



Headlines Network
promoting mental health in the media

Hybrid working in journalism

A guide for journalists
and newsrooms on
supporting hybrid and
distributed working



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Introduction



This resource will consider how hybrid working has impacted journalism in recent years, paying particular attention to how it has affected the wellbeing of newsroom staff and freelancers.

It will offer guidance for individuals, organisations and the industry. The guide will share tips on self-care and how to support colleagues and offer insights into the impact on people's mental health of working practices that have become more commonplace since the pandemic.

This practical part of the resource consists of four sections:

1. **Looking after your mental health – whether as a staff journalist or freelancer**
2. **How to support your colleagues**
3. **Supporting those you manage**
4. **Considerations for newsrooms and the wider industry**

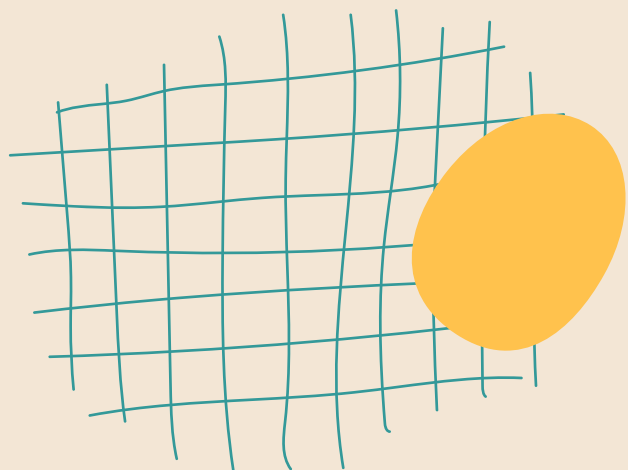
Our guide combines practical tips and advice from media practitioners with our own knowledge of the journalism industry. It incorporates personal insights from those who have experienced different hybrid working environments. It also offers signposts to additional clinical resources if further support is needed.



What is hybrid working?

Hybrid work is the mixture of remote and office working. Because journalists bear witness to stories and report live from locations, the industry had considerable experience of remote working even before Covid-19.

Like other industries, journalism has adopted and adapted to different forms of hybrid working since the pandemic. This has brought radical upheaval to our profession, including unpredicted changes to work processes, collaboration and the boundaries between personal and professional lives. Despite these changes, there has been limited consideration given to the ways in which hybrid work has affected journalists' mental health.

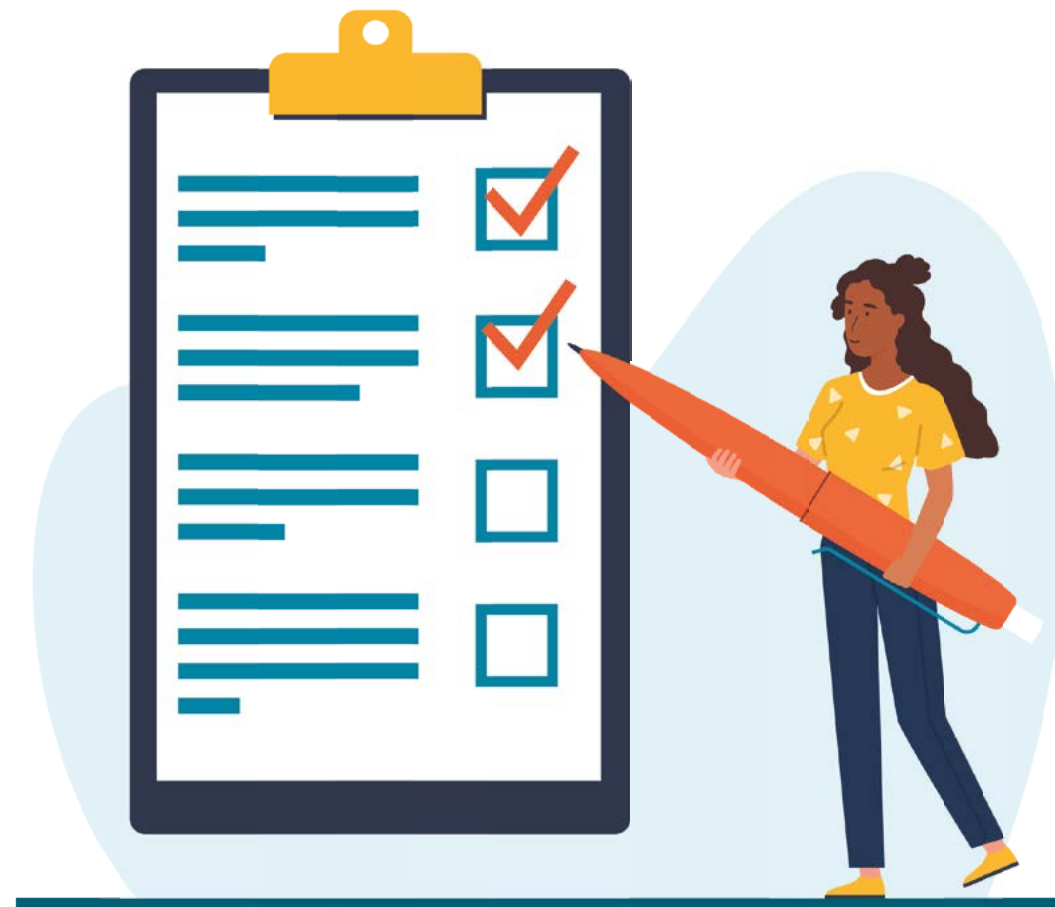


Hybrid working questionnaire

Headlines Network conducted a survey in March and April 2024 to seek journalists' views on hybrid working.

We asked respondents to identify whether they were staff or a freelancer and what kind of hybrid or office-based work pattern they were currently in.

We supplemented these questions with a survey and also sought more in-depth insights from a smaller group of senior journalists, academics and practitioners.



Looking after your own mental health

Self-care refers to the efforts we make to look after our own mental health. Knowing and practising the steps we can take to support our mental wellbeing can help us feel better, sleep well and improve working relationships with the people around us.

A clear signal at the end of the day can be beneficial in setting this boundary between what is work and what is your own ‘personal time’.

If working in the office, this boundary might be your commute or if you’re now working from home, it could be going for a walk or a run. In essence, creating a bridge between the beginning and end of the working day – wherever you are located – is important.

As we noted in our Headlines Network guide [Managing our mental health](#), self care isn’t the same for everyone.

What works for you may be different to what will help a colleague or a family member.

Self-care can be practised and maintained in vastly different ways depending on where we work and our role, from editors who run large organisations to those working in small newsrooms; and from journalists in a cross-functional team to freelancers working on their own.

Many of these issues are still not sufficiently recognised by our news industry, and yet self-care is important for everyone and even more so where distributed working has blurred the boundaries between our professional and personal lives.

Therefore it can be valuable to find ways of distinguishing between these two parts of our existence.

The past few years have increased the sense of isolation and highlighted the absence of community for many journalism colleagues. On the flip side, journalists are now hyper-connected through their digital devices, while they scramble for relevance in a profession that often leaves them feeling undervalued financially and emotionally, run ragged by stretched resources and anxious about the future of our industry, and our roles within it.

All of this takes its toll on wellbeing.



Mental health insights from a freelancer

Feeling undervalued, emotionally or financially, inevitably has an adverse impact on wellbeing. Freelance journalists in particular are paid poorly in an industry that doesn't have a good record on pay generally.

Journalists who work for themselves will say they are well accustomed to 'low, slow and no pay'. Many attest that chasing up unpaid invoices has a detrimental impact on their mental health.

A significant number of freelancers also work full time for news outlets.

Those who responded to our survey said commissioning editors don't consider them when thinking about hybrid working conditions – including accrued staff benefits like holiday pay, pensions and health cover.

Because the majority of freelancers work from home, they can also more easily succumb to feelings of isolation and self-doubt.



Laura Oliver

is a freelance journalist based in Brighton, UK, who 'predominantly' works remotely. At present, she teaches journalism students in-person on a weekly basis, with the rest of her time spent working as a reporter, editor and editorial consultant from home or from a remote hired desk space.

'When done well, I think hybrid working can be a real positive for freelancers,' Laura says. 'I also think it's a positive shift in our cultural approach to work and a step away from the presenteeism that has dominated newsrooms for so long.'

Oliver cautions that it doesn't necessarily fix the idea of being 'always on'.

'To make [hybrid working] work well, you need to establish really good methods of communication between hybrid team members and clear communication around who is working where and when. It's crucial to build trust so everyone buys into this way of working.'

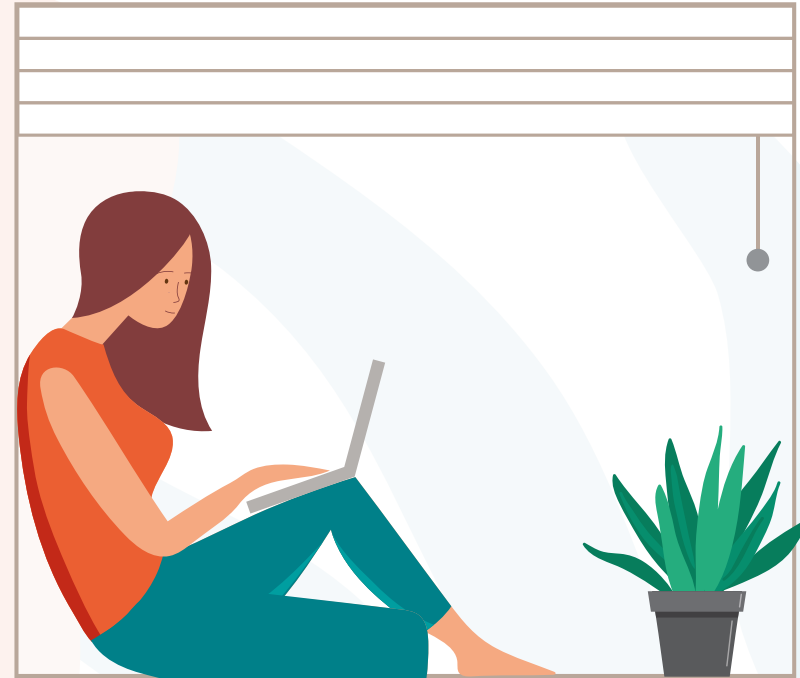
Our conversation with Laura continued...

Do you feel the opportunity to do hybrid working has improved your mental wellbeing?

66 Knowing that I don't need to commute five days a week is a huge boost to my mental wellbeing as it means I can reliably organise other things like exercise, time with family and friends, hobbies and interests. They aren't dependent on what train I can catch. Overall, it gives me a greater sense of controlling my work patterns rather than work patterns controlling me.

On the flip side, having some days of in-person contact allows me to feel connected to colleagues, and the mission or values of a project or organisation and reminds me that I am a professional person. That might sound odd, but if you work from home for long enough, you forget what it's like to put on shoes to go to work and command a meeting of 10 colleagues in a fancy meeting room.

This also has mental wellbeing benefits as it can remind you that your skills, insight and expertise are valued, in addition to having stronger interpersonal relationships with colleagues.





Are freelancers forgotten by their newsroom colleagues?

Newsrooms want freelancers to produce high-quality work that meets their values and brief; leaving freelancers outside of working practices, organisational updates and benefits does not support this aim and can, in fact, have a detrimental effect on their output.

This sense of being forgotten is frequently bolstered when having to chase for late payments or not knowing who to address with a payroll or employment issue beyond the editor contact.

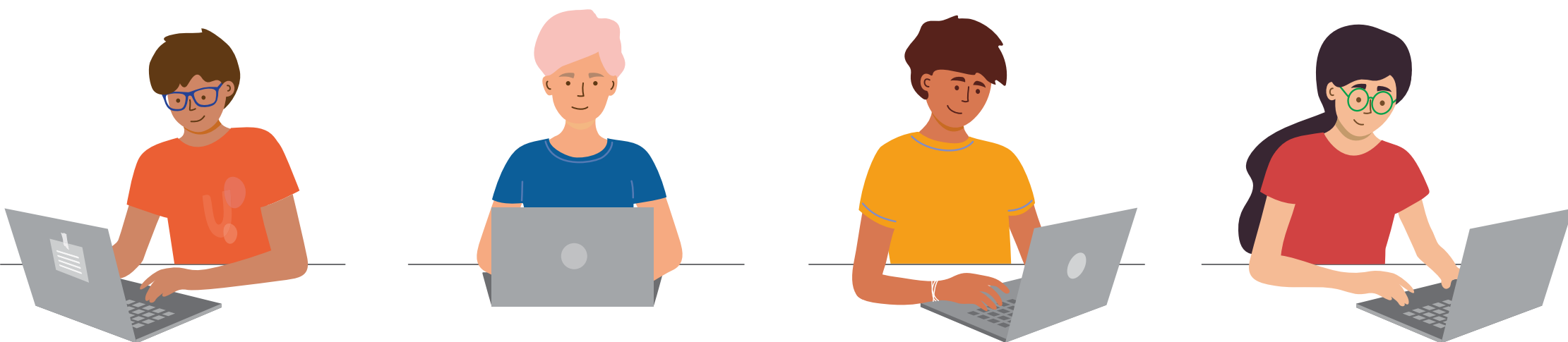
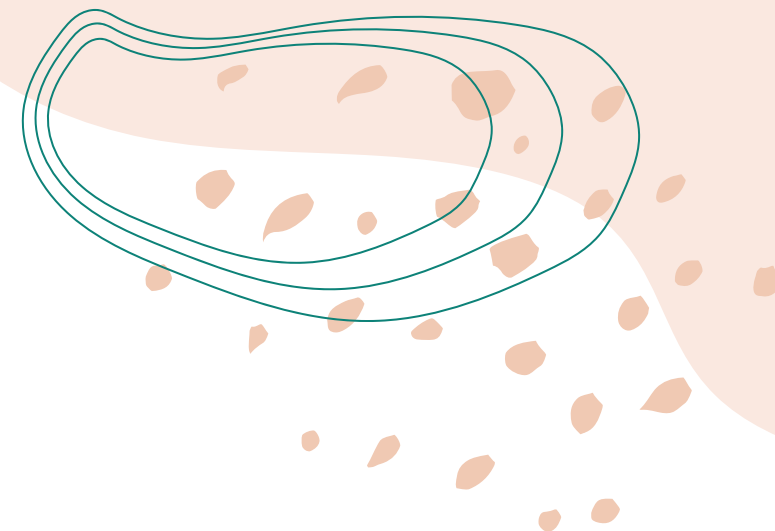
“What tips and insights would you give to help maintain a good state of wellbeing when working in a freelance setting?”

- **Find a community, online or offline, of other remote workers or freelance journalists:** it will provide solace and support and draw you out of yourself at tough moments when you need to stop fixating/worrying/doubting.
- **Get out and about every day:** I rent a desk so I can mix home-working and working from a co-working space, but you could just as well choose to go for a long walk before starting work or work from a cafe for half of the day.
- **Understand your working rhythm:** think about what times of day are best for you for certain tasks. Remember that you can set your hours and working culture.
- **Be reasonable with how much you can achieve in one day:** just because you're freelance, it doesn't mean you should have a limitless working day. I've found it much better for my mental wellbeing to focus on one client or project during the day, so there's less attention switching. I also try to limit myself to a maximum of two interviews/meetings a day; any more and I lose too much time/energy. Also, if you've completed what you had assigned yourself that day, then it's okay to down tools.
- **Take a longer view as well as day-to-day when organising your work:** think about how you are going to feel on a Friday when you've got something on the evening before; maybe Thursday morning isn't the best time to schedule that call because you've got lots of calls the day before. Deadlines aside, freelancing can be very flexible, so make this work for you.

Mental health insights from younger journalists

Many GenZ journalists now in their twenties came of working age during the pandemic. In the chaos of lockdown and changing working circumstances, they were asked to adapt to distributed working without any meaningful support.

For many, hybrid working is the only ‘newsroom setting’ they have experienced. As a result, some can have different attitudes to office work than older colleagues. We asked if working remotely has affected their mental health. More significantly, we asked if they felt older managers truly understood their experience.





Angel Martinez

is a freelance journalist based in the Philippines. She covers ‘the intersections of the internet and identity for local and international publications’ such as *Vice*, *Teen Vogue*, *Esquire* and *i-d*.

While she works remotely at home on most days, Martinez also does on-the-ground reporting and is sometimes required to co-work with colleagues from an office.



How do you find your current working hybrid setup?

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I think it’s ideal. As a writer, I need time to myself to generate ideas and produce drafts. Traffic here in the capital Manila is terrible. [If I had to go into an office] I would be leaving the house every day at 5.30am just to make it to my office by 7.00am, which sounds like a tremendous waste of both time and money.

Our conversation with Angel continued...

What was it like for Martinez starting her career at the height of the pandemic?

“ I was frequently balancing online classes with Zoom interviews for internships and freelance commitments, which is just as exhausting as it sounds. But I always made time to prepare interview guides and icebreaker questions when speaking with sources, and changing my outfit, putting on makeup, and keeping my camera on during meetings. I guess I was just so excited to get the job done. I had so much zest for life!

Now that I’m employed, I have maybe three to four consecutive calls lined up on weekdays, and while these can still sap all the energy out of me, I try not to change the way I communicate or interact with people online. Still the same level of effort and energy.



Martinez feels working from home grants her the ‘flexibility to get quality work by giving me time for leisure’.

“ My WFH days are pretty holistic: I have enough time to make my own breakfast and have a quick jog after, as well as nurture hobbies like reading and watching movies. Not only does this help restore balance in my life but it serves as a great incubator for ideas. I don’t think I’d be able to churn out even half of the articles I get to do these days if I spent four to five hours a day shuttling to and from my house.



Daniel Henry

is a UK-based correspondent for Sky News. He describes his working environment as ‘60% newsroom, 40% on the road, lots of driving in the car’.

Henry says that he can ‘set up stories from home – but it’s rare’. He believes newsroom leaders should continue to encourage hybrid working and ‘make it as easy as possible’ for journalists.

As a roving correspondent, what does hybrid working look like for you?

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The majority of my work is in the newsroom/on the road. But the moments I get to work hybrid are great for work/life balance, which is positive for mental health.

I live in the Midlands [in the UK], so hybrid working means I can bring stories from my patch to the national newsroom [in London] while having a better work/life balance.





Natasha Hirst

is a freelance UK-based journalist who is deaf. She says she finds hybrid meetings ‘quite inaccessible’ as the audio quality for discussions is ‘often poor unless everyone is using an individual microphone’.

But she says online video meetings are much more accessible than in-person, providing the audio quality is good. ‘I use assistive tech, which reduces background noise, along with captions, so it is much easier for me to focus and participate without [it] wearing me out so much.’

Auto captions are useless if audio quality is poor, she adds. If audio quality is good, she finds Zoom ‘more accessible since you can have a full transcript of the meeting alongside the Zoom grid, which means I can scroll back if I miss bits or need to check my understanding’.

When it’s done well, she believes hybrid working can be a good way of delivering training or holding conferences or talks – less so for more interactive activities over a longer time period.



Has hybrid working improved your wellbeing?

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Yes and no. Being able to work from home means that the decisions I take in a day are more straightforward (less thinking about what to wear, how to travel and anticipating what I’ll need to have with me through the day).

I have ADHD so freeing up my head to focus on other things is valuable. But also because I have ADHD, I need stimulation and benefit from being around people and moving around. Finding the balance between the two is the tricky part!

How to support your colleagues

Being there for work colleagues takes empathy and insight. Creating space for people to feel safe, where they are heard, without risking being judged, isn't always easy.

Many of us worry about making things worse. We are concerned that we don't have the time or the training. We don't know how to spot the signs or where to signpost people when they need more help.

Doing this in a hybrid setting when you are communicating with a colleague on a chat app or a video conference call can be far tougher. But we do know that by simply asking someone if they are okay, and taking the time to hear them in a non-judgemental way, can make a big difference, especially if people feel isolated.

Journalists continue to face job cuts and financial insecurity. Those who come from communities or identities marginalised by our traditional media

may feel even more reluctant to speak about their experiences for fear of the impact on their reputation or career progression.

We have noted in our resource [Supporting our colleagues](#) that conversations with trusted colleagues – in newsrooms, external support groups or peer-to-peer networks – can be a source of solace and comfort at work, even though many of us do find it difficult to speak about our mental health.

Such conversations can be even more beneficial where formal support structures are not in place, either because such structures do not exist in the news organisations or because people work in a freelance capacity.

As noted, freelancers need support but can experience challenges accessing it.





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Angel Martinez notes:

I can't discount the importance of in-person dynamics in boosting morale, strengthening bonds between co-workers, and even giving me stuff to write about. Needless to say, there are certain experiences that I never would have been exposed to or inspired by if I was always stuck in my room.

Today, I do hybrid work for a start-up in the Philippines. They have a very young and vibrant working culture, so being able to drop by their co-working space and attend in-person events they organise with partners allowed me to become fast friends with everyone and feel like I was truly part of the team.

These in-person sessions are also more conducive to co-creating and giving feedback, which allows for quicker turnaround time and lends more dimension and perspective to my work.

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Martinez says working from home constantly can bring on feelings of loneliness and self-doubt.

I definitely experienced this when I was 100% working from home. One side effect that was adversely impacting my wellbeing was my inability to separate work from the rest of my life.

During work-from-home days, we mostly rely on water cooler-type Slack channels and the occasional Discord call for game nights. These do the job, breaking the monotony of a non-stop work day or providing a breath of fresh air after hours in front of the same requirement. But at the same time, I think they're only as easy as they are because we've already established an in-person relationship or at least met in real life.

It's important to have balance and to be surrounded by colleagues who get your distinct struggles as a creative [person]: people who can provide support in any way, people who will be around for you even when you're not performing at your best.

How to support those you manage

If you are based in a newsroom, has hybrid working improved your working culture or not? We asked our colleagues a series of questions.



Graeme Davies

is managing editor of FT Specialist based in London. He is responsible for a team of 80-plus journalists and was one of the survey respondents.

He noted that if someone is struggling, 'it is easier to fly under the radar when working remotely'. That is something he says newsroom leaders and line managers need to be 'hypervigilant' about.

Headlines Network has provided training for newsroom leaders in how to support and manage direct reports, and we note the importance of being attuned to how people might be behaving in ways that are different from their normal.



Getting the balance right: Graeme Davies on newsroom culture

Would you describe your team's journalism working environment as remote, hybrid or largely office-based?

We have settled into a hybrid routine with staff expected to be in the office at least two days a week – one a whole department day and the other their individual team day. In practice many are now attending Tuesday to Thursday with a smaller number in four or even five days a week.

What is your opinion of hybrid working in general?

Personally, with a long commute and a relatively young family, it works really well. For our business we are making it work pretty well although it does have its downsides for team and office culture when there are often empty desks. Staff cannot just lean over and grab their colleague for a quick

five-minute chat. Setting up a video call naturally makes interactions feel more formal and less organic. I also feel that having distributed teams can potentially hamper the development of less experienced staff.

Has it deepened connections with colleagues and improved work culture?

I don't think so. During the pandemic there was an 'everyone in it together' mentality but that has faded as people's working patterns have been established in different ways.

Do you feel the opportunity to do hybrid working has improved your mental wellbeing?

Being able to work to patterns which suit my lifestyle better certainly helps – I walk a lot more

now than when I was commuting every day. The commute seems less like a chore than it used to.

All of these help my mental wellbeing, as does more time with my family. On the downside, having your workplace effectively in the home means separating the two can be more difficult. And it is easier to work unsociable hours when you are at home. It has exacerbated the 'always on' nature of modern work.

Would you say journalists working from home might be considered more prone to feelings of loneliness and self-doubt?

Working from home can obviously increase the risk of staff feeling more isolated. It is incumbent upon managers to keep a keen eye out for this.



Returning to Angel Martinez, we asked if she feels younger people are forced to work more in the office at the expense of those with families. Are younger journalists also ‘losing out’ by not being in situ, ‘learning’ from their peers?

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I haven’t personally experienced being forced to work in-office but I know this is an industry norm – a way of getting younger journalists to ‘pay their dues’, while their more experienced peers have the option of staying home.

I can, however, speak to the feeling of losing out due to a feeling of detachment from peers: I admittedly lack in-person mentorship, having started freelancing as a bored college student during the pandemic with a lot of pent-up creative energy.

I also haven’t experienced full-time employment in an actual newsroom. A lot of what I know today about developing and pitching ideas as well as tapping and interviewing sources is all a product of my snooping around: there were no resources available for young writers in the Philippines back then.

While I do think that journalism involves a lot of relying on my own instincts and solving problems without a blueprint, I do wish I had started out in an environment where I didn’t feel so alone and where I learned to follow the rules before making up my own.



Newsroom culture

Journalists' attitudes to hybrid working – and its impact on their mental health, productivity and work culture – elicit strong responses. This is not surprising, but it does make coordinated action to support wellbeing more complicated.

Those who work in our industry cannot be easily segmented or 'categorised' by newsroom leaders. We also know that people experience mental health in different ways and that stigmas persist, so singular or broad-brush solutions will not work.

Journalists and individual news organisations can effect change. But wider industry buy-in to this important issue will really shift the dial.

In order to boost retention and loyalty to the company, Graeme Davies advocates working with individuals to understand the working conditions that suit them in the context of what the business needs.

'Hybrid working can help greatly with this,' he says, 'but you have to be able to trust your staff and you have to be aware that you can miss issues which are more obvious in an office setting.'

He also worries younger journalists are often vulnerable from a wellbeing perspective.

'Often due to their sub-optimal home working conditions, or through preference, [younger journalists] tend to be in the office more than their seniors and I do worry that there is a risk that development will be stunted if senior staff are not around enough.'

This is 'why we ask staff to come in on the same days and in teams. We have, on occasion, had to be stricter with enforcing office attendance among more senior staff but thankfully have not had that many issues'.



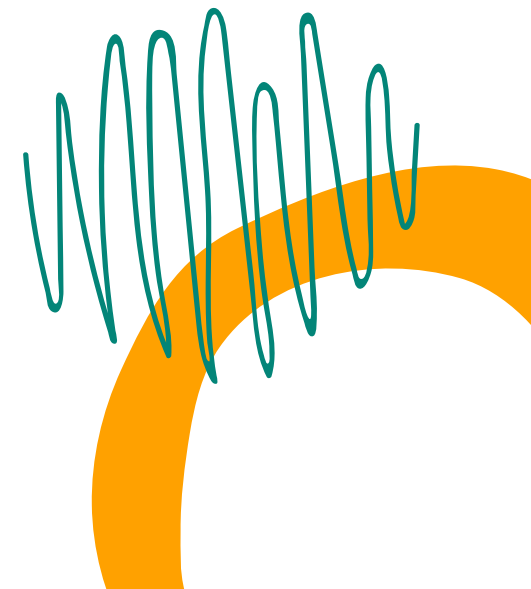
Federica Cherubini

is director of leadership development at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism based in the UK. RISJ runs programmes for newsroom leadership both remotely and from its base in Oxford.

‘I think flexibility is what makes the difference,’ she said of the best approach for newsrooms. ‘The difficulty from an organisation’s point of view is balancing the flexibility needs of each individual with the needs of the organisation’.



“ There are some tasks or meetings that can efficiently happen when people work from home, and there are other occasions when being in person makes a difference. This is my personal opinion, but I believe less in a generalised rule ‘x amount of days in the office per month/week’ and more in ‘purposeful planning’.



But her view echoes that of Davies: ‘To make an organisation function at some point you need a rule of sorts, so people know what is expected of them – and, crucially, why’.

In 2020, Cherubini co-launched the [Changing Newsrooms survey](#), a strategic, non-representative, non-random sample of newsroom leaders from around the world. The annual report has been co-authored over the years by Nic Newman, Rasmus Klein Nielsen and Ramaa Sharma alongside Cherubini and reflects newsroom managers’, editors’ and executives’ perspectives, not those of journalists or the newsroom in general.

While the survey does not allow for generalisation to the industry at large, it offers insights into how newsrooms are adapting to hybrid working and supporting the wellbeing of staff. She explained her take-aways from the latest report:



“ In 2023 [the last available report] we found that 65% of newsroom leaders who participated in the survey said that their organisations have largely implemented flexible and hybrid working models with new rules in place for staff and only 16% said that their organisations made some changes, but largely returned to a pre-pandemic model, with the majority of time spent in-person in the office.

When we asked how they had actually implemented hybrid working, we found that 15% of our sample offered workers total flexibility in terms of when they work from home or come to the office, but what is more common is some degree of flexibility: 30% of newsroom leaders participating in our survey said staff are required to be in the office some fixed days per week and their company is enforcing the rule to make sure it’s respected, while 22% said that, despite staff being required to be in the office some fixed days per week, no one is checking if this really happens.

Another 16% of staff are required to be in the office most of the time.

Soon after journalists began returning to newsrooms following lockdown, the topic of proximity bias came up in the authors' conversations with managers for the survey. Cherubini explained:

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We looked at proximity bias in 2021. It's the idea that those people who are more visible to their bosses (provided their bosses are there as well) will be perceived as better workers and receive preferential treatment. We noted that the issue was far from new, but it seemed to have been accentuated by the pandemic.

There was a quote in the 2021 report about this which I was struck by: 'The thing we're concerned with as a management team is making sure that some people don't end up becoming favourites because they get more face time with the boss,' said Angela Pacienza from the *Globe and Mail* in Canada.

She said managers were encouraged to prioritise one-on-one time with their staff and to be really sensitive to the people who weren't in the room and what they're missing out on. 'I think it's going to take a different type of training for managers to be able to recognise and be aware,' she said.



Takeaways for newsroom editors and leaders

Laura Oliver:

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I would like to see transparency around expectations, boundaries and ways of working, which is crucial to make hybrid working work well, as are good channels and structures for communicating with all members of your team.

When hybrid work has worked best for me, there's been a degree of knowing more about how work fits in with my colleagues' 'real' lives – Mike starts at 10 remotely on a Thursday because he needs to take the kids to school; don't book a meeting with Sarah on Friday lunchtime because she takes a yoga class round the corner from the office.

This isn't blurring work and personal lives; it's creating a more humane approach to work.

When it hasn't worked well for me, this level of transparency and well-established communication channels and patterns – who is working when, what are they focused on, do their working patterns differ on different days, when is the best day for team meetings in-person, how will we bring hybrid people into meetings effectively – has been absent.

A crucial example that I experienced first-hand and I would recommend no newsroom leader replicates: filling remote working days in a schedule with wall-to-wall meetings. It negated all the benefits of remote working, left you feeling chained to your desk and felt like a way for the organisation to keep tabs on people [or] that the organisation wasn't willing to update its working practices for this new age, but was trying to replicate an in-person environment online.





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Natasha Hirst:

Employers and line managers industry-wide need to consider how their domestic abuse policies link with hybrid working (and other) policies, says Hirst, who serves as the National Union of Journalists' president.

'Workers who work from home almost exclusively will have fewer opportunities to seek support, and colleagues may not pick up on signs that may point to domestic abuse,' she says.

'This also includes tech policies – a work phone or laptop may be the only access that some people have to securing information or support that isn't monitored by an abuser. There's more to think about with hybrid working than productivity, work-life balance and general wellbeing.'

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Angel Martinez:

It's a common misconception that implementing hybrid setups results in reduced productivity. But it's the only way journalists can exercise agency and achieve the balance needed to stay well in such a demanding industry. When people are working from home, it's important for senior leaders and editors to find ways to establish rapport while still respecting boundaries: this means that even though check-in calls or co-working sessions are welcome, this isn't a free pass to populate a team's entire Google Calendar with meetings that could have been emails.

Writers need to carve out time to work on assignments. When in the office, if it's not possible to have all staffers present or assign all reporters to field work, they should be able to make up for it with workshops, mentorship programmes, or other similar opportunities for growth and camaraderie.

The need for signposting

It is important to recognise that different things work for different people, so information about signposting needs to be accessible.

Some individuals will not feel comfortable having a conversation about mental health. Therefore, this information should be put in a clear place on company intranets or other internal communication channels, as well as promoted in physical spaces where people can engage with the information away from colleagues, such as on the back of toilet doors.



Support and further resources for journalists

Headlines Network

A series of resource guides between Headlines Network and the mental health charity Mind to support journalists with their mental health.

[Managing our mental health](#) | [Supporting our colleagues](#)
[Vicarious trauma](#) | [Burnout in journalism](#)

We have also published interviews with [Jonathan Levy](#) and [Rachel Corp](#), news leaders from Sky News and ITV who offer their insights into how managers can promote mental health in newsrooms. These and further information are available at:

headlines-network.com

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma

A resource hub and global network of journalists, journalism educators and health professionals dedicated to improving media coverage of trauma, conflict and tragedy. It is a project of Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in New York City, with international offices in London and Melbourne.

dartcenter.org

Journalist Trauma Support Network

The Journalist Trauma Support Network (JTSN) is a programme of the Dart Center. It is aiming to establish an international community of qualified therapists trained to care for trauma-impacted journalists. To best serve journalists, it provides therapists with cultural competence and data security training, peer support, and referral pathways.

jtsn.org

Trust for Trauma Journalism

The organisation works with journalists 'before, during, and after they go into harm's way' bolstering their resilience and ensuring much-needed services and support. Its mission is to provide funding to sustain global initiatives that prepare news professionals for the impact of covering traumatic events.

traumajournalism.org

Film & TV Charity: Whole Picture Toolkit

The Film and TV Charity supports people behind the scenes at every stage of their career. The 'Whole Picture Toolkit' is created by people within the film and TV industry, with support from the mental health charity Mind, to help place mental health at the heart of any production. Many of their insights and best practices apply to colleagues in the journalism industry.

wholepicturetoolkit.org.uk

Mind Infoline

Mind provides confidential mental health information services. With support and understanding, Mind enables people to make informed choices. The Infoline gives information on types of mental distress, where to get help, drug treatments, alternative therapies and advocacy.

t: 0300 123 3393 | info@mind.org.uk | mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines

Samaritans

Whatever you're going through, Samaritans are there to listen – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Samaritans offer a safe place for you to talk any time you like, in your own way about whatever's getting to you. They won't judge or tell you what to do, they'll listen to you.

Telephone: 116 123

Shout, text support

Shout is a free, confidential 24/7 text messaging support service for anyone who is struggling to cope. The service is anonymous and won't appear on any phone bill.

Text: SHOUT to 85258

CALM helpline

The CALM helpline is there for anyone who needs to talk confidentially about a tough time they are experiencing. Calls are taken by trained staff who are there to listen, support, inform and signpost you to further information. The helpline is open from 5pm to midnight every day, 365 days a year.

Telephone: 0800 58 58 58

Mental health and wellbeing definitions

Helpful definitions

For the purpose of clarity, when we refer to ‘mental health’ in this guide we are using it in the broadest possible sense. Some useful definitions for terms used in this guide can be found below.

Mental health

We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. How we feel can vary from good mental wellbeing to difficult feelings and emotions, to severe mental health problems.

Mental wellbeing

Mental wellbeing is the ability to cope with the day-to-day stresses of life, work productively, interact positively with others and realise our own potential. When we talk about wellbeing we are referring to mental wellbeing.

Poor mental health

Poor mental health is when we are struggling with low mood, stress or anxiety. This might mean we’re also coping with feeling restless, confused, short tempered, upset or preoccupied. We all go through periods of experiencing poor mental health – mental health is a spectrum of moods and experiences and we all have times when we feel better or worse.

Mental health problems

We all have times when we struggle with our mental health. A mental health problem is when difficult experiences or feelings go on for a long time and affect our ability to enjoy and live our lives in the way we want. You might receive a specific diagnosis from your doctor, or just feel more generally that you are experiencing a prolonged period of poor mental health.

Common mental health problems

These include depression, anxiety, phobias and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). These make up the majority of the problems that lead to one in four people experiencing a mental health problem in any given year. Symptoms can range from the comparatively mild to very severe.

Severe mental health problems

These include conditions like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, which are less common. They can have very varied symptoms and affect your everyday life to different degrees, and may require more complex and/or long-term treatments.

Work-related stress

Work-related stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them at work. Stress, including work-related stress, can be a significant cause of illness. It is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and other issues such as increased capacity for error. Stress is not a medical diagnosis, but severe stress that continues for a long time may lead to a diagnosis of depression or anxiety, or other mental health problems.

These definitions have been provided by the mental health charity Mind.



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