Vitality

Thriving in Hybrid Work Environments

"Going to work" means different things to different people. Some workplaces successfully adopted hybrid work models long before the pandemic, and the remote work revolution continues to be a major trend in today's competitive job market.

Before this surge in hybrid working models, employers trying to attract young talent focused on offering innovative workplace cultures and enjoyable on-site work experiences. Today, positive employee experiences are less about onsite perks but rather focus on flexibility and work-life balance. Employees who participate in hybrid work arrangements are often happier, feel more empowered, and highly value the autonomy that hybrid working extends. They can thrive in hybrid work environments if the challenges of supporting "communication, coordination, connection, creativity, and culture" are addressed when employers formalize hybrid workplace policies.[1]

Why the standard in-office, 9-5 workday is changing

Today, workers want more control over how their work lives are structured. They focus on creating more value and broadening the workplace experience to include something more meaningful and tangible than the "in-office perks" of the past. Flexible working arrangements allow people to recognize when they are most productive or creative. Sometimes, these fall outside of the typical 9-5 workday. For example, having the flexibility to attend appointments and finish their workday later represents the work-life balance people crave. It also extends to where work happens. Technology has facilitated connectivity that allows workers to connect with the office from wherever they happen to be.

What is a hybrid work environment?

For many organizations, adopting hybrid work arrangements could still be regarded as being in the experimental phase. Some workers prefer physical workspaces for the interpersonal relationships, collaboration, and social aspects of the experience. But for many people, the experience of living in a global pandemic created extreme distress. They feel burnt out or have been experiencing other mental health issues. These challenges have been affecting organizations at their core. Ultimately, businesses need human resources to see their businesses prosper. Securing and keeping talent is becoming more complex.

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Hybrid work "comes in many different forms for different businesses and their employees."[2] It means that employers must develop policies to introduce hybrid working arrangements that adopt a variety of work schedules and locations.

We've included a list of some of the most common forms:

• **Location-flexible**
  Employees can choose which day(s) to come into the office.

• **Hybrid split-week**
  The company assigned specific on-site and remote days that can be organized by team or job function.[3]

• **Office-first hybrid**
  Employees are expected to come into the office for most of their workdays and remote days can be scattered throughout the week/month.

• **Hybrid manager-scheduling**
  Managers choose which day(s) their team comes to the office.[4]

• **Shift work**
  Employers schedule who works when and where, but employees benefit from a set schedule and interaction.

• **Full-time remote**
  Employees work from remote locations 100% of the time and join meetings virtually. In cases where some employees are remote, and others are on-site, hy-flex meetings may occur where the facilitator manages the discussion and attendees in all locations.

• **Work from home versus work from anywhere**
  Remote work must be completed at the employee's home or with the ultimate in flexibility, remote work can be completed anywhere, regardless of geographic location.

• **Compressed work weeks**
  Where employees may work on-site or remotely and choose to work extend days for one day off.

  Example 1: This could be one hour extra over nine days and receive the 10th day off.

  Example 2: Four 10-hour workdays, then the fifth day off.

What do employers gain from introducing hybrid work arrangements?

Employers that embrace hybrid work are often rewarded with increased productivity. They see less time lost to commuting, increased employee engagement, and realize savings on building and real estate expenses. Overall, their employees feel more autonomous and are trusted contributors. This method can also reward an employer with broader access to an international talent pool.

Benefits for Leaders

Leaders can realize many benefits from supporting hybrid work arrangements. Their employees tend to have higher job satisfaction and increased productivity because they can develop a better work-life balance. When employees know they are supported, leaders see stronger loyalty and improved employee retention. With hybrid work, the organization can also realize significant operating cost reductions, as much as 51%, from fewer in-office employees.[5]
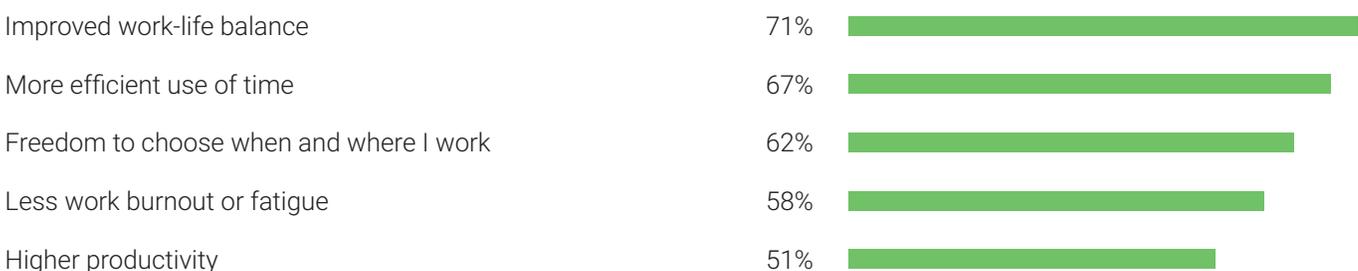
Benefits for Employees

GALLUP polled 8090 remote-capable employees between June 13-23, 2022. Here's what those surveyed said:[6]

Advantages of Hybrid Work, Ranked the Most Common Response

Since you began your hybrid work arrangement, which of the following positive impacts on your work have you noticed? Select all that apply. (% Mentioning)

Top advantages

Improved work-life balance	71%
More efficient use of time	67%
Freedom to choose when and where I work	62%
Less work burnout or fatigue	58%
Higher productivity	51%

Other advantages

Easier to coordinate work with teammates	22%
Improved working relationship with coworkers	17%
Increased team collaboration	16%
Better cross-functional communication and collaboration	16%
Better access to work resources and equipment	15%
Better at meeting customer needs	13%
More connected to organization's culture	11%
Improved employee-manager relationship	11%
Move development opportunities	9%
Easier to understand expectations and priorities	7%
More feedback opportunities	6%
More recognition	5%

June 13-23, 2022

What are some of the common challenges associated with hybrid work environments?

Employers need particular focus on some key areas to ensure their employees can operate in hybrid work environments. These include:

Communication and staying connected when working remotely

Ensuring that all contributors have a voice at the table is key as hybrid remote employees can feel unseen. Solving this challenge requires intentional, proactive, and planned communications to prevent workers from feeling isolated. Managers should recognize and take advantage of moments where increased communication could enhance work experiences and promote better continuity and understanding. For example, when wrapping up projects, leaders and managers should host facilitated discussions. They can develop insights and understand potential opportunities for improvements they can make in the hybrid work experience.[7]

Managing conflict

Another challenge is that workplace harassment may not be as evident in a hybrid-work environment. Managers should pay attention to subtle cues, such as hostile tones in emails. They must look for other, more common types of harassment that can still occur, even in virtual spaces. One common form is cyberbullying. One area where leaders might be able to see conflict is during instant messaging/chats.

Recognition and inclusion

Hybrid work can create an uneven playing field due to proximity bias, a phenomenon where employees who work in the office are more likely to get recognition and promotions. Employees who spend most of their time working remotely could feel isolated from conversations and decisions because they're not physically in the office.

It's also important to be sensitive to experiences unique to the remote work experience that are beyond an employee's control, such as feelings of isolation. These could include connectivity lags, a/v problems, language differences and even confidence in someone's ability to manage virtual presentations.

Leaders should ensure that recognition is provided equally for all employees. They must refrain from showing a preference for one work scenario versus another. For example, hybrid employees could be valued more than on-site employees. After all, they can have increased productivity because they may be able to dedicate exclusive focus to a task that someone on-site may not be able to.

What strategies can leaders use to overcome the challenges and make hybrid work environments successful?

Here are four best practices that organizations can use to help manage and support a hybrid team:

1. Ensure equitable access to resources and equipment.

2. Improve communications to ensure remote workers feel connected to the organization's culture. They need to be able to collaborate and develop relationships with their coworkers.

   • Try establishing a weekly virtual social time for people to drop in.

   • Be open to arranging for opportunities where smaller groups of people can collaborate. You might consider booking a co-working space outside the office where two employees can meet and work together on a project.

   • Host town hall sessions that include virtual and in-person teams. It's a small gesture that helps to validate that both in-office and remote locations are valued.

3. Appreciate that ad-hoc adaptations to processes built for in-office workers may need to be developed to optimize productivity.

   • Businesses should adopt workflow management tools to support bringing transparency to workload, projects, and team members. It will help ensure that resourcing can be rebalanced when necessary.

4. Recognize the importance of encouraging employees to keep a routine. Predictable and consistent patterns are essential for instilling a sense of security and control.

• Employees and managers should be checking in regularly with one-on-one meetings to discuss collaboration challenges and any other struggles. Create a forum to allow employees to share feedback and feel heard. This kind of safe space can also be a way for leaders to learn about troubling situations to respond to and diffuse conflict.

• Appreciate that switching between two workplaces and carving out two different sets of daily work habits can affect someone's cognitive resources. They may display emotional and mental fatigue and try to mask it or be unaware of the effect it is having on them.

In the end, each organization will need to maintain their distinct workplace culture. Some strategies that organizations may explore when adopting hybrid working arrangements may be more effective than others. What's most important is to keep the employees' current and future needs in mind as the workplace continues to evolve.

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