

TOP 4 CONCERNS ABOUT HYBRID WORK AND HOW LEGAL TEAMS ARE RESPONDING

By Ann Gomez and Myriah Graves

AT A GLANCE

- 6 min read
- Key takeaways from the 2022 Hybrid Work in Law survey.
- Top issues include well-being, retention, in-person bias, and team connections.
- Maintaining productivity, delivering high-quality work, and client satisfaction ranked lower this year.

In our 2022 Hybrid Work in Law survey, we asked legal teams about their experiences with hybrid work. Legal teams identified their top concerns about this new working model. This article highlights those concerns and identifies practical strategies to help legal professionals thrive, wherever they work.

Hybrid work has been identified as a true disruptor in the workplace and the legal industry is forever changed. The vast majority of

legal teams surveyed — 94% — are embracing hybrid work. As teams settle into new hybrid routines, they remain concerned about the top issues threatening to offset this precarious new balance, including well-being, retention, in-person bias, and team connections.

Hybrid Issue 1: Well-Being

Not surprisingly, employee well-being topped the list of concerns about hybrid work, as

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cited by 69% of survey respondents. Legal teams are acutely aware of the need to prioritize well-being and mental health as we continue to navigate unprecedented changes. The only way we can do our best work is if we *feel* our best.

High-performance legal teams are encouraging restorative breaks, including stepping away from their desks at lunch, pausing for mid-afternoon mindfulness moments, and covering one another for uninterrupted vacations.

Legal teams are also talking about wellness more, which is normalizing this important foundation in how we work and live. Leaders are saying things such as, “I’m going for a power walk at lunch and I’m taking this call outside in my backyard,” which helps to encourage others to shift away from a less-effective “all work” culture. Lawyers are finding ways to support one another as well, from holding team-wide step challenges to minimizing off-hours communication and sharing their well-being successes in meetings.

Hybrid Issue 2: Retention

Culture is paramount when it comes to retaining top talent — especially in this employee-driven market. Notwithstanding unprecedented salaries, legal professionals are seeking development opportunities, mentoring, autonomy, and meaningful work. And they have demonstrated they are prepared to switch jobs to find these career enhancers.

To meet these needs, savvy legal teams are prioritizing career development with the backdrop of a flexible one-size-fits-one model. Leading organizations are rolling out hybrid guidelines but are granting individual teams the autonomy to define what will best suit their business and personal needs. Most team members *want* to connect in person and are still committed to doing what is best for the business. But they want to do so without the constraints of unnecessary rules and mandates about facetime. We all crave autonomy and control over our work and

have demonstrated over the past couple of years that we can thrive with this flexibility.

Hybrid work is enhanced when teams co-create routines with consistency and predictability. This allows people to plan their personal lives accordingly, while working in a way to best serve their business goals. Hybrid work is also enhanced by moving away from office time metrics and focusing on results. Professionals can deliver in a more empowered and motivated way when they are granted the control to get the work done and on time, when and how it fits into their schedules.

Hybrid Issue 3: In-Person Bias

Facetime is not a reliable indicator of work effort, and research has proven we can be even more productive when working virtually. Yet in-person bias disproportionately rewards individuals who choose to spend more time at the office with greater access to

opportunities, information, networking, and eventually promotions.

The most effective teams recognize the need to mitigate this bias, especially when certain demographics are more likely to choose to work from home more often. Race, gender, socio-economic status, and other factors may influence who chooses to spend more or less time in the office.

What can leaders do? As a starting point, they must be open to the fact that they may carry this unconscious bias. Leaders can commit to being more deliberate about noticing the efforts and results of virtual team members and be more conscious of when and how they share information. This will help ensure all team members have equal access to opportunities, wherever they work.

Hybrid Issue 4: Team Connections

Prior to the pandemic, teams benefited from the organic connections that happened at the water cooler and outside the boardroom. As we saw during the height of virtual work,

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we have lost many of these unscheduled relationship-builders. Not surprisingly, this led to team members feeling disconnected and unsupported. And without these key relationships, many more were stuck in a high-risk languishing state, as discussed in Adam Grant's popular *New York Times* Article:

[“There’s a Name for the Blah You’re Feeling: It’s Called Languishing.”](#)

Hybrid work prompts us to be more deliberate and proactive about how we foster team connections — and this gives us the opportunity to form stronger connections, in a more inclusive way. For example, team connections were not always equitable within the four walls of the office prior to the pandemic, and not everyone had the same access to coveted mentoring and networks.

High-performance legal teams invest the time to connect and get to know one another on a personal level, regardless of where they work. After all, a team will never be stronger than the bonds they share. The more connected teams are, the more they trust, collaborate, and elevate the performance of one another. Relationships at work matter. They matter a lot.

From coordinated in-office time to a greater emphasis on collaborative work, legal teams are viewing the office as a place to connect (versus retreat). From new associates to managing partners, there is great power in walking the halls and prompting informal conversations. These connections lead to mentoring, unscripted apprentice-type learning, and access to new opportunities. Simply putting an in-person face to a name fast-tracks connections, which can then be nurtured in virtual work.

Productivity, Work Quality, and Client Satisfaction

Interestingly, some key legal industry priorities did not rank as high on the list of hybrid work concerns among those surveyed. These factors include maintaining productivity, delivering high-quality work, and ensuring client satisfaction. While these goals are always important across legal teams, there

was less of a concern about hybrid work disrupting them.

Presumably, the pandemic assured us we can maintain high-quality work and client satisfaction regardless of where we work. We can be even [more productive while working virtually](#). There is also promising research to show we can be [very productive in a hybrid model](#) — when it's well-executed.

Despite a range of hybrid approaches, all survey participants shared a common goal: to help their hybrid teams thrive. Thankfully, there are many practical steps you can take to cultivate productive, connected, and healthy hybrid teams. Contact us if you would like a copy of the 2022 Hybrid Work in Law survey with practical suggestions to help your team thrive, wherever they work.✚

This article was submitted on behalf of the Canadian Section.

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