The Complete Guide to Hybrid Work Strategy

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Introduction

To return to the office, or not to return to the office? That is the question! 😊

It’s buzzing in the minds of CEOs, HR departments, and employees everywhere. In-office work vs. remote work has been debated since the shift to software-based work, and the COVID-19 global pandemic has certainly forced a turning point in the conversation.

Supporters and naysayers of both sides can be loud, so our aim for this resource is to provide thoughtful, balanced, and practical guidance for what we’re calling the **Hybrid Work Movement**.

Here’s what you can expect:

- A crash course in **definitions** you need to know—like, what is hybrid work? How is it different from remote work? What are mixed modalities? Why is knowledge equity important?
- Discussion of the **benefits** of hybrid work—excellent if you need help addressing hesitations from your team!
- **Considerations** to think about when implementing a hybrid work strategy. Of course, it’s not a perfect solution, but here’s what you can do to mitigate areas of tension.
- When and how to start **planning your transition** to a hybrid workplace strategy.
- And when it’s time, how to **put your plan into action**.
- Of course, it doesn’t just end there! We’ll discuss gathering feedback, **iterating on your strategy**, and next steps.

Buckle up! The fun thing about this topic is that hybrid work is still a fairly new concept to many companies—we’ll figure it out together! 🎉
Definitions

In-office work

For a long time, office work was considered the norm of most employees’ lives. From business complexes to campuses, cubicles to open floor plans, we’ve seen many iterations of what “office life” looks and feels like.

What we consider office work’s benefits and challenges vary from employee to employee, but here’s where folks typically land.

Pros and Cons to in-office work

Benefits for employees

- Opportunities for spontaneous collaboration and communication
- Ability to socialize and build a central company culture
- In-office perks like snacks, childcare, gyms, and catered meals
- Separation of work and home

Challenges for employees

- Commuting
- Timekeeping and lack of flexibility
- Distractions and interrupted work
- Having to conform to traditional ideas of professionalism

Benefits for employers

- Opportunities for positive employee branding (in-office perks like games and snacks, workspace design, events, having a central space for building a company culture)
- Management and supervision occurs in-person

Challenges for employers

- Costs, from real estate to supplies to providing in-office perks
- Reduced talent pool due to location-specific employment
Remote work, distributed work

As a contrast to in-office work, remote and distributed work typically refers to working outside of a centralized space, whether in a home office, coffee shop, coworking space, or from the beach. All you need is a WiFi connection! 🌴

“Changes in society, such as a more mobile workforce and workers' demands for flexibility, have fueled the development of portable office equipment. Laptop computers, cellular phones, and facsimile machines now equip a growing telecommuting workforce and, in some cases, have eliminated the need for central offices altogether. The option of telecommuting has become a valuable tool for companies competing for skilled employees who are tired of commuting long distances from the suburbs.”

–The Smithsonian, *A Short History of the Birth and Growth of the American Office*

Pros and Cons to in-office work

**Benefits for employees**

- Flexible hours and increased autonomy
- Increased productivity
- Eliminated or reduced commute
- Increased health and wellness (ability to take breaks when needed, less time spent sedentary during a commute, flexibility to go to appointments as needed)

**Challenges for employees**

- Less opportunities for spontaneous socializing and collaboration
- Blurred lines between work and home, difficulty unplugging from work
- *Feelings of loneliness and isolation*, lack of belonging
- Lack of work visibility and potential for siloes
- Upfront costs to supply a productive working environment
**Benefits for employers**

- Larger talent pool and [more diverse candidates](#)
- Opportunities for knowledge equity and documentation
- Eliminated or [reduced overhead costs](#)
- [Increased employee productivity](#)

**Challenges for employers**

- Potential security risks (unsecured WiFi, accidental data exposure, external breaches)
- Difficulty in establishing a central company culture
- Decreased visibility of day-to-day accomplishments

**Hybrid work**

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted many employees to consider what is actually important to them. Is it flexible scheduling to allow for childcare and household errands? Or are they struggling to unplug at the end of the day?

It all comes down to employee preferences—making the hybrid work model appealing to the largest number of people. According to [Glint](#), LinkedIn’s people-success platform, 56% of employees (out of 30,000 surveyed) prefer a hybrid work model, compared to 31% of employees that prefer an entirely remote approach, with only 13% wanting to go into the office.

“Although the pandemic has intensified the discussion around the pros and cons of working from home, and what working without an office means, it is safe to conclude that the best alternative is not to opt between one or the other, but to give employees the option.”

Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, [Harvard Business Review](#), *Thriving in the Age of Hybrid Work*
Luckily, the hybrid work model is the opposite of a one-size-fits-all approach. It incorporates aspects of both in-office and remote work—making it the most flexible of the workplace strategies discussed in this guide.

“According to a PwC survey conducted in early 2021, just one-fifth of executives said they thought it was necessary for employees to be in the office five days per week. While there was disagreement on exactly how many days employees should be physically present, 62% of executives said either two, three or four days would make the most sense. Remote work is an even bigger priority for young employees, with almost half of Millennial and Gen Z workers stating that they would even be willing to forfeit future earnings for the ability to work remotely.”

Josh Millet, Forbes, How Companies Can Thrive In The Emerging Era Of Hybrid Work

Here’s what a hybrid work model can look like:

Company A

50 employees based in a central location

- In-office Monday, Wednesday, Fridays with lunch on Wednesdays
- Tuesday & Thursdays optional on an ad-hoc basis
Company B

- 200 employees across three locations, with 85% of employees being near company headquarters
  - 70% prefer to work remote
  - 30% consist of teams that prefer to work in person
  - Main office lease expires and co-working spaces are acquired for the in-person teams

Company C

- 500 employees across the globe
  - Department level decision of their preferred workplace model
  - Office needs and tooling will be decided based on those outcomes

There are countless ways a company can implement a hybrid work model. Are you thinking this strategy would be a good fit for your team? As the main star of the guide, let’s take a deep dive at the benefits of the hybrid work model. ★
Benefits of a hybrid work model

Hybrid work looks different at every company. For companies doing it right, here’s how they stand to benefit from implementing a hybrid work strategy:

**Increased flexibility**

When asked about motivating incentives, flexible schedules came out on top: 76% of employees want it!

Modern employees want to build out their schedules based on their preferences: night owls might prefer a slower start to the day, whereas parents and caretakers are more productive with the peace of mind that they’ll be able to take care of work and family when necessary. Feeling a mid-day slump? Take a break and recharge!

“For the hybrid [work model] to truly work, all employees should be relatively free to maximize where, when and how they execute their work tasks.”

Holger Reisinger, Forbes, *How Managers Can Rethink Employee Engagement For Hybrid Work*
Increased diversity

Many companies are struggling to fill jobs, while ‘The Great Resignation’ is prompting employees to take their talents elsewhere.

By pursuing a hybrid work strategy, you’re not constrained by the physical location of your office—which opens up the diversity of your talent pipeline. Here are some populations of the labor force that you appeal to with a hybrid work model:

- People with physical or mental disabilities
- People with caregiving responsibilities
- People who may not have the economic means to live near your office

“[Some companies]—especially ones in high-cost housing markets such as San Francisco or Seattle—are finding that they can hire new talent faster and more affordably if they relax old rules about how often people need to be in the office,” says George Anders for LinkedIn. Backing up that hypothesis is Dropbox, who saw a 3x increase in applicants, 15% faster time to hire, and a 16% increase in diverse candidates after their transition to a hybrid work model. 👏
Increased productivity

The beginning of the pandemic prompted many questions around employee productivity as a majority of the workforce began working remotely. “Are my employees really working?” was a question on the minds of many leaders, and emerging studies suggest that the answer is a resounding yes.

The National Bureau of Economic Research suggests a 5% productivity boost in the post-pandemic economy due to more employers turning toward a hybrid work model.

It’s true on the company level, too: Accenture found that “63% of high-growth organizations have enabled productivity anywhere workforce models, while 69% of negative or no-growth companies are still focused on where people are going to physically work (favoring all onsite or remote rather than enabling hybrid)”. 😳

While these statistics are sure to evolve and shift as companies find their stride with hybrid work, there seems to be no indication that remote or hybrid work negatively impacts employee productivity on a collective basis.

Challenges & solutions of a hybrid work model

Like with any workplace model, there are challenges to implementing hybrid work—but nothing that can’t be mitigated with good communication and a well-crafted strategy! Here are a few common pitfalls, with suggested solutions.

Plus, as our VP of People Ops Vicki Yang says, “Instead of solving for where you work, solve for how you work.”
Inclusion and sense of belonging

Social isolation and remote work during the pandemic has emphasized the importance of a strong sense of belonging at work.

Glint’s Employee Well-Being Report found that a sense of “Belonging” shot up four positions to be the second-most important factor in employee well-being. Since the pandemic stripped away organic in-office socializing, events, and perks, employees are turning toward more abstract indicators of company culture, like mission and vision, sense of belonging and purpose, and company core values.

For companies turning toward a hybrid work model, fostering that sense of belonging should be top of mind. Our rule of thumb? Think about this through a digital-first lens. By making sure your remote employees feel that sense of belonging, you’ll bring your hybrid and in-office employees along with them.

Here are a few our favorite company culture tips to help build your hybrid company culture:

- Audit your onboarding process: This is your first opportunity to create an excellent employee experience. Make the most of it! We recommend having a digital-first onboarding plan to establish that hybrid company culture

- Stream and record your all-hands presentations, and ask employees to submit questions prior to the meeting

- Recognize and reward employees that exemplify your remote-first core values

- Introduce a program like Donut to encourage employee introductions and chit chat

- Plan fun remote-first events

Bonusly is a fun, personal rewards and recognition program that helps people feel engaged and successful at work. Chat with one of our product experts to start building a recognition-rich culture at your company!
Mixed modalities

You might be thinking, "We all worked remotely for the past year and a half! Transitioning to hybrid work will be easy-peasy."

Not so fast!

Transitioning to hybrid work can be easy-peasy, but it’ll take some prep work. One of the biggest challenges to hybrid work is mixed modalities.

For example, if you have two folks on screen and five people in-office, how can you make sure that everybody can be seen and heard equally? How do you eliminate difficult-to-hear side conversations that may contain important context for remote folks? How do you make sure remote employees are fully engaged in the meeting, instead of being an outside watcher?

Lean on tech

While a telepresence robot might not be strictly necessary, there are a lot of devices that can help smooth out mixed modalities. Like we said above, approach this with a digital-first mindset, and you’ll end up solving for the whole team.

- **Make brainstorming accessible** with a tool like Mural, instead of remote employees having to dictate their ideas to someone physically in the room.

- Invest in devices like the Meeting Owl Pro, that provides a better meeting experience between remote and in-person workers.

- Introduce a meeting notes app like Hypercontext, so everyone in a meeting understands the agenda, is clear on next steps, and can refer back to meeting notes for anything they missed.

- **Document everything.** Using a knowledge wiki tool like Guru ensures everyone has the information they need to succeed, whether they’re in-office or not.
Keeping work visible

Your employees are likely getting their work done—even without someone looking over their shoulder. But we get it. You (and your leaders and managers) want to see what everyone's up to! In this section, we'll cover a few ways to keep lines of communication open and hard work visible—without sacrificing your employees' autonomy.

Breaking down, and keeping down, siloes

Overcommunication will be your best bet in transitioning to a hybrid work model. Since there is less opportunity for organic communication in an office setting, employees must be encouraged to proactively communicate in digital channels—especially for the benefit of fully-remote employees.

Luckily, there's a plethora of tools out there that makes this communication easy. Consider scheduling stand-up meetings at the beginning of each week, or asynchronous Slack updates. Along with those updates, a project management tool like Asana or Trello will be imperative to surfacing task prioritization and opportunities for collaboration.

Employee recognition

It can feel hard to be recognized in a remote environment. There are often fewer opportunities for employees to see each others’ work, especially between different teams.

It's hard to be recognized, period! According to Gallup, only one in three workers in the U.S. strongly agree that they received recognition or praise for doing good work in the past seven days. 😞

That's why in a hybrid environment, you have to create those opportunities. Make great work visible! Here are a few ideas:

- Dedicate a space for shout-outs at your company, whether that's on a bulletin board, in a Slack channel, or even an email thread!
● Dedicate time during weekly team or all-hands to publicly recognize high performers

● Allocate space in your budget for fun rewards and gifts, and send out surprise packages when someone does something awesome

● Include a recognition or positive feedback section in your next round of performance reviews

● Survey your employees on how they’d like to be recognized

● Celebrate birthdays and work anniversaries!

● Encourage and create space for peer recognition, not just top-down recognition

● Introduce a recognition program like Bonusly

Keeping recognition visible helps teams stay informed of work across their organization and better understand how other employees’ contributions impact the company’s goals. It’s a great way to stay connected and build a sense of purpose.
Crafting a plan

Your leadership team has agreed to a hybrid work model—now what?!
Like we mentioned, a hybrid work model is largely based upon your employees’ preferences. So… what are those preferences? 😊

Surveying your employees

One of the biggest mistakes you can make is implementing a new workplace strategy without getting feedback from your employees.

Our #1 tip? **Don’t make assumptions.**

The pandemic has upended all our routines, and even vocal naysayers of the transition to remote work may have changed their tune as their routines settled over the past year and a half. There can be strong opinions from both sides, so make sure you’re gathering sentiment from quieter employees, too.

Another important thing to remember is that while you may have one company culture, each department in that company is likely to have their own unique team culture. That’s a lot of opinions to take into consideration!

Coming to a consensus is likely to create more headaches for you. What we recommend is first having your department heads and team leads survey their direct reports, and then come together to assess overlaps and trends. Then you can strategize for a workplace model that truly fits your employees’ lifestyles.
The questions you’ll ask will depend largely on the current state of your business, but here are a few starter questions to get the creative juices flowing—many of these questions were asked by Bonusly leadership to gather information about Bonusly employee expectations and wishes!

- Pre-COVID, how many days a week did you work from the office?
- What are your biggest concerns about returning to the office?
- What have you enjoyed most while working from home?
- What has been your biggest challenge while working from home?
- Do you think your productivity has increased, decreased, or stayed the same while working at home?
- What are you looking forward to most about going back to the office?
- Which activities will you expect to do when returning to the office?
- Do you think your ability to collaborate with your team has increased, decreased, or stayed the same while working at home?
- If given the opportunity, would you prefer to keep working from home permanently?
- How many days would you like to be in the office in the future?
- What types of events have you found to be successful to maintain engagement and culture with dispersed and in-office employees?
- How are you thinking about hybrid team building experiences?
Bonusly's leadership team sent these survey questions via Bonusly Signals, our employee feedback and surveying tool!

How long you keep your survey open will depend on multiple factors, including the size of your organization and the strength of your internal communications. For what it's worth, our leadership team ran this particular survey for one week and asked us to answer the questions to the best of our abilities with the information we had at the time.

After you close your survey and you've analyzed your survey results... what's next?

**Understanding logistics**

**Evaluating office space and supply needs**

The results of your employee survey will be a huge influencer of your post-pandemic office environment.
Whether your office space sat gathering dust during the pandemic or you gave up your lease, understanding your hybrid work real estate needs is likely top of mind. Here are a few factors to consider...

- Based on your survey, how many employees on average can you expect to have in the office? What are your high-capacity days, and when will the office mostly be empty?

- Does every employee need a dedicated desk to be successful?

- How many meeting rooms (and accompanying meeting tools) do you need to accommodate the folks that plan to come into the office?

- Do your remote employees have the equipment they need to be successful? Remember, this includes future remote employees. Consider:
  - Steady internet connection
  - Headphones and headset
  - Ergonomic seating
  - Monitors, keyboards, mouse

- If your remote employees don't have what they need, how can you support them? Consider:
  - A stipend to build a home office environment
  - Expensed membership to a coworking space
  - Upgraded internet and data plan

Taxes

Of course, implementing a hybrid work strategy also includes some logistical considerations. Every situation and company is different, so we recommend talking to your accountants. Consulting an expert like Origin and their guide to remote work and taxation is also a great idea.
Putting it in action

Developing your working agreements

Working agreements are norms or guidelines created by a team to define goals, set expectations, and establish a common language for working together. Since hybrid work is a new frontier for many of us, it's especially important to make sure everyone is on the same page.

Like we mentioned, individual teams within a company will often have their own cultures. For example, your Sales team may prefer to be fully remote because they're typically on calls for most of the day, but would like to come in on Mondays for weekly planning. Meanwhile, your Marketing team all live close by the office and enjoy socializing with their colleagues most days of the week. Your engineers? They are scattered around the United States and will travel into the office once a quarter for roadmap planning.

Here are the questions we found the most impactful for building our hybrid team working agreements:

- Why does this team exist? What are our goals for this team?
- What's in it for you to be part of this team?
- What work do we achieve together?
- What meetings and tools do we use to collaborate?
- What are our goals for working together in the office?
- What are our encouraged behaviors?
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- What are our discouraged behaviors?
- To reach our goals, which meetings or what type of work would you like to do in person, and how often?

For a great starter template, make sure to check out our [Working Agreements Template](#).

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**Iterating**

It feels good to check "hybrid work strategy" off your to-do list, and it should! ✅

However, changing circumstances will beget changing employee needs. We're big fans of treating working agreements as living documents and using surveys to adapt them over time. Don't be afraid of change, just be sure it's documented and communicated with the team.

Check in often, and remember that agreements can always be renegotiated, especially when new members join or situations change. Our rule of thumb? **Schedule check-in surveys each quarter as your team gets adjusted, and then at least every six months after that.**

Every new team has a distinct dynamic, with individuals that prefer a certain mixture of behaviors and practices. Respect your uniqueness!
If you're ready to get started, Bonusly's surveying tool, Signals, is available for all Bonusly Pro users. There's even a survey template, called "Return to Office with Bonusly and Robin," that's available in our template library for you to use! We collaborated on it with Robin, the workplace management platform that's designed for hybrid teams.

If you're interested in learning more about Bonusly's platform, schedule time to speak to one of our employee engagement and recognition experts!
Bonusly is the fun and easy way to engage all of your employees and improve retention and productivity at every level of your organization.

Bonusly's 360-degree recognition solution makes teamwork visible to everyone, empowering your employees to show their appreciation for each other, build stronger working relationships, and feel a greater sense of belonging.

Learn more about employee recognition at bonus.ly

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