

# Hybrid working: digital communication and collaboration



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## Introduction

Communication and digital collaboration skills are now essential for new ways of working, and working online. As more organisations move to permanent hybrid working, being able to connect with others, use digital tools and understand expectations is becoming more important.

This course aims to develop your own skills and those of your teams, in order to succeed in a digital hybrid world. It is recommended that you also study the [Hybrid working: skills for digital transformation](#) course that is part of this collection; it focuses on the essential skills and capabilities you require for working digitally.

While communication and collaboration can cover many areas, the focus of this course is the basic skills that everyone within an organisation requires when using tools to work collaboratively with others.

# Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- manage your digital persona
- collaborate and work in a supportive, safe manner online with others
- identify choose and use digital communication and collaboration tools
- interpret and respect the approaches to communicating in different spaces
- develop your ability to run effective hybrid meetings
- share and manage files effectively.



# 1 Why communication and collaboration skills matter

As organisations move to hybrid working, communication and collaboration have changed. The opportunities for 'water cooler' moments or to ask a colleague a quick question across the desk have become less frequent, and new ways of sharing information have developed.

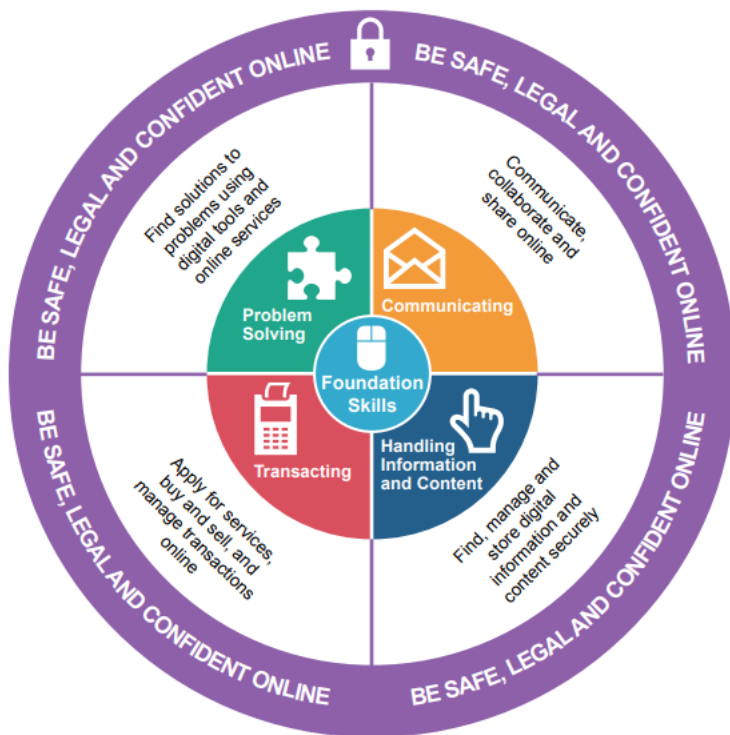
Not only did having to move to remote working at an organisational level change how many of us needed to work, it has impacted workplace culture and expected behaviours. During the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the frequently changing rules, everyone was having to continually adapt, at short notice and sometimes with minimal guidance from the organisation.

As new ways of working have become embedded, organisations are now focusing on how to build a new culture and set of values but also on re-establishing expectations of the workforce, expectations that reflect the needs of individuals and teams as well as the organisation.

The reliance on digital communication and collaboration tools will continue, and developing organisational capabilities requires the individuals within it to be supported through formal and informal training and development.


All individuals need to have the essential digital skills to succeed. These are based on the 'Essential Digital Skills Framework' for the United Kingdom (GOV.UK, 2019), which sets out the digital skills and understanding all adults require to interact in a digital world (see Figure 1). The skills relate to:

- being safe and responsible online
- using devices and handling information
- communicating
- creating and editing
- transacting
- problem solving.



**Figure 1** The UK's 'Essential Digital Skills Framework' diagram. Essential Digital Skills – Framework Diagram (Crown Copyright, Gov.uk, 2018)

### Activity 1 How digitally confident are you?

 5 minutes

Read a summary in Table 1 of the six skills which are based on the 'Essential Digital Skills Framework' (GOV.UK, 2019).

**Table 1 Essential digital skills**

Being safe and responsible online and offline	Digital wellbeing, responsibilities when working online – security, privacy and data protection, accessibility, understanding processes and policies, behaviour and non-digital considerations – for example, your desk setup, not writing down your password.
Using devices and handling information	Understanding hardware, software, operating systems and applications and how to manage and store digital information and assets.
Communicating	How to communicate effectively digitally depending on the 'tools' and 'context'.
Creating and editing	Developing the skills to create and edit using digital tools and reflect best practice and guidelines for creation of digital content and products.

Transacting	The ability to interact with digital forms, systems and payments.
Problem solving	The ability to find solutions and approaches and use digital tools to assist with this.

Think about how digitally confident you are. Depending on how competent and confident you are, you may wish to complete

[\*Hybrid working: skills for digital transformation\*](#) before doing this course.

How digitally confident you are may reflect your digital persona. In the next section we start to explore your digital persona, as who you are, how you approach digital tasks, and your digital behaviours will influence how you communicate and collaborate digitally with others.

## 2 Your digital persona

Consciously or subconsciously, you make a decision about how you want present yourself to the world when you meet people face to face, through how you dress or style your hair and the way you communicate with others.

### Activity 2 What is your face-to-face persona?

 5 minutes

Take some time to think about the image you present to the world. Do you consciously decide what your persona is? Do you adapt it in different situations? What would you change?

Write a short summary of the things you consider when you present yourself to the world in face-to-face contexts.

*Provide your answer...*

Chances are that you adapt how you present yourself depending on the situation. However, how often do you think about your digital (online) persona? Your digital persona requires you to make decisions about how you want to present yourself online, but how much thought do you put into this?

### Social media and social networks

Outside our work context, many of us use social media or networks to connect and share information about ourselves. It can be useful to understand the difference between social media and networking, as, to some extent, the terms are used and understood interchangeably. Here are a couple of definitions:


‘Social media is a collective term for websites and applications that focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration.’

(Lutkevich, 2021)

‘Social media requires a social network in order to disburse content to those that wish to consume and interact with it. Thus, the social media network is the underlying technology and human connections, while social media focuses strictly on what is being published and consumed within the social networking platform.’

(Froehlich, 2020)

### Activity 3 What do you consider when you post on social media?

 5 minutes

If you use social media, think about the following:

When you choose your profile photos, which of the following do you base your choice on?

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When you post a message or a photo on social media, which of the following do you consider?

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How do you describe your use of social media/networking platforms?

Interactive content is not available in this format.



I set the security settings to reflect how I use them, such as public vs private.

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While these might seem simple questions, they help you to start thinking about your digital persona and how you use social media and networking. In your personal life, you choose what platforms/apps you engage with, what you share and whom you connect with. You'll have an awareness of whether you are sharing to a private group or publicly to the world.

Your confidence interacting online may depend on whether you prefer to keep everything private, so you have more control over the interactions you have online, or whether you are happy to publicly share information about yourself with the world. If you tend to be more open, you should understand that by doing that, you may receive more feedback, even from people you do not know. Keeping yourself safe online and looking after your 'digital' mental health is important. We will look at this later in the course, and in the [Hybrid working: wellbeing and inclusion](#) course within this toolkit.

## 2.1 Developing your personal brand


Having thought about your digital persona in your personal life, now think about how you present yourself in a work context. If you have uploaded a photo onto work-related platforms, how do you think this portrays you? How do you behave in meetings – is this



different in person, hybrid or virtual only? You might like to ask a trusted colleague how they perceive you.

If you use social media/networking in a work context, have you considered the blurring of your professional and personal digital personas, especially if you use the same accounts for both? One example might be LinkedIn.

#### Activity 4 Using social media for professional purposes

 10 minutes

If you use social media/networking for both professional and personal use, how much thought do you give to the impact a personal post might have on your professional brand? Does your post adhere to your organisational guidelines and policies?

Take time to find and review your organisational social media guidelines and policies.

Are you confident that how you use social media/networking considers these policies? How do you feel about having to be mindful of organisational requirements, even if what you are doing is outside of work?

You may be familiar with the term 'personal brand'. This is something that you need to be mindful of within a professional setting and how your 'personal' persona is an extension of this. Understanding the difference between your personal brand and personal branding is useful. The following definitions help explore the difference:

**'A personal brand** is a widely-recognized and largely-uniform perception or impression of an individual based on their experience, expertise, competencies, actions and/or achievements within a community, industry, or the marketplace at large.

**'Personal Branding** is the conscious and intentional effort to create and influence public perception of an individual by positioning them as an authority in their industry, elevating their credibility, and differentiating themselves from the competition, to ultimately advance their career, increase their circle of influence, and have a larger impact.'

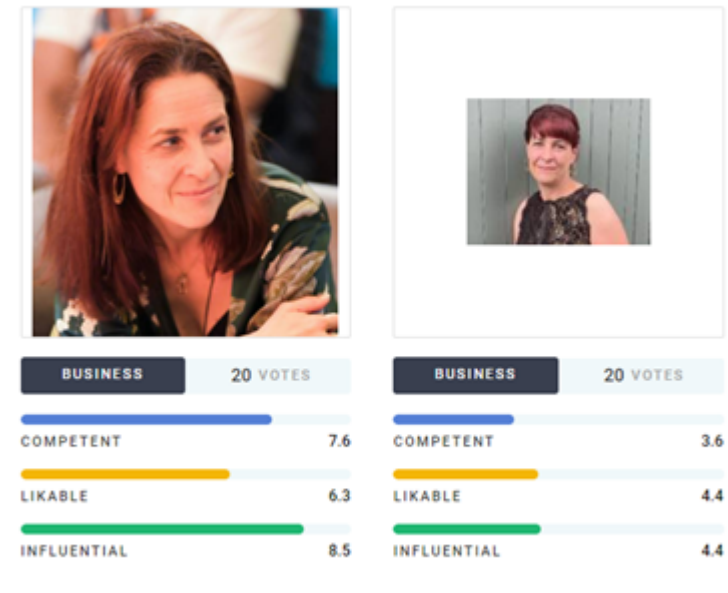
(PersonalBrand, n.d.)

As hybrid working has become more commonplace due to the COVID-19 pandemic, for many of us, so has our acceptance of a more casual approach to our personal brand and how we behave online.

Our remote working environments may now include children and pets in the background, what we wear is perhaps more casual and our workstations are set up anywhere there is space in our homes or co-working locations. This has led to uncertainty for us as employees. We need to have the 'know-how' and 'environments' to understand what hybrid behaviours are expected (George, 2021).

One of the most important elements of your 'brand' is your profile photo. Often these are the only visual reference someone will have for you, as we rely on online environments to communicate and collaborate, do not always turn our cameras on in virtual meetings and often never physically meet the people we interact with. Profile photos remove anonymity and provide information about your gender, age and ethnicity that can be helpful to provide a visual cue to you as a person. It is also useful to remember that people will also form an opinion of you based on your photo.

As an experiment, I uploaded two profile photos of me to [Photofeeler](#), which uses human opinion and AI to provide feedback on how your profile photo may be perceived. It is worth noting, as I monitored the poll, the scores fluctuated. It was disappointing to drop from 8.7 to 7.6 for competence, but it is worth remembering that how you are perceived is subjective.



**Figure 2** Comparing the author's profile photos

### Activity 5 Your profile photo

10 minutes

There are some simple steps you can take to develop your digital brand and behaviours.

#### Step 1

Review your profile photo across all work and personal online platforms.

Your profile photo is important, especially when you haven't and are unlikely to meet someone face to face. It provides a visual cue for the other person as to who you are and sets the tone for how the organisation may be reflected to others. It also means that if you are engaged in audio-only calls, the person you are talking to is not looking at a blank screen. Equally, it is useful to have seen a picture of your work colleague if you do arrange to meet them face to face, as you will know whom to look for when you arrive at the meeting place.

#### Step 2

Look at the images below – which one would you use for a work profile picture?



**Figure 3** Work profile photo poll

Which do you think is the most suitable professional profile picture?

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Why did you think that is the most suitable picture? Note your reasons in the box below.

*Provide your answer...*

### Feedback

All three photos could be used for a profile picture, but your choice is likely to be linked to personal preference and what you feel is appropriate for a profile picture. Photo A reflects someone who is approachable and looks natural. However, her head is turned slightly too far away from the camera, and is she smiling too much for a professional photo?

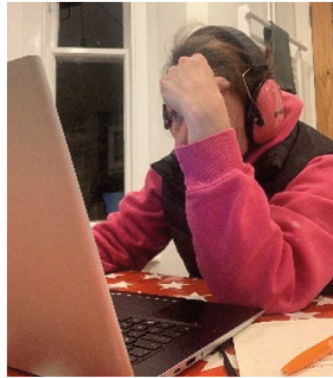
Photo B reflects someone who is serious, and the headshot filling the whole frame can feel that they are invading your personal space.

Photo C reflects a person who comes across as friendly because she is smiling, but she is not engaged with you. This photo would be better as an image with a post or website to reflect activities someone is involved with, rather than a profile picture.

Ideally in a profile photo, you would aim to have as much of your face pointed towards the camera as you can, and it is fine to slightly turn your head, as it can help to soften your appearance and help to put you at ease, especially if you are uncomfortable having your picture taken. Smiling is a personal preference; it can project warmth and being approachable. Ideally your profile photo would not have other distractions; it is designed to allow people to have a visual reference as to who you are.

**Step 3**

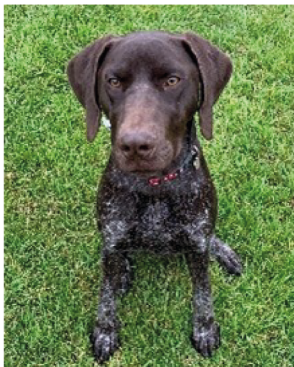
A.



B.



C.



D.



E.

**Figure 4** Author profile picture poll

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**Feedback**

This is a trick question, as none of these photos are ideal for my work profile photo, and yet all too frequently these are the kinds of images you see uploaded for work profile pictures.

A and B: Neither of these show 'me'. They are abstract and provide no frame of reference for anyone wanting to know what I look like in case we ever meet in person.

C and D: While pictures of me as a child or my pets may give an insight into other parts of my life, they do not reflect me in my professional life and so should not really be used.

E: Photos with your children, family or friends should not be used in a work context. Apart from permission issues, there are also online safety concerns to consider, especially in respect to keeping children safe online.

This is the image I use professionally; you can clearly identify me, I am leaning forwards as if in a conversation with someone, which hopefully reflects that I am approachable and interested in listening to you.



**Figure 5** Suitable professional profile photo


However, there is one issue with this photo, in that it is now out of date. I have a new hairstyle, so it is not a current reflection of what I look like. Updating your profile picture to reflect changes in your appearance is as important as choosing a suitable one in the first place.

The simplest approach for choosing a profile photo is if you have a staff identity badge, either use that photo, if not too old, or a similar one that reflects how you look now. Choose something that reflects the image you want at work. Then use it consistently on all platforms you use for work that require a profile picture.

## 2.2 Creating your professional online profile

So, you've thought about your personal brand, and you've reflected on any images you currently have on social media. Now you can think about improving your online profile.

### Activity 6 What is the image you want to reflect?

 5 minutes

Look at the two photos below. In both photos, the person is drinking. What is your opinion of the people? In what context might these photos be used on social media?



**Figure 6** Photos on social media

#### Feedback

You may have had various reactions to the photos and drawn on unconscious bias in who you think these people are. Without knowing the context of the photos, you tend to draw your own conclusions.

While both might be used for a personal profile photo or in a message on social media, Photo A is probably less suitable for use in a work context, as the T-shirt and



drinking from the bottle imply it was an informal setting. Photo B could potentially be used in a work context if it were highlighting an external work event, such as an awards evening. Remember, too, that in some cultures and contexts, presenting images of people drinking alcohol is not acceptable at all.

However, if these were linked to the following posts, the context changes again. It is important when you post online or are reviewing other people's posts that you think about the context.

**Figure 7** Photos in context



Launch of our new campaign in partnership with the rugby community to create a non-alcoholic beer and campaign to help promote healthy lifestyle choices.



Can't beat free drinks at work events!!! ... .Probably won't make it to work tomorrow!!!!  
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