Telework / Hybrid Work Toolkit

EMPLOYER SECTION

Hybrid model benefits
There are several well-documented ways that hybrid work benefits organizations, including:

- Continuity of operations. Teleworking has long been used as a business continuity strategy in response to disruptive events that prevent employees from getting to the workplace, such as local weather-related incidents or traffic problems; regional wide-area incidents like the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia; and national/global incidents as experienced with the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. With hybrid work, employers can react immediately and safely maintain employee productivity. As noted in the [Telework Benchmarking Study](#), business continuity was identified as an increasingly important driver for telework/remote work, especially for those organizations that felt the direct effects of catastrophic events such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. As noted by one employer, "It's hard to quantify the value of knowing 90 percent of your management team has the capability to work remotely in the event of an emergency."

- Recruitment and Retention. Employee turnover is costly. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) [reported](#) that on average the cost to fill a vacant position is six to nine months of the employee's salary. That equates to between $30,000 and $45,000 for recruitment and training costs for an employee making $60,000 per year.
  Hybrid work is a proven recruitment and retention tool because it gives employees the flexibility that many are seeking. A [survey conducted by FlexJobs](#), a reputable remote and flexible job search, website, showed that remote work was the second most important employee compensation and benefit. This is especially true for millennials (those born between 1981 and 1996), who represent the largest segment of the U.S. workforce (35%) according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#). In general, millennials support hybrid work models because they see remote work as practical, value a work-life balance, and are accustomed to being constantly connected. Employers are recognizing that working from home is an effective way to recruit and retain top talent. By offering hybrid work, organizations can strategize and leverage recruitment in creative ways.

  Remote work can also expand an employer's geographic reach for the recruitment and retention of skilled workers. "Work-from-Anywhere (WFA)" is an emerging form of remote work that allows employees to choose to live in a preferred geographic location. This gives employers access to skilled workers beyond a limited geographic area who they may otherwise not be able to hire. It also gives employers the ability to retain key employees who need to relocate for personal reasons, such as a (military) spouse's job change, the need to be closer to other family members, access to specialized medical care, lower cost of living, improved quality of life, and the freedom to live/work where they choose. A [study of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office's Work from Anywhere (WFA)](#) program found a 4.4 percent increase in the output of WFA patent examiners.

- Operating cost savings. One of the biggest benefits to employees and employers is cost savings. According to a [report from Global Workplace Analytics](#):

- employees who work at home half of the time can save between $640 and $6,400 a year due to reduced costs for transportation, parking, eating out, professional clothes, and other incidental spending.
- employers can save $11,000 per year for each employee who works remotely two to three days a week from reduced office space costs, increased productivity, reduced absenteeism, and less turnover.

Organizations can also maintain or reduce office space even if they hire additional staff by allowing employees to work from home and/or share office space.

- Increased productivity. While employee productivity is not something that is typically "measured" in most organizations, remote workers consistently report getting more work done when working at home due to fewer interruptions and working a portion of the time they would normally spend commuting. Internal surveys and studies conducted by employers have consistently shown that productivity increases when employees work from home.

- Increased flexibility. The ability to work from home clearly gives employees more flexibility to find a better work/life balance. For many, they may be able to take their child to the bus stop or attend their athletic events, begin exercising, socialize more often with friends or neighbors, or volunteer in their community.

- Positive environmental impacts. Having fewer vehicles on the road as a result of hybrid work has many environmental benefits including lower greenhouse gas emissions, less use of fossil fuels, lower carbon footprint, and reduced air pollution. A [study](#) commissioned by the Thurston Regional Planning Council, WA showed the following environmental benefits if 30% of the region's public sector workforce teleworked two days a week:
    - Reduce vehicle miles traveled by 14 million miles per year.
    - Eliminate over one million vehicle trips per year.
    - Reduce greenhouse gases by the equivalent of planting over 100,000 trees.

- Improved employee satisfaction. Increased morale and job satisfaction is a benefit many employees experience in hybrid work models. A September 2020 [survey](#) of Washington State Department of Transportation employees found that 81% of employees continue to be satisfied or are very satisfied with their telework experience. One-third of employees are interested in teleworking full time, whereas two-thirds are interested in a hybrid schedule of three days working from home.

Policy related best practice guidelines

- Allowance considerations. According to [Global Workplace Analytics](#) (*Home Office Stipend Fact Sheet 2021*), the technology costs for setting up a remote worker is broken down as follows:

    - $1,400 every three years for computer equipment (laptop, webcam, monitor, docking station, keyboard, and mouse).
    - $1,000 every five years for home office furniture (sit/stand desk, ergonomic chair, and storage unit).

Furthermore, the *Fact Sheet* notes that since most companies have already invested in laptops for remote workers, the best practice recommendation is a $1,500 stipend, which includes $500 for technology and $1,000 for home office furniture. Options for distributing the stipend include

allowing employees to buy what they need and expense it, distribute the stipends in the employee's paycheck, or distribute the stipend through a third-party provider that provides commercial grade furniture.

An additional survey conducted by [Global Workplace Analytics](#) (*The Future of Home Office Cost Sharing 2020*) showed that the majority of business leaders felt that it is their responsibility to set up a home office for employees who work from home three or more days per week. Employers indicated that health and safety were major factors in their decision to provide employees with an ergonomic chair and desk.

- Setting up hoteling procedures. In a hybrid work environment, some employers may turn to office hoteling to manage office space and assign work stations on an as needed basis using a reservation system. This allows employees to choose where they work best based on their needs for the day. It also provides the opportunity to collaborate with other team members, fostering engagement and offsetting any potential feelings of isolation. Factors to consider when setting up an office hoteling system include selecting the [right hoteling software/application](#), educating employees on how to use the system, having the right equipment and technology tools available at each work station, and providing maps or wayfinding signs so employees can easily find their assigned work space. While the terms "office hoteling" and "hot desking" are often used interchangeably; hoteling typically requires advanced reservations whereas hot desking does not (space is available on a first come, first served basis).

- Equipment check-out. Employers should have a way to track all equipment assigned to remote workers, including cell phones, computers, laptops, monitors, printers, and furniture. This includes equipment checked out of the office and/or directly shipped to employees' homes. Employees should sign for the equipment received and the organization's telework policy should include provisions for how the equipment will be returned within a specified period of time due to a voluntary or involuntary separation of employment.

- Telework reimbursements. In addition to the allowance considerations for equipment and furniture discussed above, it is common practice to reimburse employees for related work expenses such as printing supplies (paper and ink), a percentage of home Internet costs, cell phone costs (if the employee uses their personal phone), and any other incidental expenses related to working remotely. Employee expenses that are not typically reimbursable are home utility costs and commuting costs. For employees who work far away from the organization's office, the costs for periodic travel expenses to the work site is something that can be negotiated.

- Rideshare subsidies. Employees who work remotely may often use sustainable modes of transportation when they do come to the office, such as mass transit, carpooling, vanpooling, biking, and walking. Ideally, they should be included in any rideshare subsidies available to other employees.

Onboarding best practices
Determining hybrid model eligibility and 'work from home' frequency for staff requires a two-step process that includes evaluating positions and evaluating employees. This information can then be used to determine if employees are best suited for one of the following three categories: 100% office, hybrid (combination of home/office), or 100% remote.

Comprehensive approach to decision making

- Evaluating positions. The first step is to evaluate the position to determine if it is conducive to being done remotely. Factors to consider include – are there measurable deliverables? can tasks be done independently? are there any restrictions that would eliminate the position from being eligible? If the position does not lend itself to being done remotely on a regular basis, consider whether there are specific tasks that can be done periodically, maybe on a monthly or quarterly basis.

- Evaluating staff. The next step is to evaluate employee eligibility. Are they meeting performance expectations? do they have good communication skills? are they flexible with change? do they solve problems independently? do they have good organizational skills? and do they require minimum supervision? These are the important factors to consider in the decision-making process. Employees who had a great work ethic when they worked in the office, will typically carry that positive attitude and self-motivation with them when they work from home. The same can be said about employees who under perform in the office.

  Also consider employee preference. Some employees may opt not to work from home for a variety of reasons and some may just prefer to come into the office. Others may have requests or justification for other work arrangements, so make sure to have these important conversations and do not make assumptions.

- Scheduling analysis. The information gathered from the position and employee evaluations can then be used to help put together work schedules based on remote/hybrid status, office coverage needs, and overall staff availability. This will vary from organization to organization and will often vary from week to week after taking other factors into consideration such as employees who may be on scheduled leave or who call in sick. It is important that someone within the organization/team be responsible for preparing, updating, and communicating the work schedule so that all employees have the same information and know what the expectations are. Hybrid employees need to remain flexible and understand they may be required to come into the office as needed to make sure there is adequate office coverage.

Considerations and trends for hiring remote workers

A [2022 survey of 14,000 U.S. employers](#) showed that hybrid work is the future for most offices and failing to offer flexible work arrangements is a risk for organizations. In addition, hybrid work must be productive and engaging, not just a policy or perk. The bottom line is that hybrid work is here to stay. With that in mind, employers need to understand how to build successful hybrid teams.

Tools to build a successful hybrid team

- Goals. Establishing individual and team goals are important for team cohesion, especially in a hybrid work environment. Setting goals can help motivate the team, clarify expectations, keep employees on track, and make it easier to evaluate performance. For goals to be effective, they should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-bound ([SMART](#)) and employees should be directly involved in the goal-setting process.

- Trust. In a hybrid work model, trust is at the core of a successful team. Employees who work from home tend to feel greater empowerment because of the trust that is extended to them to perform their job duties off-site from home. For managers, the rule of thumb should be to trust

your employees until you have a reason not to. Operating in a hybrid work environment may require a change in the way employees and managers communicate with each other to make sure trust is maintained. One of the best ways to accomplish this is for hybrid/remote workers to keep their managers informed of what they are working on when out of the office. This can be in the form of a daily email, weekly report, or periodic check in phone calls.

If performance issues do arise, it is important to address them promptly. This can be accomplished by having meaningful conversations with staff to understand what is going on in their lives that may impact their work performance or productivity, like child or adult care situations or other circumstances. Build accountability by addressing performance, when necessary, rather than avoiding the situation. Addressing performance issues comes with the territory of being a manager and could affect the morale of your team if ignored.

- Accountability. Accountability is a must in a hybrid work model. Managers need to be able to answer the question, ***How do I know they're working?*** The answer starts with no longer associating a workplace or building with the act of working. Instead, the focus needs to be on the output of the work that is being done and managing by results and not observation. This includes establishing measurable deliverables based on clear priorities, specific action items, and realistic deadlines that are developed with the employee's input and the understanding that performance will be evaluated based on specific outcomes.

- Effective communication. In a hybrid work model, it is important that staff are not left out of communications. Think through how information is disseminated and solicit feedback from team members on the best way to share information. Generally, team emails are used as a primary go to because: 1) everyone receives the same message/information, even if they were not present or at work that day; and 2) it is less time-consuming than calling a meeting. This may require setting new expectations for all team members to avoid the potential for emails to get buried or overlooked. Also, look for opportunities to test new collaboration platforms.

  Managers should build individual relationships and keep the lines of communication open with staff. How often to communicate depends on the team dynamics and individual team members. Make sure meetings have a specific purpose. More meetings do not necessarily mean better communication. Managing a hybrid team does not require reinventing the wheel. What it does require is deliberate conversations and decisions around establishing new processes, policies, and actions to make sure communication is effective.

- Leadership. In today's evolving workplace, knowing how to lead remote/hybrid teams is a necessity that requires leaders to adapt how they communicate, create a great work culture, engage staff, and address challenges. These are all skills that can be developed and there are a wide range of resources available, including online articles, books, videos, and certification courses (see Resources Section).

- Teamwork. There are more social technology tools available now than ever before that allow staff to work, connect, and stay engaged. Create team events like virtual coffee breaks, team lunches, and social activities to increase rapport and foster familiarity.

Information Technology (IT) Tips

- Security and confidentiality. To ensure that information is handled appropriately, security and confidentiality should be included in the organization's remote/hybrid work policy and covered in training for managers and employees.

- Generic tips to tackle IT issues. Remote/hybrid workers should report IT issues to the organization's help desk and communicate issues to management, especially if it will impact their productivity.

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance. The [U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission](#) has determined that allowing an employee to work at home may be a reasonable accommodation where the person's disability prevents successfully performing the job on-site and the job, or parts of the job, can be performed at home without causing significant difficulty or expense.

- Shared drive tips and tricks. Shared drives are shared online spaces where teams can easily store, search, and access their files anywhere, from any device. The organization's IT staff should be responsible for setting up the shared drive and instructing staff on its use.

The importance of training

Training for hybrid workers and managers is a critical but often overlooked aspect of remote work. Sending employees home unprepared and hoping they figure it out for themselves can lead to misunderstandings and frustration on the part of remote workers, managers, and coworkers. Ideally, training should be provided at the outset of the remote work arrangement and should cover the following:

- Policies and procedures. Training should cover the key aspects of the organization's remote work policy and related procedures, including the approval process, general terms and conditions, and process for terminating the agreement by the employee and organization.

- Preparing staff and establishing expectations. For employees, training should cover key areas such as building trust, planning and organizing remote work days, home office set up, IT considerations, safety tips, and employee effectiveness. For managers, training should cover basics such as understanding the benefits of remote/hybrid work, determining employee eligibility, communicating expectations, and performance management.

- Factors to consider for non-teleworking employees. Not all employees can or want to work from home and these employees will continue to work in the office. Remote workers need to understand the potential shift in responsibilities that may impact their office coworkers and be mindful of how they can minimize this impact. Remote workers may also need to be proactive and encourage communication with their coworkers when they are out of the office.

Training can be developed and conducted by the organization's staff (typically human resources and information technology staff) and can be delivered in person or online. More detailed information is available in the Employee, Management, and Resources sections of this Toolkit.