**Training Fiche**

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| **Title** | Hybrid Work Teams for Rural Micro Enterprises | | |
| **Keywords** | Digital team / Hybrid working / Digital tools for management/Reflective Practise/ Motivation | | |
| **Language** | English | | |
| **Objective and Goals** | | | |
| * That participants appreciate the challenges and opportunities of hybrid work for rural micro enterprises * That participants are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to develop a rural micro enterprise hybrid work team model | | | |
| **Learning Outcomes** | | | |
| At the end of this training the participant will:   * Be able to identify and value the potential rewards and opportunities offered by the rural micro enterprise Hybrid workplace * Understand the challenges and possible solutions of managing small hybrid teams * Recognize different digital tools for Hybrid Team Management * Foster an appreciation of the value of reflective practice * Have an awareness of the legal responsibilities of rural micro enterprise employers in relation to hybrid working * Understand how motivation can be enhanced in rural micro enterprise hybrid work teams. | | | |
| **Contents** | | | |
| **Unit 1 Promoting Effective Teamwork in a Hybrid Work Model for Rural Micro Enterprises**   * 1. **The Hybrid Workplace – The Future of Work**   **Hybrid working is a form of flexible working where workers spend some of their time working remotely (usually, but not always, from home) and some in the employer's workspace.**  One of the few positive results of the pandemic has been the transformation of the workplace. Prior to 2020 a hybrid workplace was rare with ‘Working from Home’ reserved for exceptional circumstances. In 2020 this pattern was transformed. To the surprise of many, reliance on firstly Virtual work structures and post pandemic Hybrid work structures has for the most part worked very well. For the rural microenterprise it has been especially valuable in opening up the national, and global labour market. Such businesses are no longer disadvantaged in comparison to their urban counterparts in attracting and retaining the best staff. Making the most of this new workforce reality is a huge challenge.  The advantages of Hybrid work include;   * Improved productivity * More scheduling flexibility * A stronger work-life balance * Time money and most especially energy savings on commuting * Dramatically improved access to skills * Money saved on office space   Disadvantages or Fears include;   * Staff feeling less connected to the organization's culture and sense of team * Impaired collaboration and workplace relationships * Disrupted work processes * Less recognition of job performance * Productivity fears * Resentment among the workforce obliged by role function or close location to attend the workplace in person more frequently   The advantages of hybrid work substantially outweigh the biggest disadvantages. Fair transparent leadership, reliance on ever-improving technologies and understanding that more effort is required to ensure the natural communications channels and coordination in the physical workplace are substituted for, go a long way in addressing any difficulties.  **1.2. Creating High Performing Hybrid Teams**  **Face-to-Face Meeting and Office attendance**  Rural micro enterprises are typically more connected to place and community. Getting the team together on a regular scheduled basis is very important for teamwork and fostering trust. Agreed ‘Anchor’ Days where all employees are obliged to attend the workplace is one popular option. Having fair and enforced rules about workplace attendance and ensuring that those who attend the office more frequently don’t miss out on the advantages of working from home is crucial.  **Clearly Explain and Map Out Tasks and Processes**  Coordination is more complicated in a hybrid work setting, not just because people are working in different locations but because patterns of task completion may not be established. There’s more scope for confusion which can be managed by closer attention to the detail of responsibilities, deadlines, reviews and feedback.  **Establish Clearcut ‘Rules of engagement’ for Communication**  Hybrid teams communicate much less frequently than in face-to-face interactions and Communication norms need to be clearly established. This can include agreement on when to use different modes of communication, i.e email v phone or written, timeframes for expected responses and scheduling of regular meetings.  **Establish Workplace Rhythm**  In a traditional workplace, the rhythm of the working day such as breaktimes, specific routine task completion times, opportunities for joint problem solving and consultation come naturally. This adds structure, comfort and security to the working day. As much as is feasible, without being over rigid this should be aspired to in the hybrid workplace. Initiatives like virtual coffee breaks are worth considering.  **Consciously Target Isolation**  Work is a social exercise and combatting isolation is very necessary in fostering a culture of enjoyable rewarding work. The capacity to work alone has a lot of advantages, but the necessity of building in time for social contact, maybe in the margins of online meetings, planned team building exercises or online brief catch up meetings are helpful. Use of collaborative software that allow for easy real-time discussion should be prioritised.  **Encourage Boundaries**  One of the most significant challenges identified in Hybrid working is the difficulties in disengaging from work. While legislation has been developed to address this, in micro-enterprises with more familiar relationships this is more difficult. Clear written guidelines, supported by team discussion are necessary to ensure all staff can disengage at the appropriate time without guilt or disadvantage.  **Track Commitment and Results**  While the negatives of micromanagement are well known, in the hybrid/virtual setting there is no easy way to observe engagement and productivity. Professional trust is fundamental, but nonetheless structures which track progress are very necessary. Methodologies such as Objectives and Key Results (OKR) where targets are quantified are helpful and support a democratic leadership structure.  **One-to-One Engagement**  Leaders’ one-to-one performance management and mentorship interactions with team members have always been a key part of making any teamwork. Keeping the organizational key vision in sight and two-way communication channels remains open. Making sure this feature of the hybrid monthly calendar remains intact is essential.  **UNIT 2 ICT Tools for Hybrid Workplace Management**  **2.1. ICT tools for Hybrid Workplace Management**  Today a wide range of ICT tools to improve business and team management in hybrid/virtual work settings are available. However clear two-way communication explaining a clear rationale of choice and benefit both to the organization and employee is very necessary. Training and modeling and a scaled approach to introduction is needed.  Some of the most useful tools are briefly described below.  **Dropbox**  Dropbox is a cloud-based file holding service which can be synched across devices. It is completely customizable. Users can control access and permissions for files stored on Dropbox and work both online and offline. The profession version offers storage space of three terrabytes and a maximum file size of 50GB.  **Monday.com**  **monday.com** is a work management platform that helps teams streamline their workflow, collaborate seamlessly, and manage complex projects. This includes project and task management, CRM, marketing, design, human resource etc.  **Zoom**  **Zoom** is an online video conferencing platform that can be used through a computer desktop or mobile app. The paid version does not have a meeting time limit while the free version has a meeting time limit of 40 minutes.  **MicrosoftTeams**  MicrosoftTeams gathers up to 250 participants and online events with up to 10,000 participants. In addition to video conferencing, Teams offers extensive virtual collaboration features, including Office 365 integration.  **Google Drive**  Google Drive is a cloud-based storage service that enables users to store and access files online as well as share files and work collaboratively online. The types of files you can work with are similar to files that can be created with various Microsoft Office programs, WORD, Excel and Powerpoint.  Initial investment in the applications listed above for the rural microenterprise is relatively inexpensive. The level of training required to use these applications is also reasonably modest. The greater challenges lie in understanding when and how to use these tools and to ensure that their use is consistent across the organisation. For example, clarifying when a Zoom meeting is required as against an email, the specifics of how to manage the production of a document in Google drive? This is specific to each organisation needs. Trial and Error measured through structured Analysis and reflection is very necessary.  **2.2. Reflective Practice for ICT Tool Selection and Use in Hybrid Teams**  Reflective Practise is an essential part of learning from practise to ensure that insight gained informs practice. For new processes such as the embedding of ICT tools in support of Hybrid work it is especially useful. It is a skill that can be developed over time and practise. **It** involves self-awareness, continuous learning and growth to make better decisions.  The basic elements of successful reflection include:   * Time to reflect * Something to reflect upon * Medium for capturing reflection * Skills in reflection * Honesty * Feedback   Capturing reflection in written format in a Reflective Journal is essential. Formats can vary but a simple structure which works well addresses the following fundamental questions:   * **What?** * **So What?** * **Now What?**   Reflection is a continuous process and in the hybrid workplace management scenario might be of best use in group format. It need not be a very time-consuming exercise. What’s most important is that it be employed consistently.  ***UNIT 3 Hybrid Working - Employer Obligations***  **3.1. *Hybrid Working - Employer Obligations***  While there are differences in detail between jurisdictions in the European Union, employers have a legal duty of care to their employees regardless of the location of their work.  **Health and Safety**  Employers are legally bound to ensure that employees are not at risk from long term Health and Safety dangers regardless of where they work. In the case of Hybrid working this may require for example;  **Setting up and Virtual supervision of Ergonomic workspaces**  **Visual Display Unit Assessments**  A sensible balanced agreement between Employer and Employee is necessary to agree on the resources and equipment required for the employee to safely work from home. Employers should be expected to contribute significantly to any costs incurred.  **The Right to Disconnect**  The pandemic has seen many EU jurisdictions introduce ‘Right to Disconnect’ legislation covering the right to disengage from work and not engage in work-related electronic communications, such as emails or other messages, during non-work hours. This includes break time during the working day as well as after hours. It’s important that the rural micro enterprise is fully aware of the specifics of this in their own jurisdiction. In a rural micro enterprise this can be complicated by.  **Organisational Culture**  There may be established patterns of behaviour where communication outside of agreed working hours is acceptable. This requires leadership from the top to be changed.  **Immediate Work Pressures**  Successful and expanding rural micro enterprises will very likely have occasions where deadlines and customer/client needs necessitate unexpected extra work. Having a detailed renumeration or time off in lieu policy to cover what should be rare situations is necessary. Should rare become normal is a good indicator that it’s time to expand the workforce.  **Unit 4 Keeping Hybrid Teams Motivated**  **4.1. Keeping Hybrid Teams Motivated**  In a workplace where some employees may attend the office on a full-time basis, some attend perhaps a couple of days a week and some employees work on a fully virtual basis motivation is especially challenging. Fairness and all-inclusiveness for all staff play a key role in effective hybrid team management.  Some factors to consider which impact on motivation include;  **Proximity Disadvantage**  Staff obliged by location or job function to attend the central workplace on a daily basis may feel unfairly disadvantaged in comparison to staff working on a hybrid or virtual basis. Close proximity to the central workplace should not dictate decisions on hybrid work possibility. Where job function requires daily attendance, the employee should be fairly incentivized either financially or otherwise (reduced working hours, more vacation days etc.)  **Reward and recognition**  Employees appreciate being recognised for their efforts in the workplace. Hybrid working makes it more difficult to recognize achievement, particularly in the more casual moments of acknowledgement of a job well done. Effective teamwork structure including a degree of mentorship and consciously taking time for recognition is important.  **Organised Work Schedules**  Hybrid working offers a lot of flexibility but this can easily become chaotic. Uncertainly can be demotivating and a perception of unfairness can sometimes develop. A shared daily work calendar and efforts to implement regular scheduled events or meetings are helpful.  **Shared Decision Making**  In a rural micro enterprise staff will appreciate opportunity to take part in decision making. It signals respect for and trust in the employee. It’s invaluable in promoting teamwork and in many cases a shared decision is the only right decision. Ensuring that Staff working on a hybrid or virtual basis are not excluded from this process is very important.  **Conclusion**  Hybrid work practices have grown in popularity since the pandemic. This will continue into the future. For rural micro enterprises they are especially valuable in providing access to a much larger labour market and offering the flexibility to enhance quality of life. Hybrid work structures bring a lot of obvious advantages but also some disadvantages which need to be carefully managed. Fair transparent leadership and understanding that more effort is required to ensure the natural communications channels and coordination in the physical workplace are substituted for is vital. Supportive Management and Communication Technologies are plentiful, relatively affordable and easy to use for the rural micro enterprise. The challenge lies in their effective management. Reflective practise can be very helpful. Rural micro enterprise employers have different legal responsibilities in the case of hybrid working. It’s important to be aware of developments and changes in national legislation. Motivation in a complex hybrid work environment can be very challenging in ensuring all employees regardless of work location are treated fairly. | | | |
| **Self-evaluation (5 multiple choice queries and answers)** | | | |
| **1. What is a significant perceived** **disadvantage of Hybrid work structures?**  a) Staff may not have strong enough broadband  b) It is very expensive to equip a workspace at home  **c) Staff feeling less connected to the organization's culture and sense of team**  d) There is a bigger risk of work not being done.  **2. What does ‘Workplace rhythm’ relate to?**  a) The chosen background music of the office  **b) The daily routine of the working day**  c) The time the workday begins and ends each day  d) The schedule of full team meetings.  **3. ICT tools for hybrid work management for the rural micro enterprise are;**  a) Prohibitively expensive  **b) Relatively inexpensive**  c) Very difficult to learn how to use  d) Only available for use with IT systems using Windows 10 or above  **4. In Reflective Practise what is considered essential?**  **a) It is essential to write in reflective practise**  b) It is essential that reflective practise be carried out privately  c) It is essential that reflective practice be carried out in a team  d) It is essential that reflective practise leads to immediate action  **5. What is the ‘Right to disconnect’?**  a) The right to turn off your home computer at weekends  b) The right to work outside of the employers premises  **c) The right to disengage from work and not engage in work-related**  **electronic communications during non-work hours**  d) The right to work individually and not as part of a team | | | |
| **Define the EQF (EU Qualification Framework) level of our training (3-5)** | | | |
| Level 3  **X** Level 4  Level 5 | | | |
| **Cross-reference: DigComp 2.2 + EntreComp** | | | |
| **Information and data literacy**  **Communication and collaboration**  **Digital content creation**  **Safety**  **Problem solving**  **Competence(s):**   * Collaborating through digital technologies | | | **Ideas & opportunities**  **Resources**  **Into action**  **Competence(s):**   * Valuing Ideas * Mobilising Others * Planning and Management * Learning through Experience |
| **Glossary (max 5 terms)** | | **Hybrid Working:** is a form of flexible working where workers spend some of their time working remotely (usually, but not always, from home) and some in the employer's workspace.  **The Virtual workplace:** is a place of work that is not specifically located in any one physical area but is located on a virtual platform. It is a network of many workplaces connected by modern information and Communicative Technology irrespective of geographic location.  **Reflective Practise:** involves thinking deeply in a structured written fashion about a certain activity that you are doing or have done and ensuring that insights gleaned influence future activity. | |
| **Resources (videos, reference link)** | |  | |
| **Provided By** | | Irish Rural Link | |
| **Bibliography** | | <https://extension.psu.edu/establishing-an-effective-and-motivated-virtual-team>  <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeannemeister/2023/06/30/four-principles-for-successful-hybrid-working/>  <https://hbr.org/2022/02/5-challenges-of-hybrid-work-and-how-to-overcome-them>  <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/european-industrial-relations-dictionary/right-disconnect>  <https://www.shopify.com/blog/start-online-store#5> | |
| **Related PPT** | | MICRO 2 WP3 Hybrid Work Teams for Rural Micro Enterprises - IRL - EN version.pptx | |
| **Related Materials** | | N/A | |