



The Future of Work, Explained

How organizations across industries can strike a balance between remote, in-office, and hybrid work



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■ INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a dramatic shift in the way we work. Although employers were reluctant to make big shifts toward more flexible work models before 2020, the pandemic's global disruption changed that mindset in a matter of weeks. In the early weeks of spring 2020, [83% of white-collar professionals](#) worked remotely some or part of the time. By September 2021, the most recent data available, that figure had only dropped slightly, with 67% of professional workers continuing full-time remote work in some fashion, and nearly half of all full-time U.S. workers working remotely, signaling that remote work practices are here to stay.

The task ahead for companies is no longer figuring out how to implement remote work. Businesses have had their trial-by-fire moment, and both employers and employees agree with the sentiment that [remote work is here to stay](#). In a world where flexible work is increasingly commonplace, employers instead need to develop long-term strategies for hybrid work — and hybrid office spaces.

Flexible work models translate to flexible office environments. Gartner reports in its 2020 [Market Guide for Resource Scheduling Applications](#) that flexible shared workspaces, along with the tools needed to schedule and maintain them, are increasing in adoption and popularity. Smart offices with virtual assistants and calendaring tools, shared seating for hybrid workers and wellness-equipped spaces are all characteristics of the office of the future.

In this eBook, we'll take a look at the future of work. What pros and cons of remote work have emerged in the past two years? How will models of work continue to change? If the future of work is indeed more flexible, what does the hybrid office of the future look like?

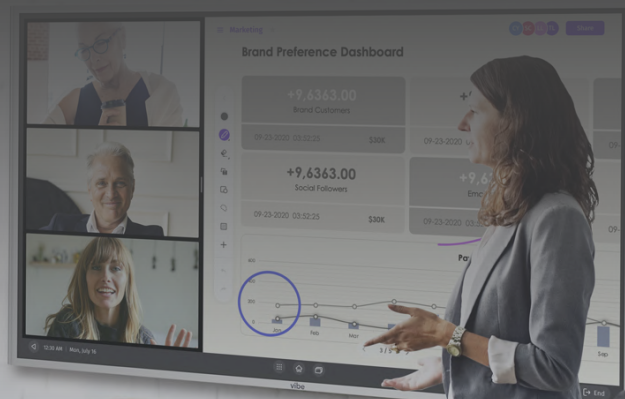


THE UPSIDES OF REMOTE WORK

Remote work is the new normal, especially for those in professional, business and management positions. As remote work has become both acceptable and expected over the past two years, many workers have realized that telecommuting offers new-found freedoms.

The American Psychological Association reports that remote work has [benefits for both employers and employees](#). “Employers can hire geographically distributed talent and reduce overhead expenses, while employees can gain flexibility, save time, and reduce transportation and some child-care costs.” Let’s break down the benefits for workers:

- **Greater flexibility.** Remote workers can choose where, and often when, they work. Flex work allows employees to achieve a better work-life balance — it’s not a big deal to fit a doctor’s visit or a soccer game in. It also allows employees to work in the way that’s most productive for them (night owls can opt for the night shift, for example).
- **Decreased commute time.** Working at home eliminates commutes, with obvious benefits. Data from Upwork shows that employees working remotely due to COVID are [saving an average of almost 50 minutes](#) per day. That’s 50 minutes to watch an episode of your favorite show, clean the house, go on a bike ride, or spend time with loved ones.
- **Reduced spending.** Working at home costs less. Money for public transportation, gas, child care and even professional clothing can be spent elsewhere.
- **Increased job satisfaction.** The happiest, [most enthusiastic workers](#) are those who work from home 60% to 80% of the time, according to a Gallup report. It’s not surprising: a more balanced work life means a more balanced home life, too.





THE UPSIDES OF REMOTE WORK

While many employers feared remote work would lead to a drop in productivity, nine out of 10 workers felt that they were [just as productive](#) at home as they were in the office. Remote work offers other benefits for employers, too:

- **Increased productivity & performance.** Employees who are able to work from home at least some of the time demonstrate [higher morale](#) and commitment, and less absenteeism and tardiness. Creating a more flexible work policy also means current and potential employees are more likely to see your workplace as family friendly.
- **Reduced overhead.** Fewer workers in the office mean less office space — and less money spent on rent, utilities and office supplies. Owl Labs reports in its 2021 [State of Remote Work Report](#) that 1/3 of midsize employers reduced office space in 2021.
- **Advantages in hiring and retaining employees.** When employees can work from anywhere, you expand your hiring pool dramatically, enabling access to more talented and qualified workers. Remote work policies also mean your employees are more likely to stay. According to the same Owl Labs report, one in four workers would quit their current position if they were no longer able to work remotely.





THE DOWNSIDES OF REMOTE WORK

While remote work brings a bevy of benefits, there are hidden costs, too.

For teams & companies:

- **Lack of company culture.** In entirely remote teams, employees can find it difficult to feel connected to their coworkers and create office camaraderie, especially when new members come on board.
- **Communication difficulties.** When communication is entirely digital, it's harder to turn around and ask a coworker a question, and even harder still when coworkers are working on different schedules, or in different time zones. Video calls are useful but don't fully allow presenters to use body language and other forms of non-verbal communication.
- **Long-term corporate leases.** Many organizations are tied into long-term commercial leases, whether or not the space is being used. That means spending money on an unused, long-term expense — not ideal.

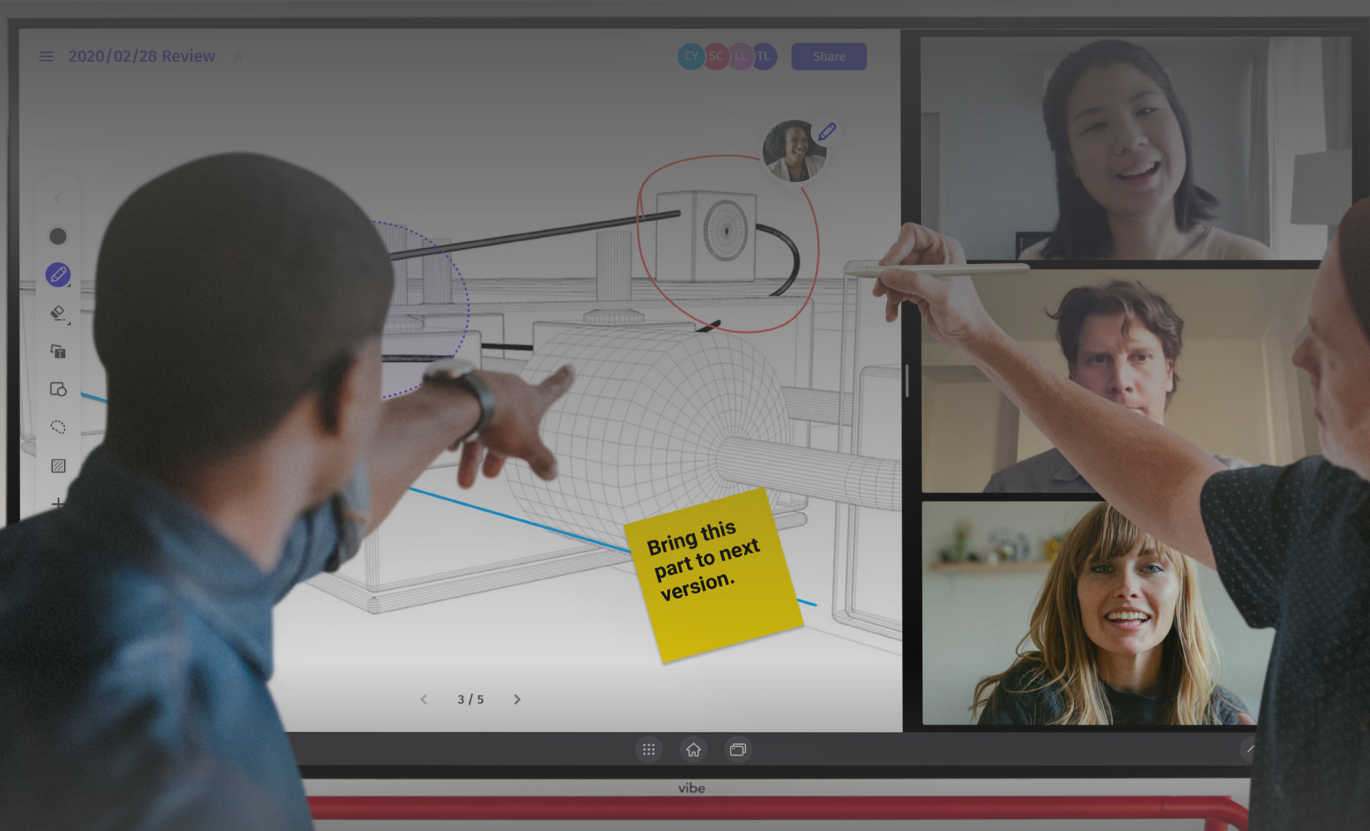




THE DOWNSIDES OF REMOTE WORK

These issues affect employees' experience on the job, but there are downsides for individual workers as well:

- **Social isolation.** According to our recent survey, 63% of workers prefer hybrid or in-person work arrangements, very possibly because of the lack of social interaction that often comes along with remote work. While digital communication technology has improved, it can't entirely replace the benefits of in-person interactions.
- **Fuzzy work-life boundaries.** It's difficult to set a clear line between work and home when you're doing all your work at home. Employees who need more structure may struggle with the free-form nature of remote work.
- **Mental health effects.** Newly remote workers felt more pressure and [put in more hours](#) than they did before the pandemic, on top of the stress of caring for family and struggling with less-than-clear home-work boundaries.



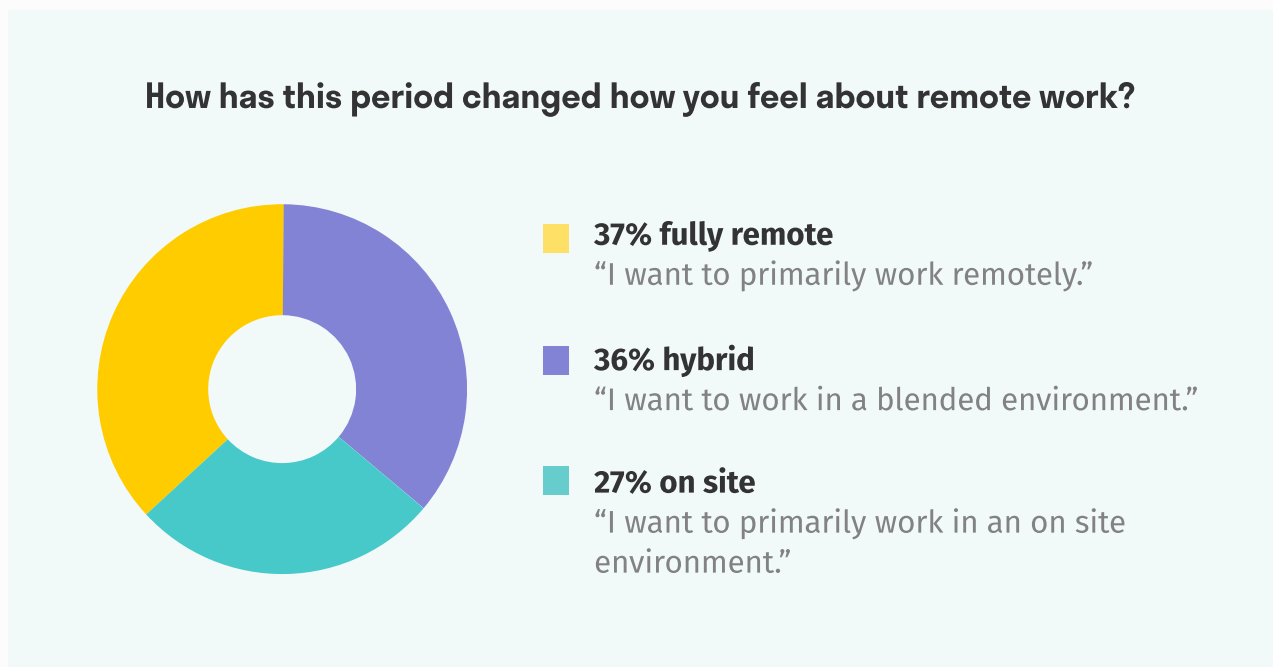


WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF WORK?

As we move out of a time of workplace disruption, it's important to consider the future of work.

What kind of flexibility will workers expect? Will offices be central to work culture, or will they become more like satellite coworking spaces, where teams schedule time to meet together? Is fully remote work sustainable? How can businesses offer employees the flexibility they want and still get results?

Workers have widely variable opinions about which work setup they prefer. In our recent survey, we found the following:



Organizations need to find a compromise that will allow employees the autonomy of working remotely, while also bringing teams together in person in a way that is safe, productive, collaborative, and respectful of employees' time.



WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF WORK?

A hybrid work model is the obvious choice for many organizations, but hybrid work models can vary widely. Harvard Business Review describes [four kinds of hybrid work models](#):

1. **Large hubs.** This model most closely resembles the office-centric culture common before 2020. Teams are based around large hubs, and while remote work is permitted, in-office work is expected and prioritized. This model works best for knowledge-heavy or creative fields where high levels of collaboration are expected, such as architecture.
2. **Hubs and satellites.** Large hubs around the world prioritize in-person workers, while smaller satellite offices allow businesses to draw from global, dispersed talent pools. Satellite offices allow small, local teams the same face-to-face interaction and commute times as teams based near large hubs.
3. **Distributed.** Employees are distributed among a small number of countries, with a high percentage of fully remote workers. This model works best for industries with a high volume of routine, easily digitized tasks, such as software companies. Companies might scale up from a distributed to a global virtual model as they gain global reach.
4. **Global virtual.** Instead of sticking to one or two countries, global virtual models allow businesses to [access talent worldwide](#), without the need for a physical office space. Companies may choose to facilitate annual corporate retreats or meet-ups, but with a global, completely remote workforce, in-office work is virtually nonexistent.

To choose an appropriate model, HBR suggests a) evaluating the kinds of tasks that make up your organization's core activities and b) making a cost-benefit analysis of having access to global employees. Regardless of whether employees are mostly in the office or mostly at home, hybrid work requires employers to completely reimagine what the work environment looks like.



BUILDING OUT THE IDEAL HYBRID WORKSPACE

A hybrid workforce requires hybrid-centric workspaces. If business leaders want to ask employees to come into the office, there needs to be a clear reason why the commute will be worth it for both them and the company. A hybrid workspace that isn't designed around collaboration could be a waste of your employees' valuable time.

Office spaces and work cultures designed for a hybrid workforce look different and require different considerations. We've got some ideas about what hybrid workplaces should look like.

5 Ways to Enable Hybrid Workers

- 1. Wellness check-ins.** Lockdowns, pandemic stress and quarantines have pushed already-isolated remote employees to the brink. Employers can address the mental health of remote teams by making sure managers have regular, structured check-ins with their employees that incorporate mental health. They can also provide opportunities for informal, creative interaction and normalize using leave for mental health days.
- 2. Desk-sharing.** When only 40% of your workforce is in the office on any given day, for example, it doesn't make sense to provide desks for 100% of your workers. Desk-sharing, or hot-desking, allows companies to use space more efficiently. [Resource-scheduling applications](#) eliminate uncertainty, allowing employees to know where they'll be working when they come into the office.
- 3. Weekly in-office days.** Partially remote workers are [more satisfied, engaged and connected](#) than fully remote workers, according to recent Gallup data. Scheduling teams or employees for weekly in-office days can help provide structured interaction and evade mental burnout. Let teams work together to choose the best days for team coworking.
- 4. Investment in technology & IT infrastructure.** A hybrid office requires new tools. Yet Owl Labs reports that "[only 38% of employers](#) have upgraded their video technology to improve hybrid collaboration." [Virtual meeting applications](#), fast and stable internet, cloud-based tools, and collaboration tools like [Vibe](#) can help hybrid employees work together more effectively, whether they are in office or not.
- 5. Provide structured mentorship for new employees.** A recent PWC survey shows that the least experienced employees are the [most likely to struggle](#) with remote work. Provide support for fledgling professionals with team-building activities, regular one-on-one video chats with managers and assigned mentors to help navigate professional growth.



BUILDING OUT THE IDEAL HYBRID WORKSPACE

What Does the Hybrid Office Look Like?

Assigned cubicles and corner offices are quickly becoming outdated. The future of office design needs to change to accommodate partially remote workers. Instead of simply being a place to house employees, the office should be designed for collaboration. So what does that look like?

The hybrid office of the future is not the open office of the past. While open offices may have swung too far toward open, high-interaction spaces, the hybrid office recognizes workers will prioritize focused work when they're at home. The hybrid office is built for a partial workforce and designed to create physical spaces that employees can't recreate virtually. Spaces for collaboration and team bonding should therefore be prioritized above all else.

Collaborative workspaces should involve a balance of what architect Tom Price calls [“me” vs. “we” space](#). Open-plan workspaces with flexible components enable collaboration, but employees still need space in the office to drill down on focused or paired work. Mixed-use rooms, furniture clusters and solo work booths can adapt to workers' needs on days when they're in the office. Collision spaces build social interaction into the workspace, while also creating a separation between socialization and focus time.

Resource-sharing applications help organizations use space efficiently, while also making office space and other physical resources, such as parking spaces and meeting rooms, easy to schedule.

An emphasis on comfort and aesthetics ensures that on the days workers do come into the office, they enjoy being there. Couches, coffee bars, interactive whiteboards, and playful graphics can help build an atmosphere that feels innovative and collaborative.





BUILDING OUT THE IDEAL HYBRID WORKSPACE

Vibe Boards Create Huddle Spaces for Hybrid Teams

[Vibe Boards](#) are an ideal tool for a collaborative, hybrid work environment. They support a fully enabled digital work infrastructure by connecting teams both in person and remotely. Vibe has already made a huge impact with hybrid teams. Here are just a few reasons our current customers love Vibe:

- Vibe creates a designated huddle space for teams when in the office, allowing colleagues to come together and work on a large and interactive screen.
- Vibe allows in-office workers to interact directly with remote colleagues for [brainstorming sessions](#). Use [Vibe Canvas](#) to work simultaneously across multiple devices while communicating virtually through voice and video apps.
- Vibe creates a stronger sense of community between in-office and remote colleagues, integrating with communication apps including Zoom and Slack to allow remote employees to become a part of huddles and [collaboration sessions](#).
- Vibe makes for easy note saving and sharing after meetings. No need to take a hard-to-read smartphone picture and pass it on — instead, save and send your Vibe Canvas instantly to the entire team.

Want to see Vibe in action? Check out this quick [demo video](#) and learn how you could incorporate Vibe into your daily workflow to help you create, collaborate and engage.





THE FUTURE OF WORK IS FLEXIBLE

The events of 2020 and 2021 have given both employers and employees the opportunity to reexamine how we work, with some dramatic changes as a result. Companies and workers have honed in on what we can change to create a more collaborative, balanced and productive work culture.

Some of the lessons we've learned from the quick transition to remote work, such as the benefits of working flexible hours or enjoying more time with family and friends, are worth keeping. Other aspects, such as the isolation of remote work and the difficulty in collaborating, still require some refining.

While businesses are still working out the kinks, hybrid work is here to stay — but a lack of collaboration doesn't have to be a given.

Vibe is a key centerpiece for any hybrid office. Our smartboards help bring collaboration back to teams who have been disrupted by remote work, with a clean, easy-to-navigate interface and seamless integrations with dozens of popular apps. Check out our [Vibe Board S1 55" and Vibe Board Pro 75"](#) to see which model may best fit your collaboration needs.





Want to talk to an expert?

[Contact Sales](#)

Please contact support@vibe.us for any questions.
We are happy to help.