



Guidelines and Policies for **Optimizing Your Hybrid Workplace** in 2022

A Practical Guide for Hybrid Teams, HR Professionals,
Workplace Managers, and Business Leaders



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01

How the Hybrid Workplace Came to Be

The pandemic did not bring about the concept of the hybrid workplace. As we'll see in a few paragraphs, that shift started years ago. What the pandemic did was accelerate it.

In March 2020, millions of employees started working from home. For some companies, this was not a huge shift. They were already either working remotely or in a hybrid way. For others, leadership and employees scratched their heads, mumbling "we've got to figure out how to run this company while everyone is working in their pajamas."

After some initial confusion, which was only natural, leadership and employees alike discovered something: Everyone became as productive, if not more productive than when they were in the office.

Mercer, an HR firm, surveyed 800 employers and found that more than 90% say productivity has stayed the same or improved.



"Before the pandemic, executives believed only 45% of the workforce was adaptable to a new world of work. Of course, COVID-19 has now shattered that belief. Today, over 90% of employers say productivity has stayed the same or improved with employees working remotely."

— [Mercer's survey on hybrid work](#)

However, others also noticed some potentially dangerous side effects of remote work. For example, Microsoft found that collaboration can take a serious hit when employees work only remotely.



“Overall, we found that the shift to remote work caused the formal business groups and informal communities within Microsoft to become less interconnected and more siloed. Remote work caused the share of collaboration time employees spent with cross-group connections to drop by about 25% of the pre-pandemic level.”

— [Microsoft's study on the effects of remote work on collaboration](#)

In short, office-only and remote-only work proved to be less than ideal for many companies in a post-pandemic world.

Enter: Hybrid work – a model where employees work partly from the office and partly remotely.

In theory, hybrid work combines the best of both worlds – the collaboration, communication, and social opportunities of the office with the flexibility and autonomy of remote work.

In reality, there are various challenges of implementing this working model for both companies and employees. Let's start by exploring the most common questions surrounding hybrid work.



02 The Big Unknowns of Hybrid Work

A lot of companies find themselves grappling with the following questions when considering the move to hybrid work:

- How can we get people back in the office after two years of remote work?
- Should we impose a strict schedule for everyone (e.g., three mandatory days at the office), or let employees decide when to come to the office?
- How will the move to hybrid impact productivity?
- What will hybrid work's impact be on our company culture?
- How do we ensure equal opportunities for employees who prefer to come to the office and those who prefer to work mostly from home?

While there isn't a simple answer to these questions, a good place to start is understanding the different types of work activities.



03 Understanding Work Activities

In general, work activities can be grouped into four categories:

- 01 **Individual admin activities**, in which the bulk of the work requires the processing of paperwork or other solo tasks. These activities (whether planned or reactionary) typically lend themselves to a remote work situation, since they aren't dependent on collaboration with others. Every company, big and small, has these types of positions, with some management roles also falling into this category.
- 02 **Deep work activities** that require hours of uninterrupted alone time. These can be things like writing copy, coding, designing graphics or UIs, video editing, analyzing data – basically anything that requires you to sit down for a few hours, think, and execute a task by yourself, without distractions. Depending on the workplace, these activities can be performed in the office. However, people with more seclusion and quiet spaces at home typically prefer to do them away from the office due to the constant distractions there.
- 03 **Collaboration activities** require more face-to-face time and teamwork. Think brainstormings, team meetings, and all other projects that require you and a colleague (or colleagues) to work simultaneously together.
- 04 **Sales and other customer-facing activities** can occupy a great deal of time whether online, on the phone, or in face-to-face meetings. This is then followed by a lot of record-keeping and project planning (which are typically administration and deep work activities, respectively).

Now, this is an oversimplification – there are plenty of activities that fall outside of these four categories. Most roles also do a blend of these activities during the week. However, grouping activities this way is a useful starting point for determining when one needs to be in the office and when remote work is a more feasible option.

04 Examples of Different Hybrid Schedules and Workplace Models

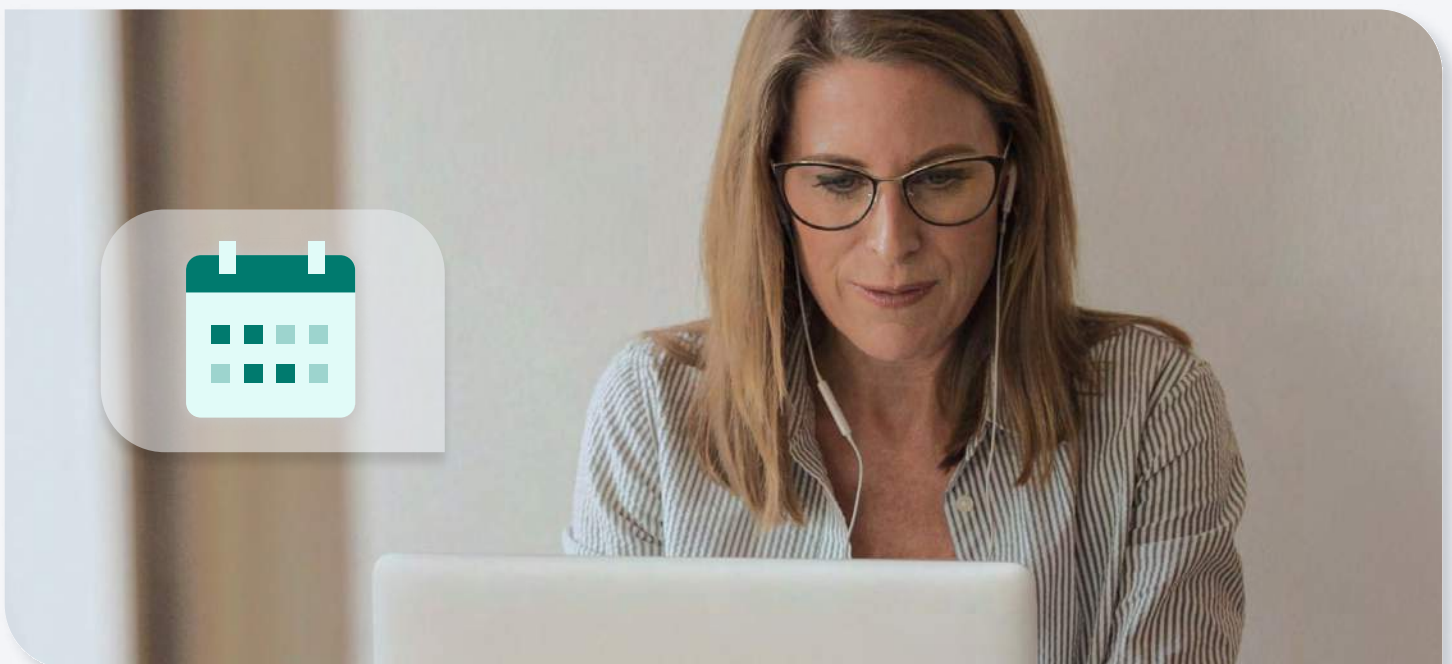
There are as many examples of a hybrid workplace as there are companies that implement it, but the models generally break down into three categories:

The “Mandatory for all” Schedule Approach – Employees have regularly scheduled days in the office and then days in which they work remotely. This model is the easiest to implement from a company perspective, but the least flexible for employees.

“

“If my kid has soccer on Thursdays and I have to be in the office all day on Thursday and can’t get him there, that may be hybrid, but it’s not flexible and isn’t working for me.”

— [Colleen McCreary, Chief People Officer, Credit Karma](#)



The Team Approach – Employees' hybrid schedules are organized by teams or departments. The team decides, with input from management, when the members are in the office and when they are working remotely.

“

“For our corporate roles, instead of specifying that people work a baseline of three days a week in the office, we’re going to leave this decision up to individual teams. This decision will be made team by team at the Director level.”

— [Andy Jassy, CEO of Amazon](#)



The Individual or Self-Directed Approach – In this model, each employee is responsible for when they are in the office. Employees still answer to their teams, but they have the ability to dictate their own schedules, i.e., make hybrid working truly flexible.

“

“We want to keep flexibility and choice front and center of everything that we do. We want people to be able to get their work done in a way that is most conducive for that individual”

— [Danielle Newton, Director of Workplace Experience at Zendesk](#)

05 Guidelines for Creating and Managing a Hybrid Workplace and Workforce

Before crafting specific hybrid work policies, it's essential to have a framework of guidelines and ideas for setting these policies. A few suggestions:

- 01 **Create a hybrid work policy with a remote-first mindset.** This might be controversial to some, but everyone now knows that not all work activities have to be done from the office. Establishing that employees are not expected to be in the office unless they have an activity that requires it is a great first step.
- 02 **Upgrade your office environment to accommodate people's needs.** There's a common misconception that people don't want to come back to the office. A more appropriate assumption is that people don't want to come back to the same bland office that's not catered to their work. Before trying to get people back into the office, try to create an environment suited to them. This can be accomplished by creating [office neighborhoods](#), for example.
- 03 **Create a "Head of Hybrid", "Head of Workplace", or another similar role.** This might be a full-time position in larger companies. In smaller companies, the duties might be dispersed between HR managers, workplace experience managers, and office managers, for instance. What's important is to have someone (or a group of people) oversee the new workplace model, collect feedback, and funnel it to senior management.

- 04 **Write a [hybrid workplace etiquette](#) handbook.** For example, if you've implemented hot desking, you might want to make sure everyone clears out personal belongings from their desks at the end of the day. Putting such rules in writing and distributing them to employees is the best way to ensure everyone's on the same page.
- 05 **Create a communication and training plan.** Conduct a retreat for all employees to discuss the new model and walk through policies and changes. Take this time to answer any questions or address common concerns. Also, consider implementing pulse surveys – short and regular sets of questions – during the first few months after transitioning to hybrid. These will help you if your new model is working as expected.
- 06 **Identify and measure critical success factors.** Establish objectives and key results (OKRs), such as productivity levels. While not all important factors are completely quantifiable, it's good to measure what you can to at least estimate if things are trending in the right direction.
- 07 **Prepare for iterations.** Some of your initial assumptions will be right, while others won't work out. That's normal. We've never implemented hybrid work at scale, so experimentation should be your primary mode of operation for a while.



“First, none of us know the definitive answers to these questions, especially long term. Second, at a company of our size, there is no one-size-fits-all approach for how every team works best. And third, we're going to be in a stage of experimenting, learning, and adjusting for a while as we emerge from this pandemic.”

— [Andy Jassy, CEO of Amazon](#)

With that in mind, let's look at some specific policy ideas that can help you optimize your hybrid workplace.

06 Policies for Optimizing Your Hybrid Workplace

Your hybrid work policies may cover a number of areas, depending on your business needs. However, we've identified **8 areas, which most companies need to consider when building their hybrid policies** – scheduling, hot desking vs desk hoteling, health and safety, core availability hours, app and software overload, visitor security, management facetime, and network security.

01 Scheduling

Hybrid workplaces often allow for a smaller real estate footprint, putting lots of companies in a position where they have more employees than desks. In these cases, it's best to use a [desk booking platform](#) that provides employees with remote access, ideally a system that gives everyone an online snapshot of who else is on-site at any given time. Someone may encounter a need to be in the office at the last minute, so being able to check space availability at any time is crucial. In your policy, emphasize that employees must use the software when scheduling office time for their and their colleagues' convenience.

02 [Hot desking vs desk hoteling](#)

While we're on the topic of office space, lots of companies decide to adopt hot desking, instead of desk hoteling, letting their employees come to the office without reserving a desk first. While this model can work, it can also turn into chaos, especially if you're mandating employees be in the office a set amount of time. Weigh your options carefully and make sure to describe your specific desk sharing arrangement in your policy, whether it's hot desking (no desk reservation system) or hoteling (with a desk reservation system).

03 Health and safety protocols

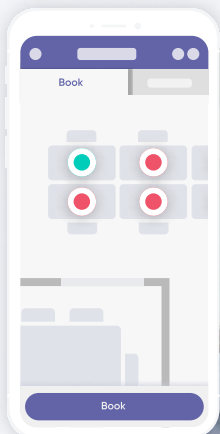
This will, at first, revolve around Covid-19 as it is the most imminent threat. You may want to establish if employees who are vaccinated and have need to wear masks in shared spaces. A few other common questions to answer: How do you handle employees who have chosen not to vaccinate? How do you decide when it's safe to come back to the office ([Microsoft uses a scale of 1 to 6](#), depending on local COVID cases)? Who carries the responsibility of ensuring common areas and shared desks are regularly wiped down? Where are cleaning supplies kept?

04 Core availability hours

Establish (or let teams establish) hours when everyone is expected to be available for company business, meetings, and other activities, either in the office or from a remote location. Employees will drift towards their most productive times. Some are natural early birds, doing their best work at 4:00 a.m. Others are night owls. Regardless, there still have to be times when everyone can be reached. This will need particular attention if you have team members in different time zones.

05 Preventing app and software overload

Decide on a collection of apps, software, and platforms to use for scheduling, communication, and collaboration, as well as rules for sharing work and tracking progress. If this isn't specified, teams and individuals will make their own choices, which can result in a nightmarish mishmash of systems that don't mesh well together. From a leadership perspective, this is about using technology to remove friction and allow everyone to flourish.



06

Visitor security

With employees coming and going throughout the workday and remote employees who seldom visit the office, it is difficult for everyone to know everyone. It makes it easy for bad actors to access your office, either to steal equipment or personal belongings, commit corporate espionage, or cause other problems. Especially for larger companies, this will call for including measures such as card-entry systems, displayed I.D. cards, and visitor registration.

07

Management facetime

Accenture reports that 22% of employees consider visibility to leaders as an advantage to being in the office. It's a good idea to set some rules for management to regularly face time with employees (whether in the office or remotely), establish coaching programs, and offer more educational opportunities.

08

Network security

More than three-quarters of IT leaders surveyed said they feel their company is at greater risk to insider threats as employees work remotely, according to a [report by TechRepublic](#). Hybrid workforces mean increased network vulnerability at home, coffee shops, or in flex or co-shared office spaces. Your IT department needs to produce measures (which should then become part of your hybrid policy) to ensure that all employees keep your network safe from intruders.



“[Network] Security is always a priority, but remote and hybrid work environments continue to introduce new challenges and complexities that most organizations have yet to reconcile.”

— [Joe Karbowski, Forbes Technology Council](#)

07 Ensuring Equal Opportunity

The final piece of the hybrid (and remote) work puzzle is ensuring fair compensation and equal opportunities for all employees, regardless of where they work.

Compensation policies in a hybrid workplace are a mixed bag for many employers:

- [A survey by Salary.com](#) found that **92%** of employers have no formal method of determining compensation for employees who work remotely only part of the time. More than **95%** of employers say they won't reduce pay for partially remote employees (which is great). **83%** of employees indicated they'd leave their job if compensated less for working remotely (which makes perfect sense).
- Conversely, [Forbes reported on a Twitter poll](#) by analyst Jeremiah Owyang that found **44%** would take a **10%** pay cut to work remotely.

Another common problem is that employees who come to the office get more opportunities than those who don't. In fact, [MIT researchers](#) found the following disturbing fact:



“Employees who work remotely may end up getting lower performance evaluations, smaller raises and fewer promotions than their colleagues in the office — even if they work just as hard and just as long.”

Or in other words — out of sight, out of mind. This imbalance must be addressed early, as it can have devastating effects on company culture and work relationships.

While compensation is always a delicate topic, companies must strive to eliminate the unconscious bias towards in-office employees. Even if you decide to reduce pay for remote or partly-remote employees (which can easily backfire), the only sensible way to evaluate someone's performance is their results, not their willingness to commute to the office.

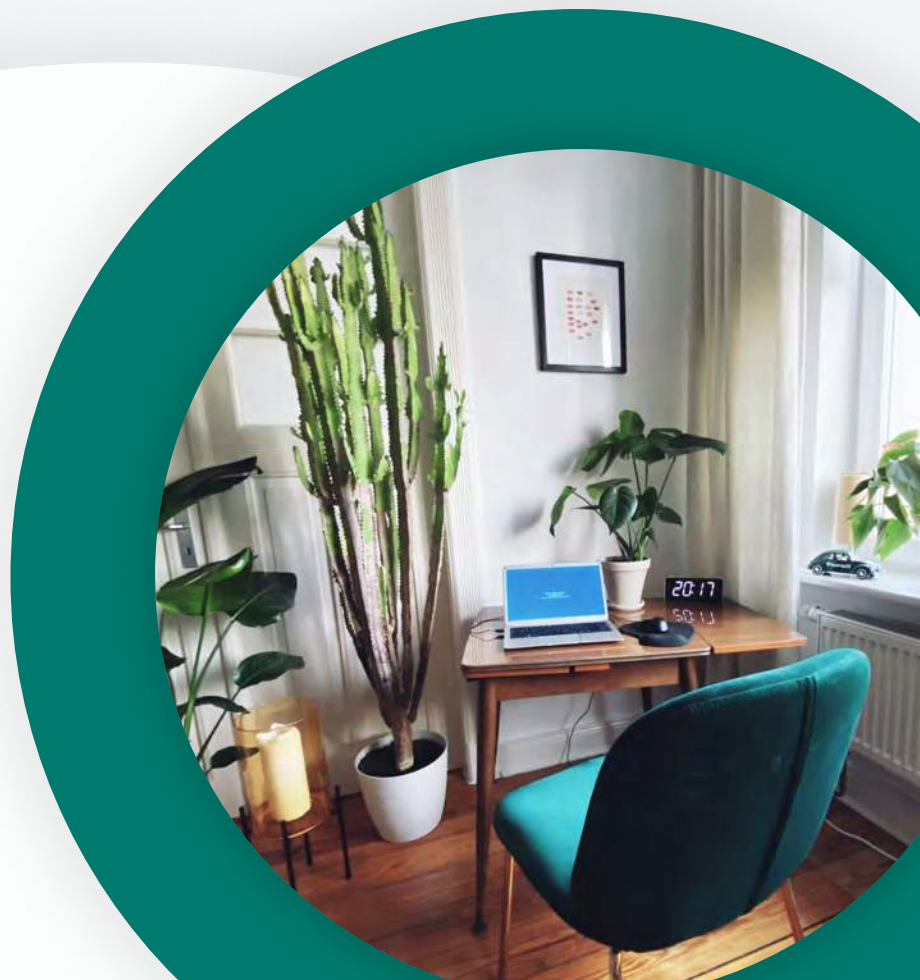
08 Hybrid Work Can Be a Win-Win

In the wake of the Great Resignation, the competition for the best employees is fiercer than ever.

Many factors may attract these top-notch professionals, but one that's almost always near the top of the list is supporting work-life balance through flexible working arrangements (be it hybrid or remote).

Going hybrid is not easy, but the opportunities to attract the best talent and transform your workplace are well worth the effort. And for employees, the chance to embrace flexible work and tailor their workweek to their personal activities can also be a life-changing opportunity.

In short, **hybrid** can work for everyone. We just have to give it a shot.



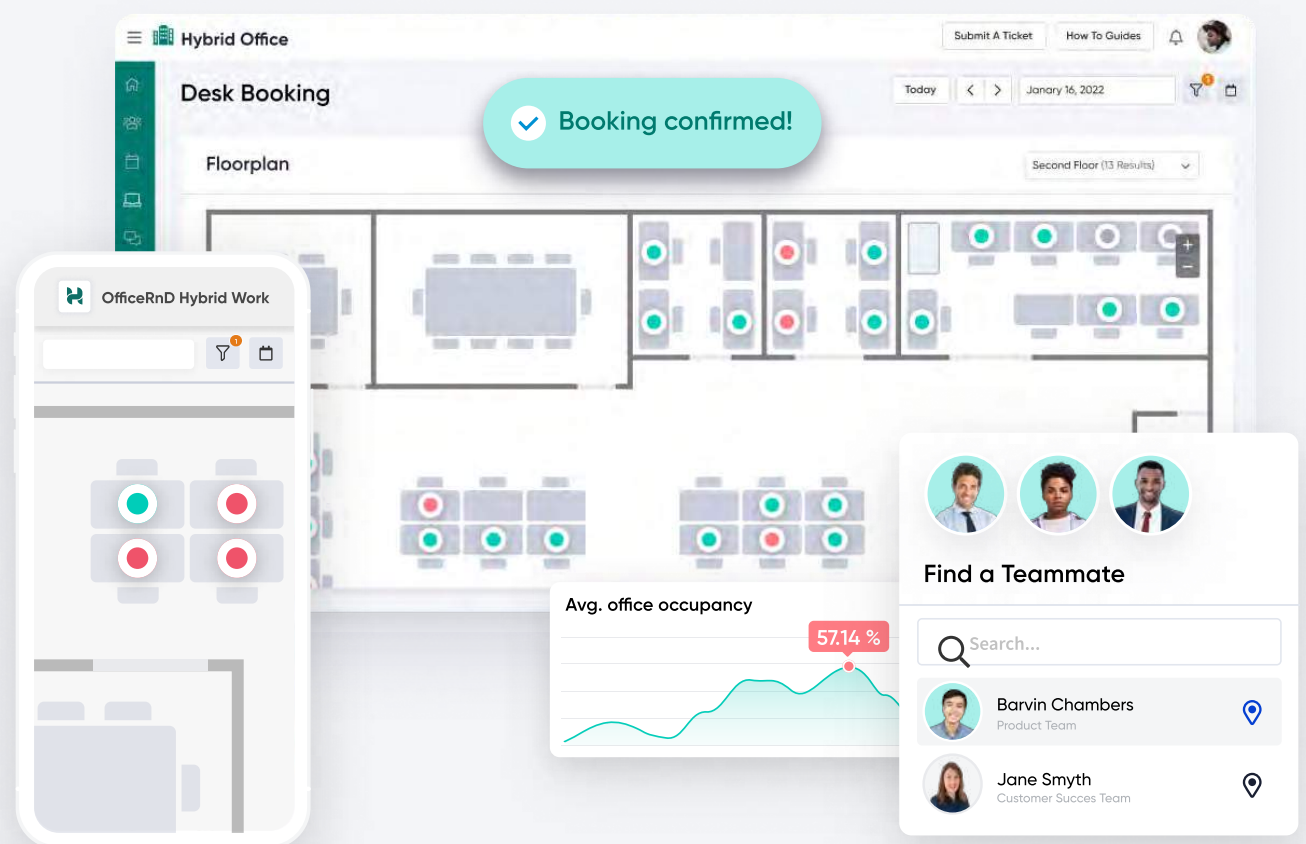
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