

Future of hybrid working

Andy Acton considers how dentistry can embrace change.



Hybrid working is very much a current discussion point in many industries, with recent surveys showing around 70 per cent of organisations are intending to adopt a hybrid working approach, and nearly



Andy Acton

is a director at Frank Taylor & Associates.

80 per cent of employees wanting more flexibility in how they work. Dictionary definitions of hybrid invariably refer to the mixture of two or more different elements, and as if to reinforce the point “hybrid” is often interchanged with “flexible”, “new normal” or “agile” when used in the context of the workplace of the future.

Whilst the future of hybrid working is still uncertain in many industries, and dentistry is no exception, it was already being discussed in many sectors before the pandemic hit. The resultant restrictions imposed on many of us have simply hastened that journey and forced more companies and/or sectors to consider the future of

the working environment and what it means for them. Underpinning all of the rhetoric though is the underlying question, would a hybrid working approach enable us to perform better as a company?

Jas Gill, principal at the Moonlight Dental Surgery in Slough, gives his observations on the current trend, “I have a ‘new patient co-ordinator’ who works remotely, they respond to all incoming leads. Once they have qualified a lead, it is passed to my in-house ‘treatment co-ordinator’ who then performs a virtual consultation and gets them booked in for an in-person consultation. When the patient arrives they have an initial consultation

with my head nurse, who performs the scan and photos and explains how the treatment works. Once the patient has expressed an interest to proceed, they are then seen by me to commence. It's proven very effective and time efficient for me, and it has its practical benefits too. I used to be hesitant to employ someone to work remotely, but I'm so glad I took the leap, because I'm seeing more consults now than ever before. Hybrid working is here to stay in my opinion, it provides a wealth of additional opportunities and potential growth. As long as you have the correct systems and monitoring processes in place there is no reason why it wouldn't work."

Clearly an encouraging example for how hybrid working can be effective, Moonlight Dental's success with this approach can be attributed to several factors.

Firstly, staff and management attitudes to change. A positive mind set to embrace the change, tackle initial hurdles as surmountable challenges not 'showstoppers' and see the longer-term bigger picture and the benefits of the hybrid approach. In the context of Jas'

surgery, the end result means patients can be seen at times that are more convenient for them, and at the early stages of treatment, without the need to travel to the practice.

Secondly, data security needs to be utterly robust. Naturally in dental surgeries, security of information, for example patient records, will always have been of paramount importance. It will be necessary to understand how staff are connecting, from where and via what devices. Again, none of these are insurmountable problems but it may be an opportunity to review information security protocols and remind everyone of good practice.

Thirdly, considering how staff interact effectively. Increasingly meetings may themselves become hybrids in terms of how the participants are involved (in short, room or Zoom?). Some will be present in the office or the practice, others connecting remotely via one of the many video or audio-conferencing applications that are available. This also requires all participants of a meeting, particularly those in the room, to be aware that others are

joining virtually. To avoid a proximity bias, it may be helpful to give those who are participating remotely specific agenda items or at least actively solicit their views.

Finally, and a common theme in the plethora of surveys on the topic, is that many employees have missed the social aspect of work, the interaction with colleagues and the opportunity to share ideas and collaborate with them; often this happens on an impromptu basis, and more generally builds a good 'esprit de corps'. There is no doubt that whilst this isn't impossible when working remotely, it is not as effective. It may be that as employees return to the workplace, if it is necessary to make modifications to the working environment, that consideration to creating some spaces where staff can collaborate more easily should be given.

There will undoubtedly be further developments as the journey to hybrid working continues, more lessons learnt, and most likely a few mistakes along the way. Nevertheless, for all involved it is an exciting time and a great opportunity to set the tone for the 21st century workplace.