondents how their organization demonstrates that commitment, the top responses were:

1. They discuss healthy teams in organization-wide communications.
2. They provide training on how to foster healthy hybrid teams.
3. They share best practices for fostering healthy hybrid teams.

2) We reviewed our data to see if there were differences based on race/ethnicity, age, and/or position within the organization. This was the only difference that we found within our dataset. Because our respondents are women who attended the Simmons Leadership Conference, our findings may not be replicable across other demographics. However, we believe our recommendations are valid for most organizations and employees due to the similarity to findings from other research.

## Two key manager behaviors

In our survey we asked respondents, “What did your manager do to create a healthy team environment?” and gave them a set of behaviors to choose from. Two factors tied for first place: “Made it safe for people to take risks” and “Helped people feel they belong.” These findings support the critical need for psychological safety and belonging in all teams (for more on belonging, see our research report [The Importance of Belonging in the Workplace](#)).

## What is the role of socializing?

A somewhat distant third choice was “Created opportunities for the team to socialize.” In contrast, when we asked about the behaviors of teammates that contribute to healthy hybrid teams, participation in team social activities was at the bottom of the list. One possible interpretation of this apparent contradiction is that by creating opportunities for the team to socialize, the manager is fostering communication and relationship building. However, each individual team member can make their own choices about whether to attend.

## For individuals, it’s all about communication

“Communicated clearly and frequently” was the top choice by a significant margin, both when we asked “What behaviors of your teammates contributed to the healthy environment” and “How did you contribute to the healthy environment?”

## Modeling good boundaries is also important

The second choice, both for the respondents’ behavior and the behaviors of their teammates was “Modeled having good boundaries between work and home.”

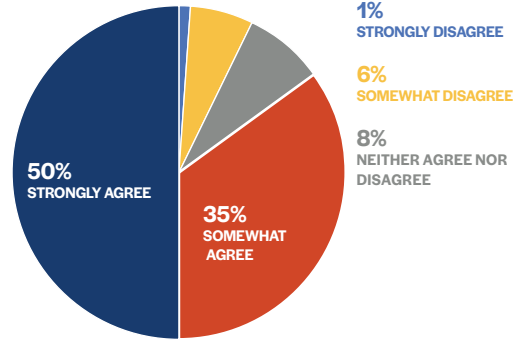
**“Walk the Talk. If we are overwhelmed with work that takes all our bandwidth and cycles, how can we take advantage of resources designed to help with burnout?”**





These findings suggest that responsibility for healthy hybrid teams rests not just with the team leader, but with individual team members as well as the organization’s leadership. If one or more of those fail in their responsibility, the team dynamic will suffer.

85% of survey respondents say their organization is committed to having healthy hybrid teams.



**“Every person on the team has a responsibility to contribute to the team’s health; it is not just about what leaders put in place. Team members should have intentional discussions on how they will work together to be successful ... They should be continuously inspecting how things are going and adapting accordingly.”**



# Fostering healthy hybrid teams — tools for individuals, managers, and organizations



**Key findings:** We offer the following tools for supporting the health of hybrid teams, whether as an individual, a manager, or on behalf of the organization. These tools are derived from insights gained from this study, suggestions offered by our respondents, and our own expertise.



## TOOLS FOR INDIVIDUALS

**Communicate, communicate, communicate:** The most important behavior for fostering healthy hybrid teams is communication. Take advantage of all of the technology-enabled communication mechanisms as well as meeting in person when possible.

**Set and maintain boundaries:** Both for your own health and well-being, and as a role model for others, be clear on your boundaries and do your best to abide by them. You can also help your colleagues set and maintain their own boundaries.

**Foster psychological safety within your team:** Everyone has a role to play in creating psychological safety. As noted in [\*Arrive and Thrive: 7 Impactful Practices for Women Navigating Leadership\*](#), organizational behavioral scientist Amy Edmondson offers three things individuals can do to foster psychological safety:

1. Frame the work as a learning problem, not an execution problem.
2. Acknowledge your own fallibility.
3. Model curiosity and ask lots of questions.

## TOOLS FOR MANAGERS

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**Communicate, communicate, communicate:** Fostering good communication is just as critical for managers, as it is for individuals (and as we shall see shortly, organizations). For managers, we particularly recommend two tools from *Arrive and Thrive*:

1. Assume positive intent — lead with curiosity about the intention of the person with whom you are communicating, and give others the benefit of the doubt.
2. Make it appreciative — look for things to appreciate about your direct reports, and communicate the strengths that you see and the value that you place on those contributions.

**Focus on psychological safety:** Ensure that all team members can be heard, can make mistakes, and can raise concerns and unpopular opinions without fear of retaliation or ridicule. In addition to the tips for individuals above, pay special attention to how you react when someone makes a mistake, asks a question, or voices an unpopular opinion. In those moments it is critical to show that these actions are not just accepted, but welcomed. It's also helpful to solicit questions and contrary opinions.

**Intentionally create belonging:** Our top tips for managers on how to foster belonging include making sure employees feel valued, and being intentional about who is included in conversations, decisions, and social events. Much more information can be found in the report, *The Importance of Belonging in the Workplace*.

**Create opportunities for the group to socialize:** But don't force people to attend. Try to provide different ways of engaging and be mindful of differing locations to lower the bar to participation.

## TOOLS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

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**Communicate, communicate, communicate:** As we saw earlier, our respondents shared that the number one way their organizations show they value healthy hybrid teams is that they discuss them in organization-wide communications. And the number three response was sharing best practices.

**Provide training:** Ensure managers and individuals are able to make the most of the tools that are available, and focus on how to build community and psychological safety in a hybrid environment.



**Hold leaders accountable:** Although this was the least chosen option for what organizations are currently doing, accountability is a significant driver of behavior and an important way to indicate which behaviors are valued.

**Walk the talk:** Achieving healthy teams is virtually impossible if your communications about wellness and healthy teaming aren't matched with respect for boundaries and generally manageable workloads. If work requirements aren't compatible with employees being able to take care of themselves, it's better to acknowledge that reality and find ways to manage those issues first.

**Acknowledge and learn from those who have been working this way for years:** Several of our respondents noted that they have been working on hybrid teams for many years. These groups provide helpful role models that organizations can tap for best practices that work in their specific context.

## AUTHOR

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Drawing on her expertise in gender equity and women's leadership, Elisa creates innovative programming that develops the mindset and skills of leaders at all stages of life so they can foster gender parity and cultures of inclusion. Elisa is a coauthor of [\*The Inclusive Leader's Playbook: The Work of the Inclusive Leader\*](#)<sup>TM</sup>. She is a coauthor of several publications, including [The Importance of Belonging in the Workplace](#) (February 2022), [The Importance of Authenticity in the Workplace](#) (July 2021), [Women's Experiences with "Male Allies"](#) (November 2018) and [Professional Women and Confidence: A New Understanding of the "Gap"](#) (October 2017).



## ABOUT US

Our mission is to develop the mindset and skills of leaders at all stages of life so they can foster gender parity and cultures of inclusion. We offer research-driven programming for individuals and leadership journeys for entire organizations.

Learn more:

[inclusiveleadership.com](https://www.inclusiveleadership.com)

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# Healthy Teams *in a Hybrid Workplace*

**This comprehensive report explores what it means to have a healthy hybrid team, and how managers, individuals, and organizations can contribute to team health in a hybrid environment. Based on the results of a survey with over 720 respondents, we provide new insight on the benefits and challenges of supporting healthy teams operating in a hybrid context.**



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