

# A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO DESIGNING A HYBRID WORKPLACE



A year of working from home (WFH) has taught us valuable lessons. Employers have started acknowledging that work-from-home is after all not that bad. Work can be completed and productivity can be high. Employees who longed for it earlier don't find it as enticing.

While WFH effectively helped limit the spread of the virus, it isn't a long-term solution. As the pandemic still continues, returning to our pre-pandemic phase is not really an option. Therefore, the need to find a middle-ground. What we call, a Hybrid workplace.



# What is the hybrid workplace model?

A hybrid workplace is a model where some employees work from the office while others work remotely, all enabled by technology. Modern tools like video calls, online meetings, document sharing, and a suite of collaboration apps enable geographically-distributed teams to function and succeed.

## How do you go about designing it?



## What should be your key objectives while designing a hybrid workplace?



It is easy to lose sight of the goal when you plan a big transformation. Keeping in mind the following considerations would help you stay on track:

1. Ensuring employee well-being and safety: Remember what drove you to this transformation. It may be tempting to overlook a few safety concerns to squeeze in a few more people. But a hasty decision could jeopardize the health and safety of others. So, cap the number of people you can have in the office at any point in time. And stick to it!
2. Balancing flexibility and security: Hybrid workplaces are all about striking the right balance. While you set out to build a flexible workplace by enabling employees to work remotely, the security risks increase manifold. So, make sure you budget for enhanced security and privacy infrastructure at the planning stage itself.
3. Driving technology adoption: A large majority of workspace and HR managers would agree that it's easier to shortlist and shop for productivity tools than drive its adoption. Ensuring you have adequate IT implementation and training staff at hand is one of the prerequisites to transform into a hybrid workplace. What good is it to invest in tech that would lie in the garage unused?

# What are the common challenges in designing a hybrid workplace?

Going hybrid may not be an option but a necessity for quite a few businesses. However compelling may be the need to go hybrid overnight, it comes with challenges. Some of these are:

## 1 Designing policies to suit the physical infrastructure:

Changes to physical infrastructure are relatively easy to carry out – your floor plan and desks will not protest. If you change policies every second day, employee frustration is a given. Treat physical infrastructure changes as fluid and policies as more static.

## 2 Using old metrics in new ways of work:

Counting work hours, judging employees on the speed of their response, or evaluating engagement based on the frequency of their replies on Slack or Teams, are simply a recast of your old biases in a now redundant work environment. Align your objectives and communicate your expectations in terms of productivity.



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## Viewing onsite and remote employees through the same glass:

One of the most common pitfalls is the inability to be cognizant that you have two sets of employees working in different realities. It is easy to get frustrated over delays caused due to remote work when your benchmark lies in a distraction-free environment equipped with adequate infrastructure. Hybrid models can thus bring in a new dimension of situational diversity in an already diverse workplace. Managing it requires learning and patience.



# What are the tools you need?

A hybrid workplace aims to create a central platform between the two ends of on-premise and remote work. This platform is a combination of three sets of tools:

## Collaboration tools:

Collaboration tools like Slack and Teams focus on enhancing productivity through features like file sharing and management, email and calendaring, integration with task tracking apps, and a chat-based interface.

## Communication tools:

Although collaboration tools offer communication features, solutions like Zoom and Google Meets have been finding new users. One of the possible reasons for their popularity could be their product quality; the other could be their large user base that attracts more users. These serve multiple purposes like recruiting, onboarding, employee engagement, apart from regular team meetings.



## Automation tools:

Automation tools are more about establishing a hybrid workplace, unlike the other two that have been enablers of a remote model. Hybrid workplaces would thrive on extensive planning. Right from the floorplan to scheduling employees, booking meeting rooms to maintaining social distancing protocols – all of it would be more efficient with automated planning and execution.





# What are the must-haves while developing a roadmap?

In a hybrid workplace, workforce management revolves around the axis of productivity and not just attendance. You must ensure the following are in place in order to be successful.

## 1 Well-defined policies and guidelines:

Most organizations, which have traditionally allowed remote work, would have policies for it. But hybrid workplace policies are different. It isn't the case of few employees working from home for a day or two. A significant part of your workforce would be contributing remotely for an extended duration, while another set would be on-site. Given the different work environments, using the same measures of performance, or indicators of the engagement level, may lead to gross inequities.

Say, measuring output in a given number of hours might unfavorably tilt the balance towards people working from the office. It could happen as people working from home need to shoulder household or parental responsibilities also. However, to compensate, they may put in more hours at work.

## 2 Empathetic approach to management and leadership:

One of the most discomfoting experiences for leaders during the lockdown has been the inability to monitor work. Many managers relied on sight to see if their teams were working. It's also easier to set up expectations and follow up in a physical workplace. In a hybrid setup, the approach changes.



Working in a virtual environment, the managers need to use a more empathetic and supportive approach, leveraging tech tools to ensure their teams remain productive.

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## Well-defined policies and guidelines:

It wouldn't be an overstatement to say that WFH was possible only because businesses invested in technology infrastructure. For a hybrid model, new variables enter the equation, placing unexpected stress on the current tech stack.

As a result, business leaders need to reassess the tech needs of different functions and teams, enabling them to succeed in a model different from WFH.



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## Communication that provides a level playground for all employees:

Communicating guidelines and policies, and staying in touch with your team, helped businesses successfully implement the remote work model. Does that bode well for a hybrid workplace?

### Think of a meeting going on in a hybrid workplace.

Members in the room are privy to side-talks and more tacit communication in the room. People attending it through Zoom can listen only to the speaker. A situation like this could work to the disadvantage of the company as a whole.

Therefore, a more appropriate way of conducting meetings in a hybrid workplace would be to have all team members attend virtually – people on-premise can log in through their desks.



# How do you implement a hybrid workplace?

Like any initiative, you need to create an employee buy-in for implementing a hybrid workplace model. However, the current situation concerns the health, safety, and well-being of your team. Therefore, a healthy dose of empathy and keeping the process human would help you attain better success. Here's how you go about it:

Create buy-in



Make your workplace safe



Develop Guidelines



Communicate

## Create a buy-in:

Listening to employee-concerns, and involving them right through the planning process will help you avoid last-minute setbacks. Run employee surveys, document the data and maintain transparency throughout the process.

## Make Your Physical Workplace Safe:

Sanitization and social distancing norms are just two components of a safe workplace. Use technology for regular sanitization reminders, screening and testing employees, automate desk and meeting room bookings, revisit floor plans, add more safety equipment, and limit the number of people on the floor. Communicate all the safety measures to your employees regularly and in-advance.

## Develop hybrid workplace guidelines:

Guidelines for WFH are different from a hybrid workplace. Thinking through various situations and cases, you can develop a comprehensive yet easy-to-understand set of guidelines. List the dos and don'ts clearly, with no space for ambiguity. Also, strive at establishing an even playfield for employees working remotely.



## Communicate with your employees:

Bringing about a change after months of WFH, you are dealing with inertia mixed with the fear of COVID19. A sudden change may be upsetting. Hence, it is a must to communicate the reasons behind shifting to a hybrid workplace model. When announcing the plan, back it up with data and the benefits.



# How do you measure your success?

Every transformation exercise starts with an objective. Measure the success against those objectives. Following is the process to measure the success of your hybrid workplace model:

## Identify a baseline to measure results:

If the goal is to increase productivity, decrease lost-opportunity, or human error cost caused by remote work – quantify your as-is.

## Establish KPIs:

The digital transformation KPIs work for hybrid workplaces also. These can be technology cost per employee, workplace & technology utilization rates. Human resource management can be another dimension for your KPIs – attrition rates, employee satisfaction, and so on.

## Incorporate qualitative insights:

As we all undergo a massive change, numbers cannot comprehend the real picture. Incorporating behavioral insights and anecdotal evidence may prove helpful in the long term.





# Examples of companies that have implemented hybrid workplaces

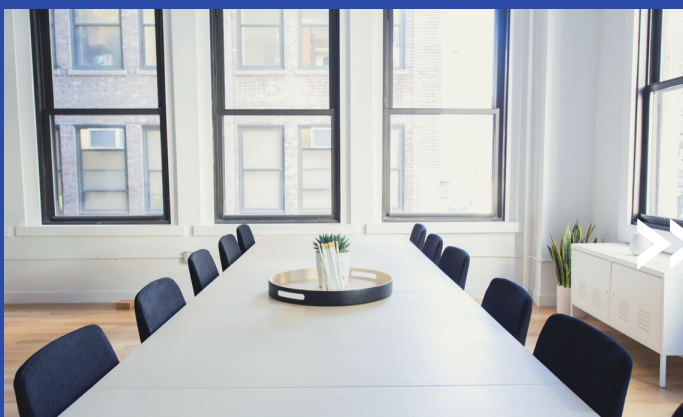
2021 is witnessing the emergence of hybrid workplaces. The ones that made it to the headlines for successful implementation are:



Starting 2021, HubSpot provided three options to its employees – office, flex, or home. The office option entails employees working from the office for three or more days a week; flex two or less and home means complete WFH.



A design-software company, Figma conducted extensive surveys to understand what its employees wanted. It rolled out two options – Hubs and Remote – along with a few policy changes. Under hubs, the employees visit a workspace with fewer people for two specific days a week. The other option is to go remote completely.



Dropbox announced its Virtual First program in October 2020. Remote work will be the primary mode of engagement for all day-to-day work.



In the same month as Dropbox, Reddit announced it would allow its team to work from “the office, remotely, or a combination of the two.”



In May 2020, Coinbase announced it would be a remote-first company, allowing “remote work to all employees who want it, while maintaining the ability to work from an office for those who don’t.”



May 2020 also saw Shopify announce its Work from Anywhere program. Under its Destination90 option, it allows people to work from anywhere in the world for 90 days a year.

# To Conclude:

Designing and implementing a hybrid workplace model can be easy if you follow the above-mentioned steps. WorkInSync is designed to ensure that you can seamlessly adopt a hybrid workplace model.

Visit [www.workinsync.io](http://www.workinsync.io) to learn more.

## Sources:

- 1.Future of Work at Hubspot – Careers blog
- 2.How is Work Changing at Figma – Company blog
- 3.Dropbox Goes Virtual– Dropbox company blog
- 4.Evolving Reddit's Workplace – Reddit's blog
- 5.Post-COVID Workplace at Coinbase – Blog
- 6.Work from Anywhere at Shopify– Careers Blog



## About us

WorkInSync is a technology solution that enables organizations to establish hybrid workplaces and enable employees' safe return-to-office.

WorkInSync is backed by our decade long experience creating MoveInSync – the world's largest office commute platform that is currently used by 150 global enterprises, including 38 of the Fortune 500 companies.

