

## 14.1 Defining the Hybrid Workplace



Workplaces have experienced the most significant disruption in decades because of the Covid-19 global pandemic. As business owners, leaders, and human resources professionals consider how to navigate the constantly changing landscape of how and where we work, they are also faced with a big opportunity: redefining the workplace for the better.

Reports indicate that workers are reconsidering what they want from a workplace and an employer more than they ever have before. Some recent surveys found that 26% of workers in the United States are already preparing to look for new employment opportunities and 40% of workers globally are considering resigning from their jobs by the end of the year.

One way that employers can mitigate the risk of losing qualified and talented employees and to increase access to talented candidates is to create a hybrid workplace.

### Defining the Hybrid Workplace

This is a term that we hear a lot of these days but do we really understand what it means? A hybrid workplace is a workplace that is designed to support a distributed workforce of both in-person and remote workers; it is flexible in how, where, and when work gets done.

### Why Employees Want Flexibility in How and Where They Work

With many workers doing their jobs from home over the course of the pandemic, they have had time to reflect on what they value most. Many workers who live in the suburbs but used to work in offices in the downtown core of a city no longer have a long daily commute. This saves two or three hours a day previously spent in a car or on public transport – time now spent with friends, family, and enjoying more of a balance between work time and personal time.

Workers may have struggled with adjusting to remote work at the start of the pandemic, but they have grown to appreciate and value it. Research from LinkedIn found that 87% of employees would prefer to keep working remotely at least 50% of the time.

# Determining What a Hybrid Workplace Means for Your Organization

Every organization is unique and while there are many articles and blog posts out there that tell you what must be in a flexible workplace, don't just rely on those to create your hybrid workplan – talk to your employees.

Here are some things for small business owners, leaders, and human resources professionals to keep in mind as they consider the shift to a more flexible workplace and create a hybrid workplan:

**Ask and Listen:** Not sure what your employees want or need? Ask them. You can do this through a short survey with an online tool like Survey Monkey or through conversations in team or one-on-one meetings. Asking is just one part of the equation.

The other part is listening – it's not always something that we do well. We ask questions but do we really stop to listen to the other person, or do we listen to respond? When you ask your employees, listen to their suggestions.

**Acknowledge:** Here's the good news: as a leader you don't have to have all the answers. Hybrid workplaces are new to many organizations and that means that many leaders are also learning how to navigate this new way of working. Sharing that you don't have everything all worked out allows you to be authentic with your employees and helps build trust. It also creates an opportunity for collaboration, which brings us to the next suggestion...

**Co-create:** When employees feel that something is being done with them rather than to them, there is greater buy-in. It's also more likely that the hybrid workplan will be effective when those who it will benefit are involved in the design and implementation.

**Test and Learn:** We don't know what the future may hold but it will likely include more change. Applying a growth mindset through the design, implementation, and assessment of a hybrid workplan allows for greater agility; if something isn't working, don't be afraid to change it. Learn from the mistakes and missteps and apply what you learned to improve.

## Determining What Elements to Incorporate into Your Hybrid Workplan

As part of your stakeholder engagement process with employees, consider the following questions to help determine what should be in your hybrid workplan (and what should be left out):

- What has worked well during the pandemic with remote work, what hasn't worked, and what do employees feel is missing?
- What work must happen/which employees must be in the workplace? This could be for client or customer needs, security requirements, or manufacturing reasons.
- Can employees live in other areas of the province, country, or world and still do their work effectively and collaboratively with colleagues?
- How many days a week or month will employees be in the workplace and how many will they be working from home? Will this vary by team or work function?
- Will remote work happen in home offices, remote working locations such as co-working spaces, or could it be a combination?
- Should teams be required to physically work in the same location for specific projects?

- How will team, department, and organization-wide meetings be conducted, and communications issued?
- How will human connections be fostered between remote workers, their colleagues, cross-functional teams, managers, and leaders?
- How will a hybrid workplan affect the overall mental health and wellbeing of your employees? Are there elements that could help or hinder health?
- Are there employees who require accommodations due to a disability or family status? How can you honor and accommodate those needs?
- Can your hybrid workplace include flexible schedules such as staggered start and end times, a compressed schedule with an extra day off every second week, or mid-week days off rather than a traditional weekend?
- Does your office need to be reconfigured to better suit the new way of working? For example, instead of single offices, maybe you need “hotel” desks for when employees are in the office or more collaboration spaces and meeting rooms? You might even consider moving your office to a smaller space.
- Will a budget be required for outfitting home offices or purchasing co-working memberships?

It doesn't have to be perfect to start! Once your hybrid workplan is almost ready, start setting it in motion to get early feedback. Regularly check in with your employees to assess what is working and what needs to be changed.

**Sources :**

<sup>1</sup>Newroom. (2021, April 6). *Increasingly, workers expect pandemic workplace adaptations to stick*. Retrieved from <https://news.prudential.com/increasingly-workers-expect-pandemic-workplace-adaptations-to-stick.htm>

<sup>2</sup>Microsoft. *The Work trend Index*. Retrieve from *Work Trend Index: Microsoft's latest research on the ways we work*.

<sup>3</sup>Siliconrepublic. (2021, September 11). *Microsoft CEO: 'Care is the new currency' in hybrid working*. Retrieved from *Microsoft CEO: 'Care is the new currency' in hybrid working - [siliconrepublic.com](https://siliconrepublic.com)*

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