The **Hybrid Experience**

2023 Workplace Trend Report

DLL financial solutions partner

The phrase **'return to the office'** has been written about at length in the media, deliberated in board rooms, debated on social media, and discussed around the kitchen table.
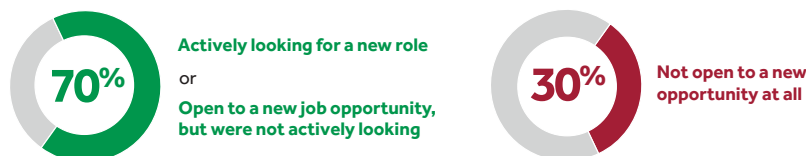
The research that has been done on employee and employer sentiment has been poured over and reviewed. Most of these discussion and research pieces have landed on a shared conclusion: to retain employees and move into the workplace of the future, companies must adopt a hybrid and flexible approach. The pandemic redefined nearly every element of life, and work is no exception. The expectations of employees have changed, their attitude toward work-life balance has evolved, and organizations must shift in accordance with this new set of requirements to reimagine what all of this means for the future of the workplace.

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The Human Experience

Business leaders have been navigating their way through uncharted territory every day since March of 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic turned nearly every work-related norm on its head. One of the greatest challenges was dubbed 'The Great Resignation'.
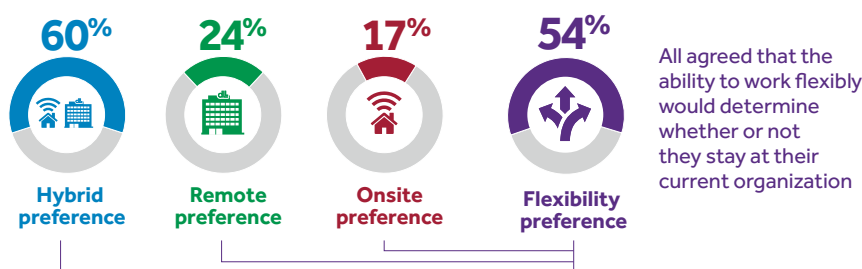
According to a 2022 employee survey by Gartner:

70%

Actively looking for a new role

or

Open to a new job opportunity, but were not actively looking

30%

Not open to a new opportunity at all

Source: Gartner, Inc.[1]

This presents an ongoing issue for employers and managers as they chart the path forward for their employees and businesses. Now more than ever, the office plays a significant role in employee attrition and employee satisfaction.

According to a 2021 employee survey by Gartner:

60%

Hybrid preference

24%

Remote preference

17%

Onsite preference

54%

Flexibility preference

All agreed that the ability to work flexibly would determine whether or not they stay at their current organization

Source: Gartner, Inc.[2]

This data affirms what many already understand: in a post-pandemic environment, there has been a shift from organizations encouraging a healthy work-life balance to workers and employees expecting that their needs as a person come first. Their families, their health, and their general well-being are being prioritized. This new sentiment around work requires organizations to deliver a more human-centric model which requires investment in people, processes, and technology. Gartner articulates the approach through five attributes: deeper connections, radical flexibility, personal growth, holistic well-being, and shared purpose.

1. Source: Gartner Inc., Employee Attrition Trends HR Leaders Must Watch to Mitigate Turnover, July 2022
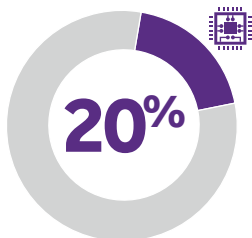2. Source: Gartner Inc., Talent Risks of a Full Post-COVID Return On-Site, May 2021

Technology's Role in the Hybrid Experience

Organizations using accessibility as a key benchmark for digital workplace technology investments:

By 2025 (estimated)
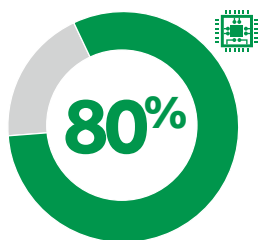
80%

In 2021

20%

Source: Bloomberg

What role does technology play in the hybrid experience? Nearly as large of a role as the people using the technology. With such a drastic shift in a short amount of time, the digital infrastructure held by most companies often falls short in a hybrid setting. Accessibility also plays a key role if an organization's workforce is geographically distributed in this hybrid environment. Meeting set ups range from one-to-one, one-to-many, workshops, executive meetings, webinars, ideation sessions, and so many more. A company's technology stack needs to accommodate this variety of meeting structures with attendees joining from anywhere, at any time, in a secure environment. A Gartner report showed that by 2025, more than 80% of organizations will use accessibility as a key benchmark for digital workplace technology investments. In 2021, only 20% of companies considered accessibility as they chose their workplace technology[3].

Truly hybrid organizations must build in-person infrastructure that is in direct alignment with a remote employee utilizing the same tools. Organizations are now leveraging the following technologies and more to create optimal formats for all meetings:

- In-room audio/visual with high-quality two-way audio arrangements
- Multiple integrated cameras
- USB-based sound and display which allows for external attendees to plug-and-play
- Closed captioning technology for those with auditory impairments, or a sub-par audio connection for remote attendees
- Native meeting rooms (rooms that detect where the attendees are when they're speaking)
- Multiple digital displays
- Spatial audio capabilities
- AI-based speaker identification
- Room design with furniture that allows for maximum viewing capability for remote members
- Content delivery network

"Leasing will allow an organization to avoid compromising on lower-quality hardware, or hardware with suboptimal capabilities to stay below a certain cost if they purchased the hardware instead."

Gartner

Adding these technologies to an organization's tech stack can be both expensive and difficult to prioritize. In Gartner's research, they compare the buying vs. leasing model, "Upfront capital investment is one of the primary disadvantages for this [buying] model, because the organization must allocate a budget for the initial purchase. Organizations with a limited budget in a given year or quarter that require video conferencing equipment should explore leasing as an option. Leasing will allow an organization to avoid compromising on lower-quality hardware, or hardware with suboptimal capabilities to stay below a certain cost if they purchased the hardware instead."[3]

As leaders prioritize their technology investments, viewing the organization holistically will allow leaders to evaluate where the immediate need is, beginning with the needs of the employees. Through this lens, they can also begin to evaluate their opportunities for improvement and any impediments to their success.

3. Source: Gartner Inc., Build Better Meeting Rooms to Support Hybrid Work, September 2022

Security & Safety in a Hybrid Environment

Current capacity of New York City office buildings:

48%

Highest level since the beginning of the pandemic [4]

Source: Bloomberg
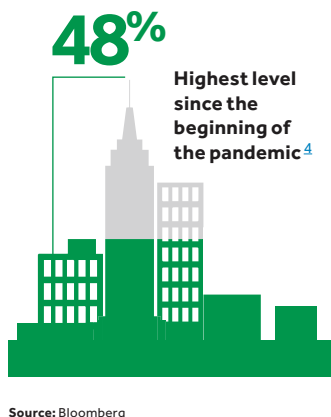
Earlier, we highlighted the importance of leaders evaluating the human experience of working. Part of that experience is the desire for a secure and safe place to conduct their work. There are two lenses through which we can view security and safety in the workplace: physical and digital. The pandemic forced organizations to evaluate their physical workspaces through the perspective of public health. Is there proper ventilation? Is there adequate sanitization? Is there an appropriate amount of space between employees to prevent airborne illness exposure? All questions that previously may not have considered. In addition to that, the hybrid environment also layers in the added risk of data safety and security. Are your remote employees able to leverage secure platforms? Do they have the ability to print and save securely? Does your organization have the bandwidth to monitor IT security, on and off-premises? As companies solidify permanent hybrid policies, these two factors should be taken into consideration.

Physical Safety

According to Bloomberg, New York City office buildings have reached the highest level of capacity since the beginning of the pandemic at 48%[4]. New York is the 28th largest metropolitan region in the world and the epicenter of global financial markets. Therefore, it often serves as a litmus test for other regions. As we see the slow return to offices, it's key that business owners and business leaders quickly assess the status of their facilities. Products like UV light sanitization, autonomous sanitization robots, high efficiency in HVAC systems, and in room air cleaners (IRAC) enhance the cleanliness of an office.

According to The Smith Group, an integrated design firm, organizations also need to implement short-term policies that promote wellness:

1   Create standard operating procedures based on risk assessment
2   Institute dedicated dining areas to discourage eating at workstations
3   Establish tier-based illness policies to help employees understand the required response, for example:
    a   Tier 1- Common cold
    b   Tier 2- The flu
    c   Tier 3- COVID-19

Additionally, organizations should create long-term solutions that promote a healthier and safer office[5]:

1   Install sanitization stations
2   Install dedicated hand washing stations
3   Use technology to automate functions on shared surfaces (automatic faucets, hand towel dispensers, voice command equipment, etc.)
4   Select furniture, fixtures, and materials to mitigate bio-contamination risk (for example, microbial-resistant fabrics and materials and non-porous, non-organic surfaces that respond well to the harsh cleaning products required for effective disinfection)[5]

4.   Source: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-10-18/offices-in-new-york-nationwide-hit-peak-post-pandemic-occupancy?leadSource=uverify%20wall
5.   Source: https://www.smithgroup.com/perspectives/2020/WO/biosafety-best-practices-to-help-inform-everyday-environments

> "99% of password spray and 97% of credential stuffing attacks use legacy authentication, according to authentication data from Azure AD.[6]"
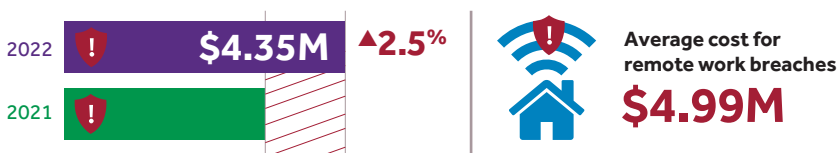>
> **Microsoft**

Digital Safety

Microsoft's 2021 Digital Defense Report states that the pandemic and the quick shift to hybrid work created new attack opportunities for cybercriminals. The increased use of cloud-based services and mobile devices, along with the periodic use of personal devices, has significantly increased the need for strong data security measures. In Microsoft's report they state: "Security architectures that rely on network firewalls and virtual private networks (VPNs) to isolate and restrict access to corporate technology resources and services are no longer sufficient for a workforce that regularly requires access to applications and resources that exist beyond traditional corporate network boundaries. The shift to the internet as the network of choice and the continuously evolving threats led Microsoft to adopt a Zero Trust security model. Zero Trust has become a priority of enterprise security leaders around the world." What is Zero Trust? In practice, it is a policy that every transaction between systems must be validated. Within a Zero Trust Framework, Microsoft suggests the following principles:

1 Verify explicitly: always authenticate and authorize including user identity, location, device health, etc.
2 Use least privilege access: use a just-enough-access approach for employees
3 Assume breach: manage insider risk, drive threat detection, and improve defenses[6]

The cyber security threat is particularly prevalent for the small and medium business (SMB) space. Outdated technology creates gaps in security that allow for greater security risk. According to Microsoft, "99% of password spray and 97% of credential stuffing attacks use legacy authentication, according to authentication data from Azure AD.[6]" UpGuard, a third-party risk and attack management provider, notes that the average cost incurred by a company due to a Cyber-attack in 2022 was $4.35M, which was a 2.5% increase over 2021[1]. In attacks where remote work was a key factor, the cost on average was $4.99M for breach damages in 2022.[7]

Average costs incurred by a company due to a Cyber-attack:

2022	**$4.35M**	▲**2.5%**
2021		

Average cost for remote work breaches
$4.99M

Source: Upguard[7]

6.   Source: https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/security/business/microsoft-digital-defense-report-2021
7.   Source: https://www.upguard.com/blog/cost-of-data-breach#:~:text=The%20yearly%20average%20data%20breach,by%20the%20 COVID%2D19%20pandemic.&text=The%20average%20data%20breach%20costs,2021%20amount%20of%20%244.24%20million

Hybrid and remote work provide employees with the radical flexibility that has become a mandate in a post-pandemic environment. However, without the right technology, devices, and digital infrastructure in place, organizations may struggle to find the balance of the risk and reward of the hybrid experience.

Key takeaways

1 When creating a post-pandemic strategy for people management, remember that a key to balancing the needs of your business with the needs of your employees is the requirement of leaders to recognize the whole human experience of work and working.

2 Without the right technology stack, it may be challenging to create a productive and positive hybrid team. The experience of a remote team member must be as positive as it is for an employee who chooses an on-premises option.

3 Creating a safe and secure workplace both digitally and physically is what makes the hybrid experience possible. Implementing strategies to mitigate public health risks and reduce cybersecurity risks improves the overall well-being of your employees.

4 Retaining top talent in today's environment can be difficult, but with a clear strategy, the right resources, and radical flexibility, building the best possible teams is within reach.

Want to learn more? Contact our team using the link below:

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