

The Future of Work: Guiding Your Organization to a Hybrid Model

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a reimagining of the concept of work, as many creative practices were established, and new technologies employed to foster a remote work environment. Incorporating lessons learned from the pandemic, to include a hybrid work schedule, is vital to retaining a highly skilled workforce in the future. During the pandemic, employees learned many of their daily tasks, meetings, and job functions can be done remotely. Consequently, their expectations of work have changed. Companies and managers who refuse to acknowledge these changes and attitudinal shifts related to how work is performed do so at their own peril.

In its simplest form, a hybrid work schedule is some combination of onsite and remote workdays. Hybrid work is about adapting to how teams work best and creating experiences that reach everyone. The future workplace will be driven by employee experience and enabled by technology. Telework is an effective component of a hybrid work model. The 2019 Telework Report to Congress provides information on telework trends for the years 2012-2018. This report includes several key findings: agencies maintain progress in setting and achieving telework goals; agencies continue to improve their capacity to assess cost savings achieved through telework; and agency management continues to leverage telework in support of mission goal achievement.

This paper aims to promote a hybrid work schedule as a bridge solution between the traditional concept of work before the pandemic and employee expectations post-pandemic. It examines the benefits of hybrid work, how to overcome key obstacles to implementing a major cultural change, identifies areas of focus for managing a hybrid workforce, and provides recommendations for developing an effective hybrid work policy.

Benefits of Hybrid Work

Most employees prefer a hybrid schedule. A Gallup poll of 140,000 US employees, published in March 2022, found that 59% preferred a hybrid work location, compared to 42% for exclusively remote work and 9% for fully onsite work. They enjoy flexible work environments because it gives them more control over how to structure their lives. The flexibility and work-life balance it provides is ideal for most employees, especially those with families who may have to deal with issues such as childcare. After experiencing this flexibility during the pandemic, many employees do not want to go back to work in an office five days per week. Happier employees translate into longer-tenured employees. The lack of flexible work arrangements is a contributing factor to the "Great Resignation" as it continues in the United States. In March 2022, the Department of Labor reported a record 4.53 million workers quit their jobs. In June 2022, 4.2 million workers quit their jobs. Going forward, the type of work schedule utilized will impact employee recruiting and retention. With flexible work arrangements now amongst the top benefits sought by job seekers, organizations employing the hybrid model are better positioned to compete for top candidates.

Note: This white paper is a follow-on to a Guidehouse article published in Trajectory Magazine on November 13, 2020, "[How to Prepare for and Guide Your Organization Through the Next Crisis.](#)"

In April 2022, Guidehouse also sponsored and published the United States Geospatial Intelligence Foundation (USGIF) white paper, "[Reimagining Unclassified Work and Platforms: A Geographically Agnostic GEOINT Enterprise.](#)"

Hybrid work provides access to a greater talent pool. Employees no longer must live in the vicinity of their workplace. Employees with families, who may need a larger house, can live farther away from urban areas and still work for the same company, since they would no longer have to make a long commute five days per week.

Employees can be more productive while working remotely. Great Place to Work compared employee productivity from March to August of 2020, the first six months of stay-at-home orders, to the same six-month stretch in 2019. Remote work productivity was **stable or increased** when working remotely from home, according to a 2-year study of 800,000 employees. Likewise, a University of Chicago Booth School of Business study of 30,000 workers found that nearly six out of 10 workers reported being more productive working from home than they expected to be, compared with 14% who said they got less done. On average, respondents' productivity at home was 7% higher than they expected.

From a cost and overhead perspective, fewer people in the office each day means lower electricity bills, fewer supplies, and a longer lifespan of office equipment through reduced usage. However, for employers looking to go further with their cost-saving strategy, the hybrid model also offers the opportunity to downsize office space for significant savings on building rental. According to [Global Workplace Analytics](#), a typical employer can save an average of \$11,000 per half-time telecommuter per year.

A hybrid work model also affords the opportunity to revive and transform existing workspaces. This new agility allows a company to better respond to daily space demand fluctuations, increased mobility, and evolving workstyles. For overcrowded offices, it also creates the opportunity to implement "hoteling," or shared workspaces based on who is physically present on a given day. Furthermore, any excess workspace created through the hybrid model can be transformed into a venue for additional collaboration.

Challenges to Remote Work

Over-classification of information has been a problem in the Intelligence Community (IC) for a long time. Accurate classification will identify unclassified tasks that can be performed outside of secure workspaces and facilitate the transition to a hybrid work schedule. Likewise, unclassified information should not be stored on a high side IT system for convenience. National security professionals have two computers on separate security domains for one reason: information should be handled and stored appropriately based on the classification.

Contractors are an integral component of the federal workforce, but restrictive contracts as it pertains to work location (often at a government facility) can hinder their ability to work from home. Contractual stipulations that require companies to perform all work for classified projects in a secure workspace make it difficult for companies to carve out unclassified tasks that could be undertaken remotely. Flexible language, focused on enabling telework where possible, should be included in all contracts moving forward.

The primary obstacle to implementing alternate work schedules such as the hybrid model is the culture of the organization. For many managers, especially those who advanced their careers through a traditional work model, there is likely to be hesitancy regarding employees working offsite several days per week. Hybrid models challenge long-held beliefs about when and how employees perform work. Without a change in organizational culture, implementing a successful hybrid work schedule is nearly impossible. Senior leadership and management must support the concept and convey their thoughts to the workforce that this is an opportunity that benefits both the employee and the company.

Think first about the organization's vision and cultural norms and values you want to promote and the behaviors that reinforce them. Then work on how to promote those behaviors in a hybrid model to create a shared purpose and deeper connections with and among full-time employees.

Many leaders fear, for example, that innovation can only thrive in a physical workplace where ad hoc and in-person brainstorming takes place or when employee teams collaborate with nontraditional workers. Adopting a hybrid model is a form of innovation. It reflects creative thought and the ability to think differently based on changed circumstances. One director of an Intelligence Community (IC) agency, when discussing the pandemic during a town hall, remarked, “If we go back to the old ways of doing business, we will have learned nothing.”

Employee success and effectiveness should not be defined by how many hours one spends at the office. Research from Vouchercloud concluded that the average office worker is productive for only 2 hours and 53 minutes in an 8-hour workday. Does it really matter if the same amount and quality of work is completed in eight hours at the office, or in a shorter period from home? Focus less on how much people get done onsite and more on how consistently they achieve desired outcomes. HR and business leaders can together define what the success of a hybrid workforce model looks like for the organization and identify measures that capture those success factors. Track these measures to understand whether the hybrid workforce model is working and where to improve. Consider success measures in two broad categories: workforce outcomes and business outcomes.

Workforce outcomes

- Track employee performance in relation to business objectives, effective collaboration across teams, behaviors that demonstrate a culture of trust and accountability, a seamless and consistent employee experience, and prioritize mental and physical well-being of all employees.

Business outcomes

- A cost-optimized workforce footprint, a strengthened employer brand, and strong contributions to revenue from innovation exemplify measures of success. Track improvements such as reduced costs, increased revenue, business development growth, greater process efficiency, more business opportunities from cross-site partnerships and the ability to attract diverse, high-quality

Managing a Hybrid Workforce

Telework as part of a hybrid model certainly brings with it new and challenging aspects for managers. However, this does not mean that managers’ authority is impeded or that they cannot properly oversee their people to ensure business outcomes are achieved. The techniques are simply different. While remote work provides challenges for managers to lead their workforce, there are also opportunities to make the work more impactful. The basic traits and qualities of good managers do not change with telework. Managers are still expected to provide clear guidance and direction to their employees and achieve business objectives. They are still responsible for the performance of their teams. They must also ensure there is a defined telework policy in place, understood by all employees, to govern how work is performed away from the office.

Communication and collaboration become more important in a telework environment when there are fewer opportunities for face-to-face interaction. This is one area that may need some extra attention and focus. Managers must ensure the collaboration forum(s) are understood by all. They should also stress to their people that communication is a bi-directional process for everyone, whether meeting in-person or virtually. This applies to many relationships: manager to staff; intra-team communications; inter-team and inter-agency communications; project team to stakeholders. Both sides of these relationships must proactively communicate their perspective and positions on all key topics.

Good communication between employees and management will facilitate mutual trust between both entities. Trust is a key enabler to a successful hybrid work model. Managers should feel comfortable that products and deliverables are being developed in a timely manner when they cannot physically supervise the work. Employees should feel confident that their performance evaluations are based on the quality of their work and not the location where the work is completed.

To implement a hybrid model, managers should first solicit employee feedback for any ideas they may have to help shape the policy and subsequent implementation. Next, perform a portfolio rationalization of all tasks and actions. The purpose of this exercise is to assess all the products, services, briefings, and meetings to determine what can be done remotely. Once a level of shared knowledge and understanding is attained specific to the requirements of the work being performed, a well-informed hybrid work policy can be developed and implemented.

Once a hybrid model is implemented, managers must monitor performance across the team to determine if telework is a good fit for everyone. Agile leadership requires identifying what is working and what is not. It is critical to periodically assess the telework policy and its implementation for any course corrections. Managers should be prepared to cancel the telework days of teammates not performing well under a hybrid work schedule.

Ultimately, managers must be agile enough to adapt to the changing concept of work and consider employee preferences for a hybrid schedule. What was good enough yesterday is not good enough for today. Those who cannot manage a remote workforce will likely not be able to manage an onsite workforce.

Recommendations for Developing a Hybrid Work Policy

Crafting a policy that governs how hybrid work is to be performed is vital to ensuring that work is being performed to standard. Without such a policy, there would likely be too much room for interpretation among employees and, to a lesser extent, management. A telework policy helps to establish all the ground rules and expectations. Several criteria to consider when drafting such a policy include the following:

- 1 Flexibility.** Specific aspects of any telework policy are best crafted with flexibility in mind. It is very difficult to adopt a “one-size-fits-all” approach due to the diverse nature of organizational missions, workforce size, client priorities, sensitivity of information handled on a routine basis, etc. Within larger companies and agencies, different sub-component offices may operate under different telework policies based on the aforementioned factors.
- 2 Remote Workdays.** Management should determine which days employees can work remotely. Otherwise, too many people would likely ask to work from home on Mondays and Fridays. If too many employees pick the same day(s) for telework, this would complicate office coverage for important actions. If space is an issue, too many employees choosing the same day(s) to be in the office would complicate seating arrangements.
- 3 Eligibility.** Telework is a privilege, not a right. Employees should understand that upfront. Expectations regarding work performance should be codified. If work performance is lacking, the privilege of telework can be revoked. For new hires, it would be wise to wait a specified period before they start teleworking. Allow them to meet all their colleagues and clients and familiarize themselves with the content and volume of work before allowing them to work remotely.
- 4 Communications.** To the maximum extent possible, a weekly rhythm should be established for all meetings and team check-ins. In addition, the communications method (Microsoft Teams, Skype for Business, phone call, etc.) should be clear to all to avoid any confusion. The second aspect of communications concerns responsiveness to other teams and inter-agency partners that a project

team routinely interacts with. These other entities should be provided the contact information for those working remotely, as well as a schedule for who is present in the office on a given day. With this information, they know who to contact in the event of an urgent action that requires their attention. In some instances, employees may need to be recalled from home to the office to work and develop the urgent action. A recall provision minimizes any turmoil associated with actions related to classified information that cannot be completed from home.

- 5 Expectations for Work Hours.** A time window when all employees should be online and responsive to emails and short notice action items should be established and understood by all.
- 6 Technology.** Do employees have the right tools and equipment to log in to the network and complete their work away from the office? Does everyone have access to the collaboration methods used? If not, management must ensure that the right tools are given to everyone.
- 7 Embrace Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT).** Leveraging open-source intelligence to a greater degree further enables virtual work. The IC must make better use of open-source information to fully understand the threat landscape and protect the country. OSINT provides unlimited potential sources of information that could be used across the IC to study patterns of life for different groups and regions.

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