# Hybrid Workplace Is The New Future – Are You Prepared?

## The corporate office is not the perimeter anymore

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When the Covid lockdown hit, many organizations found themselves suddenly transitioning to a work from home setup. Pre-pandemic, many organizations would not have agreed to this. Yet in astonishingly short order, the once unthinkable became the new normal.

Early on in this transition to remote working, many organizations worried that working from home would hamper employee productivity. However, Covid-19 busted this myth, and has shown that no commute time and fewer disruptions can actually lead to an increase in productivity and performance, as opposed to hindering it. Office complexes sit vacant, while home offices buzz with the virtual association, extended work hours, and more time that once was wasted fighting traffic going to important projects.

Organizations around the globe are forced to think about the long-term plan for where and how employees will work. This includes addressing alternative methods to structure work communication, as well as a physical presence. However, one aspect of remote working that we can't ignore is how the shift to virtual working has led to an upsurge in the number of micro-frustrations employees are experiencing daily. A recent EPOS study found that even low noise levels of the wrong kind can increase levels of stress and hamper effective communication. 95% of employees admitted that concentration and efficiency at work are negatively affected by noise, while 35% report frustration, irritation, and aggravation due to bad audio during online interactions.

So far organizations have adapted commendably, but the next step requires lasting change. Hence a new term, called 'hybrid workplace" has emerged. For most, this hybrid model will still mean working in the office once or twice a week, but the office will no longer be the main place of work. Instead, it will operate as a welcoming, well-provisioned hub for a fluid and dispersed workforce.

## Welcome to the Hybrid Workplace

Organizations are now looking to a post-Covid future that combines remote work and office time. While the term 'hybrid' is key to understanding the more flexible future of work, it encompasses many possible systems. Hybrid work allows more freedom around when employees work, as well as where they work. It generally offers more autonomy to employees to fit work around their personal lives, rather than all five days of the week spent in the office. It's the best of both worlds: structure and affability on one hand, and independence and flexibility on the other.

A survey showed that 55% of U.S. workers want a mixture of home and office working. The Covid lockdown was essentially a mass testing of remote/home working, and one that many organizations feel was a success.

At the moment, organizations are managing their remote workforces with various models. Some have given employees the go-ahead to continue working remotely until the end of the year. Others have had employees return to the office on different schedules and in staggered groups. And some are leaving it entirely up to individual employees to decide where they want to work from – indefinitely.

An efficient hybrid workplace does not require everyone to work the same hours, at the same pace. A mix of synchronous and asynchronous communication approaches helps geographically distant teams collaborate remotely.

A long-term hybrid working model will have to be a much smoother experience; the emotional and psychological impact on employees will have to be given more importance. Robust audio and video communication are vital to support hybrid working. The hybrid model offers huge advantages for both organizations and their employees. If organizations can get it

right, the hybrid workplace model has significant benefits. Organizations can cut the expense of office space, while meeting sustainability goals and employee satisfaction.

## Re-engineering for the Hybrid Workplace

Organizations must reengineer how work will get done in a hybrid setup. They must create a hybrid work atmosphere that shapes operational efficiency and agility, while optimizing long-term employee health, productivity, and experience. Some aspects that need to be taken into consideration are:

- **Infrastructure –** In a post-pandemic world, digital solutions, software-as-a-service (SaaS), etc. will be essential to helping organizations navigate this change. These technologies will empower organizations to manage everything digitally. It will enable employees with access to the resources they need, while also allowing IT teams more control over the network, irrespective of where teams are based.
- **Zero-touch tech delivery –** Moving forward, a completely zero-touch process will be vital to provide employees with the equipment they need directly and set up by themselves for a more frictionless method of remote onboarding. Additionally, "bring your own device" (BYOD) will be big, to streamline delivery in this new hybrid environment.
- **Security culture –** In a hybrid environment, IT comes into play more than ever before. Employees connect their work and personal devices through their private network, and rely on a variety of software, some of which may not be even sanctioned by IT, leaving more entry points for security threats.

Cyber threats are on the rise with 90%of organizations report experiencing an increase in attacks. In the [2020 Verizon Data Breach Investigations Report](#), phishing is noted as the top security threat. Having a strong identity and access management strategy is critical to ensure both employees within the corporate perimeter and those at home-offices are always secure. Regular security training either in-person or virtually will instill stronger awareness among employees and enhance security overall.

## Re-consider Physical Office Space

A hybrid workplace has presented an opportunity to re-consider your office network. Say for example, if you had offices at multiple locations with an inter-office connection, reevaluate if this is still needed. This leads to a lower infrastructure management burden, as well as lower IT service desk calls.

As the workplaces themselves evolve, how organizations approach certain cultural aspects must also evolve.

- **Ensuring innovation at work –** Innovation is a complex, time-consuming human process. It requires a lot of deliberating, interrupting, and consideration of conflicting ideas. An organization's best employees know how to do this brilliantly and routinely in a physical office environment. Yet, this will need to be thought through and tested in remote and hybrid environments.
- **Ensuring coherence between people and culture –** Cultivating a sense of "we are all in this together" is challenging but achievable when people are working virtually or connect very little physically. Management and HR must work hand-in-hand to form and re-form this.
- **Democratize employee engagement –** A "one size fits all" approach won't work in a hybrid work setup. Organizations must create environments in which employees and teams can interact quickly with each other in ways that feel intuitive to them.

The corporate office is not the perimeter anymore. Organizations need to recognize this and adopt the "work from anywhere" approach as an opportunity to simplify the workspace, upgrade the technology stack and implement new processes that will help both your organization and employees stay safe.

In a post-pandemic world, hybrid workforce models are here to stay. With the flexibility and efficiency offered by new technology and processes and the availability of digital transformation solutions, it's easier for organizations to build a hybrid workforce model into their business plans. The era of purely physical office locations for organizations is a thing of the past. Creating a permanent, sustainable hybrid workplace – a truly digital organization that ensures the employee experience is at the heart of every decision — is now perhaps the most critical management task to get right.

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