

Framework for the Future

2024 Workplace Trend Report

As the global pandemic gets further into the rearview, organizations are creating stricter frameworks to balance the needs of their organizations, their growth ambitions and progress, and employee productivity.



While there was a definite need for flexibility over the last several years, companies are now beginning to require more employees back in the office, while simultaneously maintaining provisions for policies that prioritize the well-being and needs of employees.

It is important to consider that aspects of work are impacted by where employees choose to plug in when implementing new company policies. In an article by Gartner¹, employees experienced an increase in external motivators due to the disruption caused by the pandemic. This article notes that employees desire an increasing amount of autonomy, or ability to control one's own behavior and decisions. Also, the ability to have meaningful, human connections will differ, as will the employer's ability to support those social needs. Finally, individual and team performance, growth, and development must take precedence as well.

1. Source: Gartner: Make the Office the Center of Hybrid Work by Understanding 3 Psychological Motivators, 2023

Let us evaluate the impact of the different work settings, specifically regarding the framework of autonomy, connection, and capability.

Office-First Approach

Reflecting on the prospect of returning to the office every day feels strange, when only a few years ago, it was the norm in every company. Assessing productivity in an environment drastically different from the workplace of 2019 poses challenges. Nevertheless, some executives and leaders maintain the belief that peak productivity is achieved when all employees are in the office, allowing for fewer non-business distractions and optimal cross-collaboration.

However, these strict office schedules come at the cost of work-life balance and less autonomy. In response to policies driven by the pandemic, some employees have gone as far as relocating farther from their offices. The extended commuting time translates to less quality time spent with family and friends. The office tends to be the sole source of connection as time for socializing after work is limited.

It is difficult to ignore that capability tends to increase, though, with resources and colleagues readily available in the office setting. Instead of having to call or message a fellow employee, you can head right down to their desk or office for collaboration.



Studies show that being surrounded by high performers increases an individual's performance by 15%².

This environment may not support the highest level of productivity for everyone, however. It is important to honor that employees are all individuals and work best in varying settings. [Likewise, the same article states that negative spillover happens too: sitting near toxic employees means you are now more likely to also become toxic, and the effect happens nearly immediately².](#) This means we need to carefully consider our new hires and optimize the selection process when bringing on new employees, especially if you are going for a fully in-office approach.

Additionally, Gartner states that, "Location-centric work designs are often rigid, amplify fatigue, drive workers away and degrade performance."³ This understanding is now leading many executive leaders to examine other options when it comes to work settings.

2. [Source: Sitting Near a High-Performer Can Make You Better at Your Job \(northwestern.edu\)](#)

3. [Source: Gartner: Human-Centric Work Models Proven to Drive Performance the Most, November 2022](#)



Fully Remote Work

The global pandemic necessitated a widespread transition to full-time remote work for every corporate employee, if only for a temporary period. This unique situation provided an opportunity for employees who may have never been able to work remotely otherwise. Employees who work remotely have significantly more control over where and when they work. The absence of a daily commute contributes to increased autonomy and improved work-life balance. Having more control over schedules and breaks makes it easier to get to personal events or appointments, causing less stress.

While some individuals appreciate the newfound independence, others grapple with feelings of isolation, relying on in-office interactions for socialization. Depending on their geographical location, employees may find themselves compelled to connect with colleagues virtually. Establishing connections through a screen can be challenging, and the preference for in-person interactions varies among individuals. Remote employees typically need to actively seek social connection outside the traditional workplace.

When it comes to capability, there are costs and benefits as well. While some employees may work better at home with customized workspaces and minimal distractions from colleagues, there may be other personal distractions threatening productivity. Leaders must make well-informed hiring decisions, selecting employees they can trust to fulfill their roles effectively, irrespective of the distractions they may be encountering.

It is important to consider that skill gaps must also be addressed for some employees, either in the fully remote or hybrid environment. Traditional communication may be through calls and email, but additional software including Teams, Slack, Zoom, or otherwise may be used, and training implications must be provided. HR Magazine states, [“Giving new-to-role or aspiring leaders the skills to adapt their style to the platform at hand, while embedding best practice within an organization, can help to address these challenges⁴.”](#)

4. Source: HR Magazine - Navigating communications in a hybrid workspace



New Office Imperative (Hybrid)

As things began to shift back to a semblance of normalcy, companies started navigating a middle ground between the previous fully in-office model and the newfound flexibility of remote work. This led to the emergence of the “new office imperative” or a hybrid approach, incorporating mandatory office days alongside flexibility for the rest of the work week. This balanced strategy facilitates in-person guidance and mentorship and collaboration during office days while granting employees greater autonomy over their schedules.

[We can see some trends emerging in the marketplace when it comes to industry and their in-office frameworks. Big Tech \(Apple, Amazon, IBM\) and Global Media \(Disney, Netflix\) are averaging three days a week in the office⁵. Global Finance Service companies like Goldman Sachs, BlackRock, JPMorgan, and CitiGroup are slightly more office-forward, with three to four days required⁵. The mid-size to large Tech and Talent and Staffing industries are taking a more flexible approach, with no in-office mandate required⁵.](#)

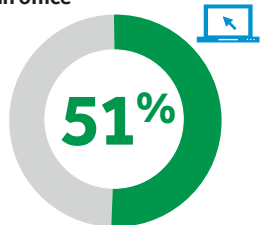
In terms of capability and connectivity, the hybrid approach has the benefits of being fully in-office, with access to resources and the ability to receive mentorship in person. There is the chance to interact among colleagues but also with friends and family outside the office. However, with a varying schedule, there is a stronger need to communicate in-office days and times for optimal employee connections. Further evidence supporting a hybrid approach, TIME states, [“In addition, well designed remote-work practices raise productivity. When employees all come into the office on the same days to work together, for example Tuesday to Thursday, and stay home on Monday and Friday to focus on deep work, research suggests productivity rises by about 3% to 5%.⁶”](#)

5. [Source: The Companies Mandating Employees Return to the Office \(businessinsider.com\)](#)

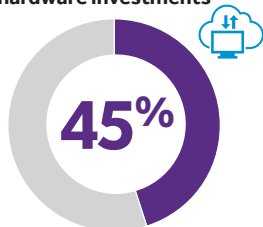
6. [Source: Working From Home Is the Trend of the Year—And Next Year Too | TIME](#)

In the Nordics, employees are keen on better digital assets that can make their work more seamless, our Work Reimagined survey finds.

Want better technology in office

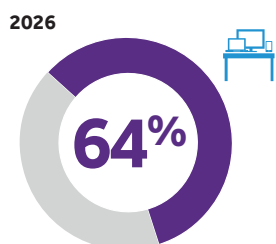
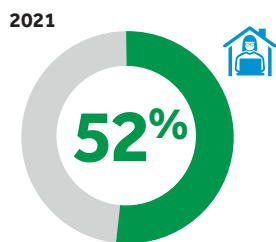


Prefer home office hardware investments



Source: How can technology activate your hybrid work ecosystem?

By the end of 2026, democratization of technology, together with the digitization and automation of work, will increase the total available fully remote/hybrid jobs.



Source: Gartner

Implications

Recognizing the diverse needs of employees and industries regarding the time spent in an office, it is crucial to assess the implications for your company's future. The technology that facilitates connectivity between employees and systems represents significant uncertainties for many organizations. Furthermore, there might be a need to explore additional roles dedicated to managing the complexities of integrating employees across various frameworks.

What role does technology play in the three working frameworks?

There is no question that the technology stack is a main factor that enables commercial effectiveness and efficiency in an organization. Ensuring that employees have the right tools, in the right capacity, is paramount to a company's success. Ernst and Young (EY), a multinational professional services company and one of the 'Big Four' accounting firms, says this, "[In the Nordics, employees are keen on better digital assets that can make their work more seamless, our Work Reimagined survey finds. More than half \(51%\) of the employees in the Nordics want better technology in the office, while 45% are more eager about home office 'hardware' investments. These figures show how the role of a digital workplace is already understood and accepted by employees.](#)"⁷

Computers, multi-function printers, and routers quickly come to mind as office technology, but the ever-evolving definition has come to also include smart technologies, like whiteboards and dynamic meeting rooms, and workplace security like access controls and cameras.

Hardware Winners and Losers

As the pandemic has waned and companies that experienced a boom in the wake of lockdowns and quarantines (think, Zoom, Peloton, and Netflix) have experienced significant down turns, the market for infrastructure technologies including cloud computing, digital payments, and cybersecurity continues to rise. [According to Global Business Outlook, AWS, the largest cloud service in the world, continues to expand by 33% annually, and other cloud services offered by Google and Microsoft are growing their annual sales by 40% and 36%, respectively.](#)⁸

The same article states that digital payments are also continuing to develop, noting that, "[Nine of ten American retailers now accept Apple Pay as a form of payment, and three-quarters of iPhone owners use it, up from half in 2019.](#)"⁸

Collaboration technology, or software used by teams to work together on a common task, is a sector also continuing to grow. As hybrid and remote positions become more readily available and commonplace, the demand for effortless connectivity increases. "By the end of 2026, democratization of technology, together with the digitization and automation of work, will increase the total available fully remote/hybrid jobs to 64% of all employees, up from 52% in 2021," states Gartner⁹.

7. Source: How can technology activate your hybrid work ecosystem?

8. Source: The winners and losers of the pandemic tech boom - Global Business Outlook

9. Source: Gartner: Forecast Analysis: Social and Collaboration Software in the Workplace, Worldwide, March 2023



Cybersecurity

For the remote workforce, Tech Radar suggests that in addition to the office hardware, you will also need software like Microsoft Office, project management tools, cloud computing, video conferencing and chat platforms, and cybersecurity tools.

“One tool you should have in your repertoire is a virtual private network (VPN). A VPN protects your privacy by establishing a private network and masking your IP address when you access the internet. You will be able to hide your location and other data, allowing you to browse the internet anonymously. [This is especially important when you are accessing public networks, like Wi-Fi hotspots, which make you particularly vulnerable](#)¹⁰.”

[Further, organizations should develop and maintain a dedicated program surrounding cyber awareness, incidents, and reporting, according to Deloitte](#)¹¹. They suggest the following:

- **Incident response program:** Organizations must re-evaluate incident readiness and response capabilities so they can recover faster, rebound stronger and adapt more quickly to threats without losing critical operational function and customer confidence.
- **A culture of cyber awareness:** Responding to attacks is not just about good decisions from the top; employees at all levels must understand the importance of their role in cybersecurity. Everyone should learn how to identify, report, and respond to threats.
- **Good cyber hygiene:** [Good cyber hygiene \(e.g heightened security awareness training\) allows organizations to create an environment where the secure thing to do is the easy thing to do](#)¹¹.

10. Source: [Top technology you need for working remotely | TechRadar](#)

11. Source: [Cybersecurity considerations for hybrid working | Deloitte Ireland](#)

What Workers Want

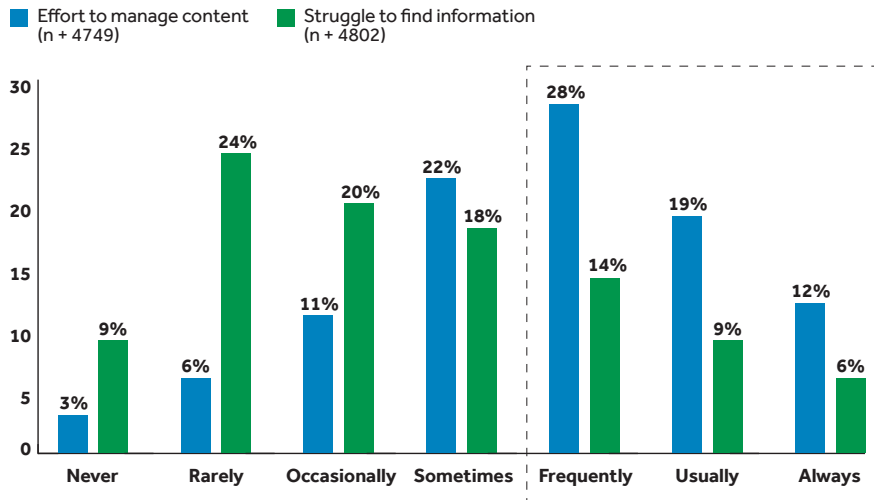
In this evolving workplace landscape, it is essential to recognize that employee expectations have undergone a shift. The increased dependence on technology to facilitate connections between teams, software, and businesses introduces new considerations. To align with your organizational strategy, ensure the integration of the appropriate technology by considering the following employee preferences:

To find information effortlessly

According to Gartner, digital workers are struggling to access the info they need¹². This lack of awareness is leading them to make the wrong decisions and miss important updates due to too much noise. While clear communication from the top is important, in some cases the pendulum has swung too far. Sending out frequent updates and cluttering up internal employee sites is leading to missed announcements and a confusing employee experience, especially for remote employees. Despite putting in significant effort, workers are still encountering issues finding the information they need. While 59% of digital workers report putting in effort to manage content, 29% still struggle to find the information necessary to complete their job (see figure below)¹².

Workers Struggle to Find Information Despite Considerable Effort to Manage Content

Percentage of Respondents



n = varies; All digital Workers excluding not sure/Not applicable

Q. How frequently do you engage in the following activities with the digital technology your organization offers you? – ‘Content: Efficiently managing content to reduce duplication and/or improving knowledge sharing and retention.’

Q. Select how often you have encountered the following situations in your organization – ‘Struggled to find information or data needed to effectively perform my job.’

Source: 2022 Gartner Digital Worker Survey

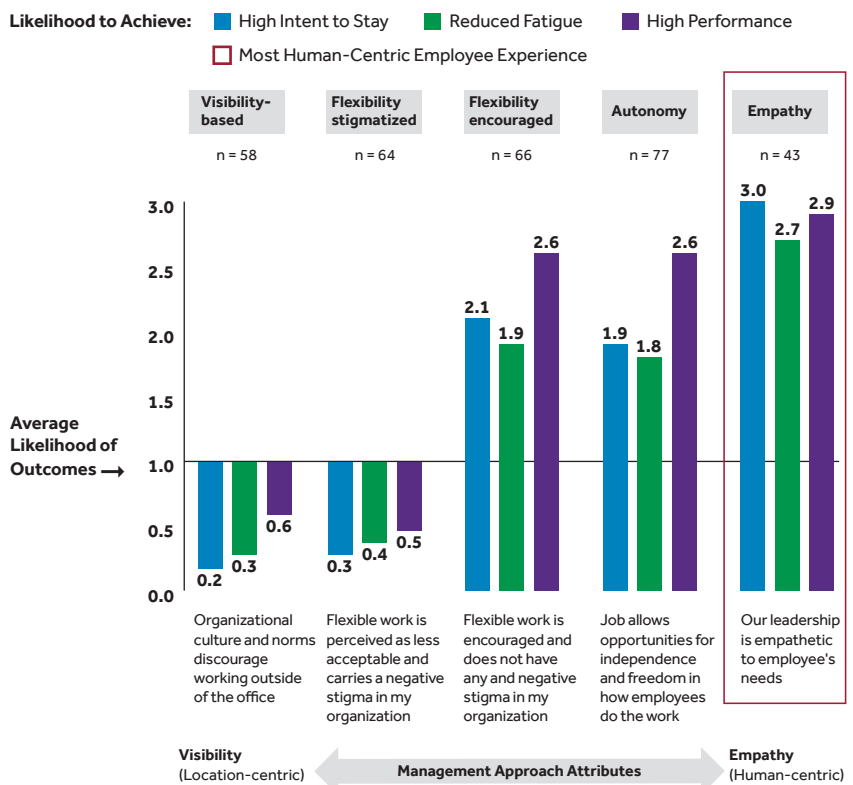
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding off error
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12. Source: Gartner: What Workers Want: Top 10 Insights From the Digital Worker Experience Survey, April 2023

To be considered

While it may appear simpler to implement top-down static approaches, another Gartner study notes that human-centric work models are providing superior outcomes, "It is 3.8 times more likely to have high employee performance, 3.2 times more likely to have high intent to stay and 3.1 times more likely to have low fatigue than when human-centric work attributes are not present."¹³ Location-centric work where employees are discouraged from working outside of the office leans heavily on visibility-based management styles, whereas human-centric work swings toward empathy and autonomy. This Gartner study shows that empathetic leadership styles show the highest likelihood of intent to stay with an organization, reduced employee fatigue, and higher performance:

Effect on Employees of Management Approaches



Source: 2022 Gartner FoW Reinvented Implementation to Drive Talent and Business Outcomes Survey

Note: Employee View
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To feel connected

If there was one thing that the pandemic showed us, it was the basic human need for connection. While lockdowns have long been lifted, it is still pertinent to consider the need for connection among peers, management, and the organization. In the Gartner study, Return-to-Office Employee Benchmarks, the top two reasons for wanting to be in-office are to build relationships with colleagues and managers (38%) and to collaborate with others (37%)¹⁴. The next closest reason is 12 percentage points away (to use in-office technology), showing that employees want to feel closer to the people they work with. Gartner suggests creating virtual experiences with "deliberate spontaneity," to eliminate the awkwardness of forced virtual conversations in their study, How to Keep Remote Employees Connected in the Hybrid Organization¹⁵.

13. Source: Gartner: Human-Centric Work Models Proven to Drive Performance the Most, November 2022

14. Source: Gartner: Return-to-Office Employee Benchmarks, October 2022

15. Source: Gartner: How to Keep Remote Employees Connected in the Hybrid Organization, Refreshed September 2022

Some examples of this are encouraging employees to take five minutes at 11a.m. and/or 3 p.m. to connect with a peer, virtual office hours, pilot apps that randomize connections to recreate random conversations that happen in office or creating a “water cooler” Teams/Slack channel¹⁵. While it may be difficult to completely replicate the unexpected interactions that happen in-office, these ideas and technologies help workers remain connected.

Choosing the right stack for your organization

Every organization is unique, and with that comes a unique set of conditions to provide for. Now that we understand the necessity of keeping your tech stack current and aligned with employee needs, it is time to determine the best strategy for selecting and implementing your technology. According to Envoy, you can use the following steps to choose the right technology for your workplace:

1 Define your stakeholders

First, you will need to determine who the core stakeholders will be. While employees are the ones are the most obvious input, you may also want to consider a team of change agents, IT managers, finance, and compliance officers to ensure a smooth transition.

2 Determine your business goals

Plan what you are expecting to accomplish with an update in technology. Are you working to improve retention, enable productivity, or simply grow the bottom line? This will guide you in the discovery phase if you plan out your priorities ahead of time.

3 Get end-user input

It is important to consider the input of the employees who will be using the technology day-to-day. They will have insight into their daily needs and preferences and including them in the process will help them feel heard. Including them in this step is crucial to adoption down the road.

4 Consider scalability

Save your business time and money overall by selecting products early that are easily scalable as your business grows and expands. Look for products and companies that have a proven record of accomplishment of scaling with their clients.

5 Consider flexibility

Finally, be sure to consider your organization’s flexible working policies when implementing new technology. [You will need to think about the ways in which remote employees are able to integrate with those on-site, and how to best support business continuity, regardless of location](#)¹⁶.

Also, it is imperative to remain in frequent contact with your stakeholders throughout the selection process, implementation, and maintenance. Checking in with focus groups and daily users will provide valuable feedback on how the selection is working, and any adaptations that may be necessary for optimal efficiency and productivity.

15. Source: Gartner: How to Keep Remote Employees Connected in the Hybrid Organization, Refreshed September 2022

16. Source: [The ultimate guide to office technology | Envoy](#)

Establishing the framework for the future of work does not need to be intimidating. With unprecedented access to information and a myriad of connectivity options, there exists a robust foundation for remote and flexible work. By adopting a strategic and collaborative approach to workplace technology, it is entirely feasible to build a connected work environment that will effectively support our businesses for years to come.

Key Takeaways

- 1 Remote work is here to stay. Studies show increasing support of at least a hybrid option for the workplace approach to maintain employee loyalty, productivity, and mental health. The question now is how to approach it most securely and effectively.
- 2 Organizations should develop and maintain specific programs around cybersecurity, awareness, and reporting to maintain the integrity of data, regardless of the work environment.
- 3 There are opportunities for growth in varying segments related to the new office imperative, including payment solutions, collaboration services, and cloud services.
- 4 Maintain an open line of communication with stakeholders and day-to-day users of the equipment or technology to avoid obsolescence.



- 5 Be sure to consider what workers want, especially in remote and hybrid environments. It is important for employees to be able to easily access information, to be considered when decisions are made and feel connected to their organization and fellow employees.

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

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