



## Business Owners' Guide to a Hybrid Work Environment

The pandemic paved the way for companies around the globe to implement hybrid work environments, and if you think about it, the speed at which the transitions occurred is awe-inspiring. For many industries, these kinds of workplaces are more the norm than the exception. Still, some business owners have either shied away from going hybrid or are struggling to create or improve these setups to meet their operational and employee needs.

Hybrid workplaces are here to stay for various reasons, with cost-saving being one of the biggest. Just as importantly, today's employees want more flexible work options, so these arrangements attract more employees and increase retention. According to some reports, about 60% of employees prefer hybrid workplaces, and employers have responded to the demand in very big ways.

If worries about decreased productivity prevent you from making the transition, this should be of little concern. The writers at [Insurance Business Magazine](#) claim that 32.2% of hiring managers surveyed stated that employee productivity increased and performance grew by 22% for employees working at home.

The move toward hybrid workplaces is not a trend that business owners should avoid or ignore. What are the best practices for hybrid work, and how can you achieve the right balance to lead you toward improved productivity and success?

When considering a hybrid approach, think about how IT may be impacted. As organizations increasingly adopt hybrid workplace models, it's important for IT departments to be aware of the potential challenges and considerations that come with this shift. One key challenge is ensuring that data and devices are secure both on-premises and off-premises. Another consideration is managing user access across a variety of devices and locations.

IT departments need to consider hybrid workplace models carefully to ensure that data and devices are kept secure, and that users have the appropriate level of access to company resources. By doing so, they can help their organizations make the most of hybrid work arrangements.

## What, Exactly, Is a Hybrid Work Environment?

A hybrid work environment is more flexible than full-time, on-site situations where employees have to report to workplaces on regular schedules week-in and week-out. Instead, hybrid environments allow them to split their time between being at the office and working at home or other locations.

The flexibility varies depending on the employer. Some companies establish specific on-site and remote work days according to functions or teams. Supervisors can also decide when their workers can come in; sometimes, employees decide independently. It can also be a mix of different options.

Note that "flexible work" differs from hybrid work and gives employees more freedom to pick where and when they work. The traditional 9 to 5, five-day-a-week schedule does not have to apply at all, and without the restrictions, employees work when and where they feel the most productive. When they need real-time interactions with colleagues, these can easily be arranged virtually or in person. As long as the tasks are accomplished on time, these arrangements can benefit employees and their employers.

No two hybrid work environments are alike, but here are some examples:

**Education:** Hybrid learning was around before the pandemic, and online classes were offered well before 2020. It is an educational model with some students attending classes in person, and others joining virtually from remote locations. Educators use real-time streaming videos or pre-recorded instruction to support their face-to-face sessions and can add in things like real-time online exercises and homework assignments.

**Healthcare:** If you became sick at the start of the pandemic, you might have used telehealth for the first time. The technology has come a long way these past few years, with practitioners across the country using platforms like MDLive and Doctor on Demand. Patients schedule virtual appointments with providers, and then symptoms, diagnosis and treatment plans are discussed online once both parties log in at the set time.

Patient portals also provide ways for people to create secure accounts, set up appointments, request prescriptions and perform other tasks. Digital clinical communications and

collaborations let providers from different locales use secure calling and messaging; administrative staff can help patients from home offices.

**Insurance:** Agencies may find it easier to transition into hybrid and fully remote environments because employees can complete most tasks while sitting at a desk. Staff collaboration can be carried out on-site or remotely, and clients no longer need to come into the office to learn about, read and sign policies. Before the pandemic, customers could go online to find out about their options and make claims; much of this was and can still be done through phone calls and emails.

Independent agents can partner with their carriers to leverage their resources to meet customer expectations and keep them engaged; this is also a common practice for real estate agents. Direct, local underwriting models can also help insurance providers serve their clients more efficiently and in timely ways.

**Manufacturing:** Pandemic shutdowns disrupted the manufacturing sector, and their repercussions are still felt worldwide. As energy is focused on supply chain recovery and growth, many companies are reshaping their businesses and focusing on different models for the future while dealing with workforce shortages. Salaried employees might work from home one or more days a week, and factory workers may also have more flexible schedules. Manufacturers are trying to develop more inclusive task forces, with employee preference more of a priority for determining work environments across locations.

## Best Practices for Hybrid Work: Workplace Tech

Without the right IT, a hybrid workplace environment can fall flat and leave everyone frustrated. Since finding and retaining good employees is challenging, you will find that they are more likely to move on sooner when their productivity needs are not met. Join forces with your IT and HR teams, who can share information about the best tools to keep employees productive and satisfied on- and off-site. Educate yourself about collaboration tools and communication apps with HR and let your IT team help you design the best infrastructure to support various networking connections.

You will likely need to invest in your hybrid environment's latest and greatest workplace tech trends while keeping an eye on your budgetary requirements. Network connections must be quick and reliable for remote and on-site access, with employees being able to use the public (on-premises), IaaS (infrastructure as a service) and SaaS (software as a service) applications quickly across different environments.

A robust IT infrastructure can be on-premises or cloud-based, as long as personal and other vulnerable information is reliably protected. Today's more secure and advanced video conferencing and workspace chat platforms help with this, but these need to comply with

industry standards and best practices. Some of the best-known and most respected tools for creating hybrid workspaces include Google Workspace, Confluence, Envoy, Slack, Zoom and Donut.

### Best Practices for Hybrid Work: Your Employees

Your business might have current employees with you before the pandemic that transitioned to remote work, plus new hires who were onboarded later. While both groups are vital for the company's needs, it is a good idea to also look at your remote hiring practices. Look at the long-term plan for the working environments, and vet candidates to ensure that their goals align with yours. If you plan to maintain the hybrid workplace, new employees should live close enough to commute when required.

For 100% remote work, you can branch out much further and have a much larger pool of job applicants. Keep in mind that employees who live in different states from where they work can bring complicated tax issues to deal with; choosing the appropriate tax and payroll software can help with this.

Current and new employees will flourish when you prioritize regular, clear communication. If you don't have a solid long-term internal communications strategy, this is the time to do so. Employers should formalize the hybrid work policy and make it available to everyone that it applies to. Different messages can be designed for your audiences (stakeholders, managers, teams or company-wide) and sent out through secure, reliable channels regularly. You should also promote an open-door policy to encourage questions, feedback and groundbreaking new ideas!

### Best Practices for Hybrid Work: Managing the Physical Space

Many hybrid workers claim that when they go into their offices, they feel like they are going into ghost towns. With few people inside an office, employees can feel isolated and unmotivated; a crowded environment can lead to the same problems and feelings of disorganization or chaos. Space planning and designing workstations can inspire people and lead to more efficiency and productivity. There can be quiet, assigned spaces, plus shared areas for meetings and other collaborations. Informal workspaces are also good and can offer opportunities for employees to have meals, take breaks and meet casually.

Employee safety is the primary concern for on-site work environment best practices, so the entire area should be kept clean, updated and well-maintained. Since so many people still have concerns about COVID-19, you might want to set up health checks and a vaccination verification system. A secure visitor management system is another wise idea to protect your workers, equipment, supplies, IT infrastructure and network. Cyberthieves employ high-tech strategies

to steal information, but the old-fashioned method of walking in from the street and robbing an office never seems to go out of style.

You might also want to consider network-enabled smart building monitors that support ever-changing security and health initiatives by automating processes like lighting, alarms, HVAC and security with IoT sensors.

### How Can I Keep Hybrid Employees Happy?

Setting up workflow and productivity expectations when implementing a hybrid environment will go a long way towards increasing organization and productivity while preventing future disagreements. Clarify the processes and boundaries and maintain ongoing communications to keep people informed and motivated. Employees should be encouraged to identify challenges they encounter, and employers can do this through feedback and surveys. Slack has its "always-on" survey, for example. Some tools and technologies can help your company improve its retention strategies, understand employee stress levels and measure the impacts of new programs and other changes.

Remote work does make some people feel isolated. Still, you can develop feelings of connection with special events like free (and engaging) webinars, on-site gatherings and rewards for outstanding performances. If certain employees have not been connecting, you may want to reach out to check in with them. On-site, you can create things like drink and snack stations or have dress-down days. These all work together to provide employee-centric experiences that are very much appreciated.

You can design and integrate perks like these, along with other perks, to create a unique company culture that thrives on positive relationships and interactions between employees and between the employer and the employee. Remote workers can be brought closer into the fold when you attempt to recreate the same ease of conversation, engagement and atmosphere that happens in person. Continuity is also essential, and here is an example: if you have an on-site employee fitness center, provide the staff with a stipend or a special discount to use for gym memberships near their homes.

### Security Concerns with Hybrid Work Environments

Hybrid work models can offer significant benefits to companies and their employees, but these environments can present increased chances for cybersecurity threats. You must account for all risks, whether your company is in banking or something less sensitive, like manufacturing.

Following the cybersecurity industry's best practices for setting up and maintaining a healthy, productive hybrid workplace can significantly mitigate the risks associated with cyber threats.

Remote workers depend on Wi-Fi networks to connect to employer networks, and keeping these secure can be challenging. Public or personal Wi-Fi exposes you to unauthorized access by outsiders, which is where hackers can get in.

Using a VPN (a virtual private network) is the right move and lets employees connect securely. A VPN has to be appropriately encrypted end-to-end; otherwise, bad actors could target IP addresses and login credentials (and other confidential information) for a cyberattack that could shut you down for good. A VDI (virtual desktop infrastructure) can increase security and employs software technology that separates desktop environments and software from physical devices used to access it.

Compromised authentication methods also create port holes for cyber thieves, and once they get in, they can access a company's entire network. Creating those unique passwords is not enough. Multi-factor authentication is one of the most secure paths, and advanced biometrics can be a third layer of protection. You can also implement an effective zero-trust strategy, but it has to make good business sense. One example might be to use it to screen all incoming and outgoing company emails on a cloud-based service.

## Employee Cybersecurity Training

Hybrid workspaces can be tech-intensive, so there is almost always a learning curve as employees become familiar with the new platforms. Even with modern security technology, human error is still one of the main ways intruders hack into networks. Organizational leaders are tasked with educating employees about the technology and company cybersecurity safety protocols since all data and communication sharing is done electronically. Not only are they tasked with creating policies, but they must also ensure that employees follow those policies.

Cyberattacks can damage and destroy businesses, and employees should know that they will be held accountable if they violate company policies. To assume responsibility, they need to have the appropriate security tools and software at their disposal and understand how to use them. Cybersecurity policies can include rules for creating strong passwords and changing them regularly, backing up data frequently, creating secure web content, using email properly and appropriately and prohibiting unauthorized user and software access.

While the software is updated automatically, employers should train employees on how to spot possible problems and who they should contact about those issues. This contact could be an IT staff member or a contracted MSP (managed services provider).

## How TAG Solutions Can Help Set Up Your Secure Remote/Hybrid Network

The keys to setting up a safe remote or hybrid network are following the best cybersecurity practices and developing comprehensive emergency management plans. TAG Solutions can set up your remote or hybrid network, and our staff provides 24/7 threat monitoring and detection, vulnerability scans, penetration testing and employee/user awareness training. Some of the other specific services we offer include:

- Anti-virus and anti-malware
- Data and email encryption
- Mobile device management
- Patch management program
- Firewalling and perimeter defense
- Web content filtering
- Multi-factor authentication
- Intrusion detection & prevention systems

Our team specializes in remote access technologies and is ready to help you transition into a modern workspace that will meet your business objectives and keep your employees happy.

We can also help you design a customized cybersecurity program, create the appropriate policies and assist with incident response planning. Even if you already have a cybersecurity plan, it might not be up to speed. Contact us for a [free network assessment](#) today.