

Future of the Hybrid Workforce Is Here

Are Your Leaders and Employees Ready?



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Introduction

Before the disruption of COVID-19, around 30% of the U.S. workforce was working from home at least some of the time. The number more than doubled when the pandemic hit, as enterprises overnight enabled everyone they could to work remotely. That same trend played out around the globe.

This unintended experiment in mass-scale remote work shattered one of the most durable myths about the workforce. You cannot trust employees to do their jobs if you cannot see them.



Background

WHAT IS A HYBRID WORKFORCE?

Much of the answer to this question is currently unclear. However, it seems inevitable that many organizations will adopt more flexible working policies, allowing at least an element of work from home (WFH) to continue after it is safe for all to return to brick and mortar spaces.

Some organizations will inevitably leave the decision as to whether and when to come back to the workplace to each individual employee. It is likely that such employers will manage the process on a case-by-case basis, acknowledging that some people will be keen to come back to the office, while others will not be.

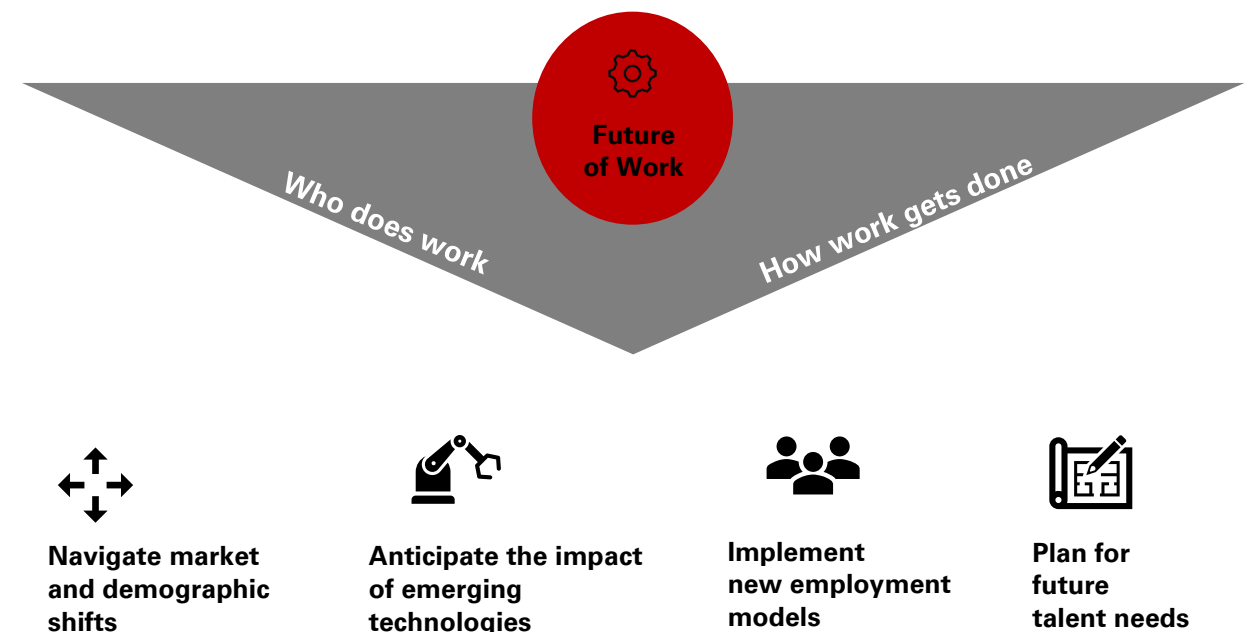
Variations in employee circumstances, preferences or requirements within the same workforce could lead to the rise of hybrid teams, in which some members work in the one co-located workplace while others work remotely.

FUTURE OF WORK

The questions today go far beyond the binary issue of whether employees are remote vs on-site. That is a legacy mindset from the “before” times, when the drive for efficiency motivated the bulk of business decision. The smart money in today’s highly disrupted environment will flow to businesses that are “composable” – made up of interchangeable building blocks that can scale up or down or swap out, according to the definition and measurement of customer success and employee engagement. The hybrid model is adaptable and interchangeable.



Capturing the opportunity to attract talent, reduce operational costs and maintain the organization’s culture takes a progressive mindset and a discrete set of steps to smooth execution. Here are some considerations to keep in mind.



7 HYBRID WORKFORCE MYTHS

Many business leaders have been pleasantly surprised by how successful remote work has been as an urgent response to pandemic conditions. Yet many still question the long-term value of any nontraditional workforce mode, let alone a full-fledged hybrid workforce model.

Why the hesitation? Much of it stems from common myths about what a hybrid workforce model is – and old school ideas about where, when, and how employees perform at their best.

If you do not dispel those myths, you could leave untapped a key driver of organizational resilience and handicap your attempts to attract and deploy the talent you need and diminish opportunities to build a cohesive team reflecting multiple generations and a high regard for diversity and inclusion.

MYTH 1. Our existing remote work strategy will work for hybrid models.

FACT: Hybrid workforce strategies go far beyond remote work.

Organizations need to break down long-held beliefs and potential myths about where and how work gets done most effectively. Managers must trust employees to be effective and productive while employees need to be flexible and comfortable being mobile.

THINK DIFFERENTLY. Build the business case and strategy through tangible benefits, which include reduced operating costs, an improved employee value proposition and expanded access to lower-cost talent pools. Define workforce outcomes and degrees of flexibility for different roles.

MYTH 2. Employees are less productive outside of the office.

FACT: Remote workers more often go above and beyond and report higher performance and more control over work/life balance.

THINK DIFFERENTLY. The role of hybrid-workforce managers is not to micromanage productivity; it is to remove barriers and enable outcomes. Weekly on-on-one meetings with direct reports is a good way for managers to communicate expectations and provide direction and feedback.

Soft skills such as *adaptability, self-motivation and remote collaboration* all help remote employees to be more effective. HR and business leaders can together develop programs to hone these skills.

7 Hybrid Workforce Myths continued

MYTH 3: We need to monitor and measure what employee are doing.

FACT: Employees thrive when given radical flexibility and autonomy. Flexibility fuels employee performance.

THINK DIFFERENTLY. Track employee performance in relation to business objectives and effective collaboration across teams, behaviors that demonstrate a culture of trust and accountability. Track improvements such as reduced costs, increased revenue, greater process efficiency, more business opportunities from cross-site partnerships and the ability to attract diverse, high-quality candidates.

MYTH 4: Our jobs just cannot be done remotely.

FACT: Hybrid workforce models look beyond roles. Most jobs fall somewhere on a spectrum between fully portable and fully nonportable. This requires a focus on tasks and bundling of tasks not job titles.

THINK DIFFERENTLY. Identify the tasks that can be done remotely, and then work with employees to understand their preferences about where they work. For those who want to work remotely some or all the time, provide the resources they need to do it. Set expectations around what they can do anywhere, what they must come into the office to do and how often they are expected to be there.

MYTH 5: We need in-person contact to sustain our culture.

FACT: Collaboration, agility and trust are increasingly important cultural values in resilient organizations and do not relate to physical location.

THINK DIFFERENTLY. Think about the cultural norms and values you want to promote and the behaviors that reinforce them. Teach employees the value of working across and within all units. This is an effective approach to eliminating siloed work and relationships.

MYTH 6: Hybrid workforce models hurt diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

FACT: Hybrid workforce models can make it easier to tap a diverse talent pool; inclusion and equity need discrete, intentional effort. Whether the workforce model is hybrid or not, the imperative is to remove unconscious bias in talent recruitment, performance evaluations and opportunities for development.

THINK DIFFERENTLY. Pole employee groups about their work experience and ask what they need from the organization to feel connected and heard. Leverage employee resource groups to ensure everyone has a voice, and identify new practices, from flexible work schedules to additional hardware or software for differing needs.

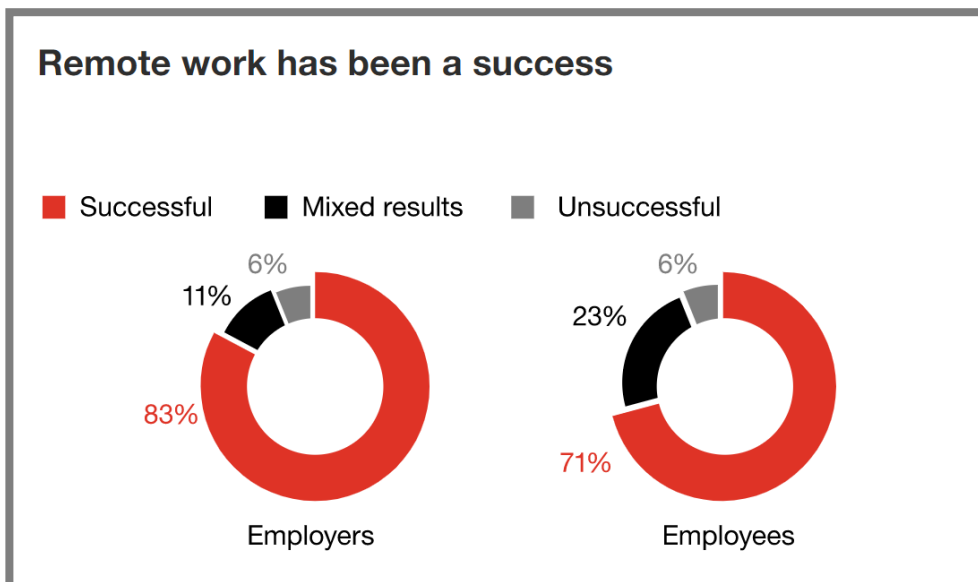
MYTH 7: A hybrid workforce model duplicates our IT infrastructure.

FACT: Resilient organizations continuously reengineer their IT strategies and infrastructure anyway. Everywhere enterprises use technology, team structures, processes, skills, and tools to empower dispersed workforces, harness distributed infrastructures and serve ubiquitous customer bases.

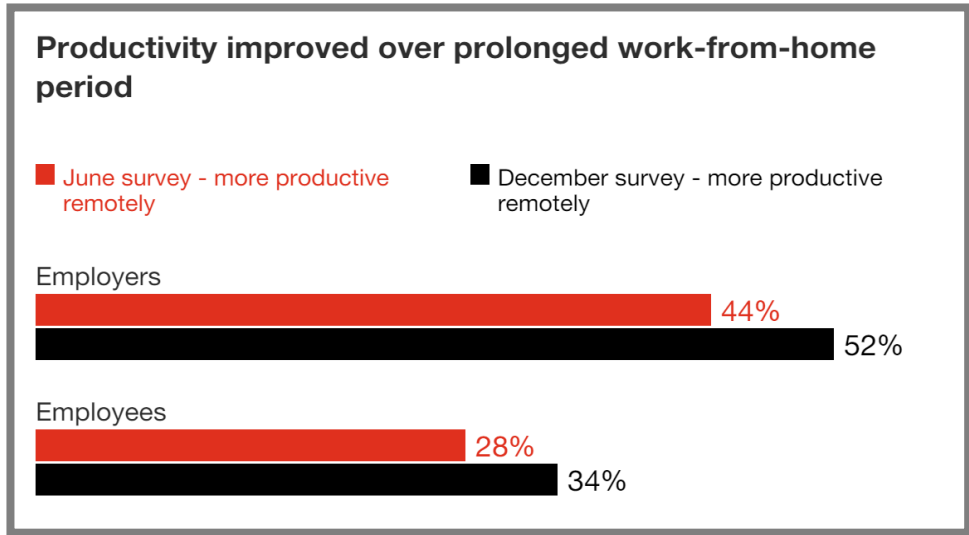
THINK DIFFERENTLY. Establish the specifics of who needs what, including minimum download and upload speeds, and negotiate coverage to include as many employees as possible. Deploy solutions that distribute traffic across the network and prevent backlogs that come from routing everything through the on-site data center. Invest in cloud-based services.

WHAT EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS ARE SAYING ABOUT THE FUTURE OF WORK

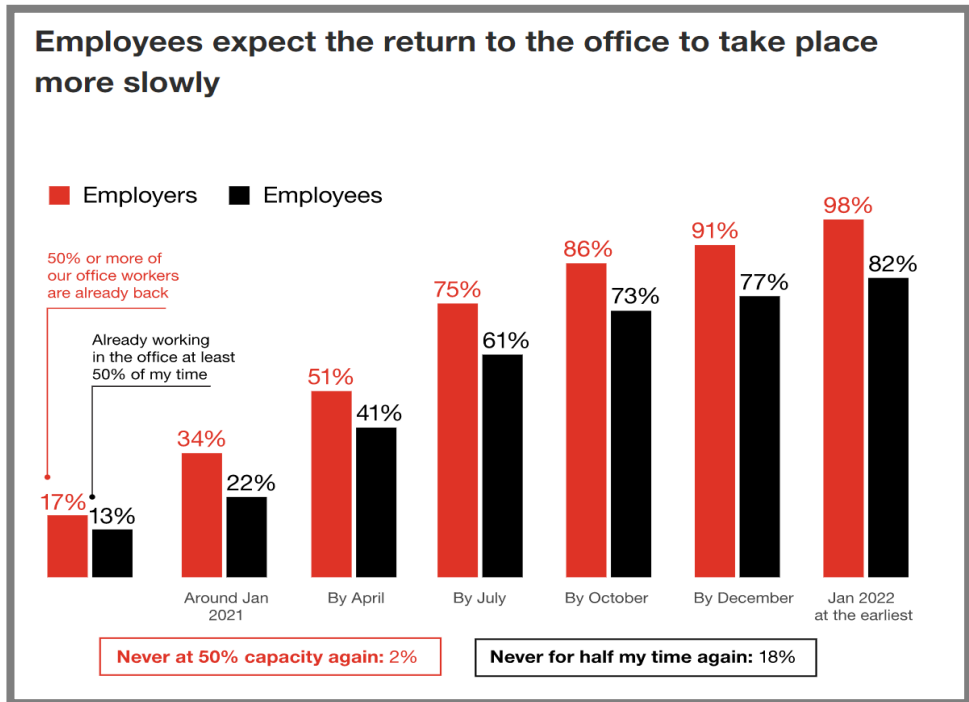
PwC released its US Remote Work Survey January 21, 2021. Most of the executives and employees surveyed expected this hybrid workplace reality to begin to take shape in the second quarter of this year. To be sure, the timing will depend on the rollout of vaccines. Some firms might move more quickly as vaccines become more available or slow down if vaccinations occur slower than anticipated. PwC surveyed 133 executives and 1,200 office workers in November and December 2020. All participants work in a corporate or government setting. All respondents were from public and private companies in three sectors: **financial services** (43%), **technology, media, and telecommunications** (31%) and **retail and consumer products** (26%). Here are the findings.



Finding 1 – Company actions supporting remote work are bearing fruit.



Finding 2 – Executives are ready to ramp up return to the office in 2021; employees say not so fast.



Finding 3 - Hybrid workplaces likely to become the norm.

The purpose of an office...

According to employers

- #1 Increasing employee productivity
- #2 Providing a space to meet with clients
- #3 Enabling our employees to collaborate effectively
- #4 Enabling our company culture

According to employees

- #1 Collaborating
- #2 Accessing equipment or documents securely
- #3 Meeting with clients or colleagues
- #4 Training and career development

By design or default, most US companies are heading toward a hybrid office workweek

It's been great! We're better off giving up on office space entirely



No turning back: Many of our office employees will work remotely a significant amount of their time



Going with the flow. Business performance is not suffering. We'll likely increase the level of remote work



Prefer limited remote schedules but people like it, including future talent



Back to the office as soon as feasible. We're at our best on-site and in person



Finding 4 - Employees and employers don't see eye to eye on the optimal schedule for remote work

Over half of employees want to work remotely three days a week or more

I would not want to work remotely



1-3 days per month



One day per week



Two days per week



Three days per week



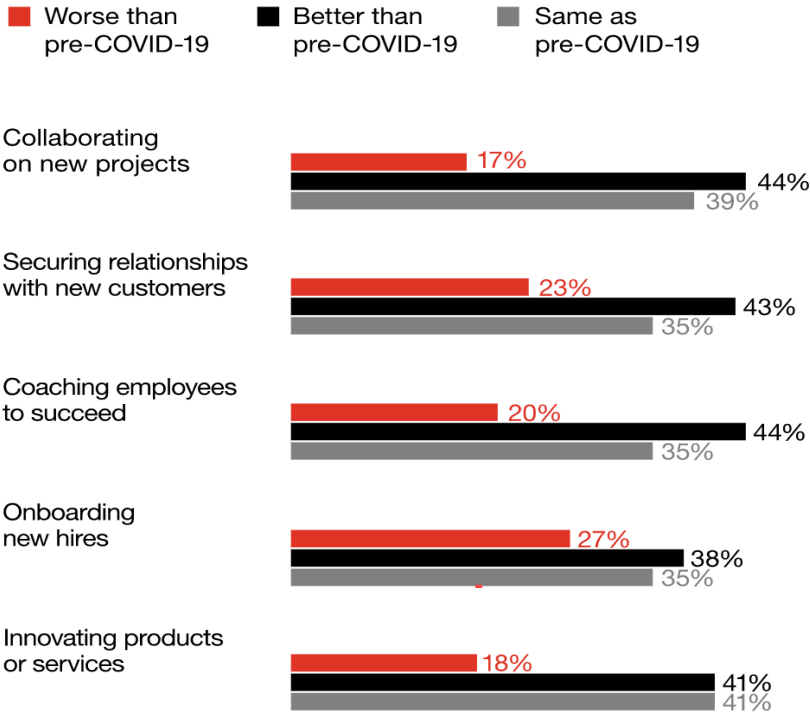
Four days per week



Five days per week

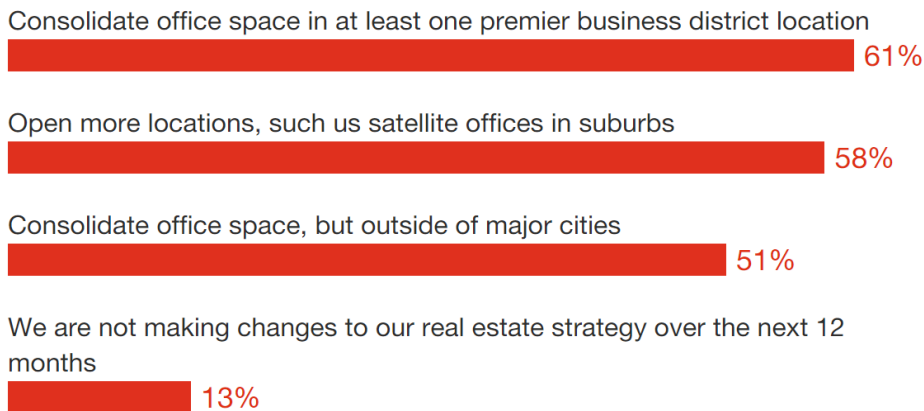


Employers more likely to say performance improving under remote work



Finding 5 - Most executives anticipate changes to their real estate strategy in the next 12 months.

Real estate strategy in transition as companies anticipate multiple changes



HYBRID-READY LEADERS DRIVE SUCCESS

The current world context is pushing organizations to make better-informed, faster decisions to survive in a rapidly changing environment. Hybrid workforce models reflect the kind of intelligent composable business responses needed for individual functions and whole organizations to digitalize activities, at scale and at speed.

Hybrid models to challenge long-held beliefs about when and how employee perform well. It will take deliberate strategic planning to scale such hybrid models in a way that drives business objectives and cost savings.

The flexibility inherent in hybrid workforce models delivers a host of good outcomes – but only if the leadership has the mindset to champion hybrid work.

Hybrid workforce models enable employees to flow through various work sites— from remote solo locations and microsites of small populations to traditional facilities like offices and factories. Work gets done where and when it is optimal to drive the highest levels of productivity and engagement. This new paradigm takes a certain kind of leader.

Mind Set of Hybrid-ready Leaders

Hybrid-ready leaders do not view a hybrid workforce model as a risk—or insist on preserving tried-and-true ways of working. Leaders who perform well in, and drives success from, nontraditional workforce models instead view the move to a **hybrid workforce model as an opportunity, and they demonstrate courage, agility, ownership, and long-term thinking.**

There are 4 types of hybrid workforce leaders, based on maturity. To determine whether your leadership is well-positioned to leverage a hybrid workforce model, you can diagnose the openness of their mindset and maturity of their skills set on a simple matrix. Segmenting the leadership population in this way enables you to prioritize development where it is needed most.

The four types of hybrid leaders are:

1. **Hybrid champions:** Leaders with the right mindset and skill set to lead a hybrid workforce.
2. **Hybrid strivers:** Leaders who have the right mindset but lack the right skill set to lead a hybrid workforce.
3. **Hybrid resisters:** Leaders who have the right skill set but a closed mindset toward a hybrid workforce.
4. **Hybrid laggards:** Leaders who lack both the mindset and the requisite skill set for leading a hybrid workforce.

Skill Set of Hybrid-ready Leaders

An open mindset is key, but management skills sets are also important. Hybrid-ready leaders must be able to:

- **Drive performance**, even when teams are remote, without close monitoring or supervision.
- **Champion development** to ensure that employees are equipped with the skills needed to drive current and future performance.
- **Communicate effectively** across a variety of channels to lead virtual and in-office teams.
- **Enable enterprise contribution**, connecting remote workers with their in-office and otherwise dispersed peers and supporting them all to drive high enterprise performance and contribution.
- **Foster inclusive team climates**, independent of employees' choice of work location.
- **Build trust and psychological safety** so that dispersed workers feel safe to share their challenges for collective problem solving.
- **Establish team culture and norms** throughout in-office, remote teams and across departments and functions.

CONCLUSIONS

Many of the skill sets needed in a hybrid-ready leader are not new, but they do have to be developed. The expectation of flexibility is likely to make a hybrid workforce model more prevalent in the post COVID-19 world, and the right leaders are critical to operationalizing hybrid workforce models.

A candid C-suite conversation about hybrid workforce models needs to take place—and soon. The pandemic environment may seem like an employer's market, but that is an illusion, especially when it comes to talent in high demand.

There is no going back to the work model that prevailed before the pandemic. Your organization cannot be resilient without thinking that embraces the possibility of nontraditional strategies like hybrid workforce.