

Team Pulse by CoastZone — The Deep Dive

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Hybrid isn't a place — it's a team discipline

Companion read to the podcast. Written for consultants working in a Danish/Nordic context. A single-topic deep dive: fresh 2026 data combined with the foundational studies that hold up. Every claim links to its source so you can dig in.

The big picture

The where-do-we-work debate is effectively over. According to [Gallup's hybrid work indicator](#), 52% of remote-capable U.S. employees now work hybrid, 27% fully remote, and only 21% fully on-site. Hybrid has stabilized — it is simply how knowledge work is organized now.

What has *not* stabilized is the quality of how teams do it. [Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2026](#) (data collected through 2025) contains one of the year's most overlooked findings, and a listener asked us back in June to cover psychological safety in hybrid teams — today we deliver. This is honestly labelled a deep dive / masterclass, not breaking news. Three facets: what's moving in the data, what the evidence says actually works, and the Danish research voice who has studied this longer than almost anyone.

Part 1 — What's moving: forced attendance is the most expensive model of all

The headline numbers first. In Gallup's 2026 global data, exclusively remote employees report **25% engagement** and hybrid employees **24%** — but employees in remote-capable roles who are *required* to be on-site sit at just **17%**, the lowest of any group, even below colleagues in jobs that genuinely cannot be done remotely (**18%**). The same pattern shows up in wellbeing: **45%** of both remote and hybrid employees are thriving in life overall, against only **32%** of the forced-on-site group — a ten-point drop in a single year. Their job-market optimism fell **14 points**, the sharpest decline of any group ([Grow Remote's detailed read of the report](#) lays out the year-on-year tables).

The interpretation matters. As Grow Remote puts it, **the perception of denied flexibility may matter as much as flexibility itself**. Workers who know their role could be done remotely, and watch that option being withdrawn, are a distinct — and distinctly at-risk — group. Return-to-office mandates that don't address the underlying leadership problem don't fix engagement; they relocate disengagement to a desk.

And leadership *is* the underlying problem. Gallup has previously attributed roughly **70% of the variance in team engagement to the manager** — while manager engagement itself has fallen to **22%**, down nine

points from 31% in 2022. The hopeful counter-data: in Gallup's best-practice organizations, **79% of managers are engaged** — nearly four times the global average. The lever isn't location policy. It's the human infrastructure around distributed teams.

What to do Monday. If your organization is debating attendance mandates, put the real cost on the table: forced attendance without better leadership produces the least engaged group in the global dataset. Redirect the energy from *where* to *how*.

Part 2 — The evidence: hybrid works when it's designed, not improvised

The foundational study. Stanford economist Nicholas Bloom's randomized controlled trial at Trip.com — published as the NBER working paper [How Hybrid Working From Home Works Out](#) (Bloom, Han & Liang) and as a Nature article in 2024 — randomly assigned **1,612 employees** to full-time office work or hybrid (two home days a week). The result: **resignations fell 33%**, with the biggest retention gains among women, non-managers and long commuters — and **no measurable effect on productivity or promotions over two years** ([Fortune](#), [Stanford Report](#)). One of the few genuine RCTs in this field, and the reason serious researchers stopped arguing about whether hybrid "works" and started asking under what conditions.

The main failure mode. The biggest documented risk in hybrid teams is **proximity bias** — the unconscious tendency to favour the people we see most often, rooted in the mere-exposure effect, showing up in everything from task allocation to promotion decisions ([HRD on proximity bias](#)). Notably, Bloom's RCT found *no* promotion penalty — but that was in a program that was organized, org-wide and endorsed from the top. Proximity bias thrives precisely where hybrid is left informal.

The trainable fix. A randomized controlled trial published in the [European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology \(2025\)](#) tested a team-level intervention with **478 individuals across 56 hybrid teams**. Teams worked through explicit team-regulation strategies — agreeing on how to organize communication, provide social support, build psychological safety and manage psychosocial challenges. The intervention produced **medium effects on team regulation and psychosocial management, and a small but measurable effect on psychological safety — persisting nine weeks later**. In other words: the soft infrastructure of a hybrid team can be deliberately built, in workshops, with lasting effect.

The Danish angle. Danish teams often pride themselves on informality — "we don't need rules, we trust each other." The evidence suggests the opposite conclusion for hybrid teams: trust is the *outcome* of explicit agreements, not a substitute for them.

What to do Monday. Write the team agreement down: how do we communicate, when are we reachable, what goes on video, and how do we flag when something feels off? It is the cheapest evidence-based intervention available for hybrid teams.

Part 3 — The Danish angle: micro-decisions and presence at a distance

The researcher. Denmark's leading voice on this topic is Professor **Christine Ipsen** (DTU), who has researched distance management and hybrid work since 2015. Her core insight: hybrid work is conflict-prone because it consists of thousands of "**micro-decisions**" — who comes in when, what goes on video, who hears the news last — which quietly erode team cohesion (*sammenhængskraft*) if no one takes responsibility for them (**Endelig Mandag podcast #53**). Her conclusion for the public sector: **leaders must be far better equipped for hybrid working life**. Her **SPACE project with HK Kommunal** follows four municipalities and a regional hospital (2021–2025), investigating what hybrid work forms do to trust, fairness and cooperation — the social capital of the workplace.

The practitioner playbook. **Væksthus for Ledelse** (lederweb.dk) has mapped **five competencies distance leaders must master** to remain present at a distance: (1) align expectations about self-leadership — clear, preferably written agreements about who handles what; (2) make goals and values explicit, because the ship must sail without the captain for longer stretches; (3) strengthen trust and relationships; (4) find the right form of control — negotiated, meaningful, fair; and (5) delegate to the team and key people. Buried in competency three is a sentence that deserves a frame: "*Du kan let komme til at forskelsbehandle, hvis nogle medarbejdere eller grupper er tættere på dig til daglig*" — you can easily end up treating people unequally when some are simply closer to you day-to-day. That is proximity bias, in Danish, formulated for municipal leaders before the term became fashionable.

Why this matters for consultants. The Danish research and the international evidence converge on the same design principle: hybrid succeeds at the *team* level, through explicit agreements and deliberate fairness — not at the policy level, through attendance mandates.

What to do Monday. Turn the micro-decisions into shared decisions: put "how do we work hybrid?" on the team meeting once a quarter. And next time you spar with a leader who leads at a distance, walk through the five Væksthus competencies as a self-assessment — fairness first.

The three things to remember

1. **The location debate is over — the leadership debate is not.** Forced attendance without better leadership creates the least engaged group in the world (17%); roughly 70% of a team's engagement traces back to the manager.
2. **Hybrid works when it's designed.** Bloom's RCT: 33% fewer resignations, no productivity or promotion penalty. And explicit team agreements measurably lift team regulation and psychological safety — with effects lasting nine weeks in a randomized trial.
3. **Own the micro-decisions.** Hybrid conflict lives in small, unspoken choices. Make them explicit — and use the five distance-leadership competencies as a checklist, with fairness as the sharpest edge.

Does your team have a written agreement for how you work hybrid — or are you still running on a thousand unspoken micro-decisions?

Sources & dig deeper

International research & media - Gallup — [State of the Global Workplace 2026](#); [Hybrid Work Indicator](#); remote/hybrid breakdown read via [Grow Remote](#) - Bloom, Han & Liang — [How Hybrid Working From Home Works Out](#) (NBER; Nature 2024); coverage in [Fortune](#) and [Stanford Report](#) - European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology (2025) — [The effectiveness of a team intervention to enhance team regulation in hybrid teams: a randomized controlled trial](#) - HRD — [Understanding proximity bias: the hidden risk in hybrid workplaces](#)

Danish sources & voices - Christine Ipsen (DTU) — [researcher profile](#); [Endelig Mandag #53 on micro-decisions and cohesion](#); [Offentlig Ledelse: Lederne skal klædes bedre på til det hybride arbejdsliv](#) - Væksthus for Ledelse / lederweb.dk — [5 råd: Vær nærværende — også på afstand](#) (publication: *Nærværende ledelse på afstand*)