EPOS

Workplace of the Future

How can Intentionality Help Businesses Strike the Hybrid Balance?

Foreword from Jeppe Dalberg-Larsen, EPOS President

In the last few years, the way we live and work has changed forever. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and advances in technology collided in a once-in-a-generation transformation of the workplace.

Hybrid working is here to stay and as such, businesses and employees must map out ways to make the uncharted new world of work, work. But because the change to hybrid has been both rapid and unplanned, what it looks like on a long-term basis is still in a state of evolution as it becomes more sophisticated in practical terms business to business.

Steadying the course is becoming increasingly more difficult as new global phenomena like 'The Great Resignation', 'Quiet Quitting', and macro-economic events such as the energy and cost-of-living crisis, and rising inflation, are acting as additional forces which influence the ways in which we work. While business leaders pivot to figure out the right way forward, it can feel like operational management is under threat and out of control.

What's become clear is there is no one size fits all approach to defining a hybrid strategy. Instead, each business requires a unique and tailored plan that considers all aspects of business operations, people, and culture.

It is clear that with intentional planning and the right technology solutions, business leaders can define effective hybrid strategies that provide them with an opportunity to not only make the new world work but differentiate themselves in an evolving market.

Flexibility is key though, so it is crucial that business leaders identify, understand, reflect and respond to trends as they emerge, within the structures of their hybrid business model, to help ensure efficient delivery and future-proof both operations and talent recruitment in the years to come.

The 'Workplace of the Future' report

In this report, global audio and video brand, EPOS, examines the complexities, tensions, and potential solutions for hybrid working, a trend that is here to stay.

Together with the Foresight Factory, EPOS explores how business leaders can define a hybrid strategy that will be effective in the long term, with a focus on markets including the UK, US, ANZ, and DE. The report, further supported by expert commentary, explores the current and emerging trends set to shape the future of work.

The research identifies several key themes that can help business leaders and the C-Suite navigate towards a positive hybrid solution for their workforce:

- **Hybrid work is here to stay:** Employees expect to work from home as much, or more, in the coming year, and almost 40% report that their biggest challenge is knowing when to work remotely and when to work in person.

- **Businesses must achieve 'hybrid harmony':** Individual needs and preferences, as well as macro and micro influences, are shaping the way employees want to work and where. Currently, 54% of employees feel that their managers are out of touch with them, so business leaders need to understand the nuances of their workforce.

- **Work culture is evolving:** While salaries remain important, employees also want to achieve a sense of purpose and flexibility in their jobs.

- **Employee wellbeing is a top priority:** The pace of life and work has led to increased feelings of burnout among employees, and around one fifth of workers in the USA, UK, Germany, and Australia report that their mental health has worsened in the past year. Businesses need to help manage burnout by encouraging time off, establishing healthy boundaries, and providing guidance on wellness.

- **The culture of work has evolved:** The Fourth Industrial Revolution is driving an increased reliance on technology, and as a result, tech skills and tech-focused roles will become more important. Business leaders and IT decision makers should ensure that remote and on-site employees have equal opportunities and visibility.

- **Training for the future:** While proximity is still important for learning and new business opportunities, employees are increasingly seeking learning and development opportunities to achieve their career goals. Business leaders should prioritize learning and development to help both people and the business grow.

Expert Contributors

To support us to see beyond the confines of our own thinking, and to capture cultural shifts and regional influences, the Foresight Factory has leveraged the insights of experts in the future of work space – covering a range of different perspectives from a mix of backgrounds and locations.

Simon Thorpe
CEO,
The
Expressions
Partnership

Expert in cognitive behaviour coaching, facilitation, mentoring and delivering learning and development solutions across different types of global organisations.

Tracey Follows
CEO,
Futuremade

Futurist appearing in a list of the top 50 female futurists in the world in Forbes, regularly commenting on the future of technology, society, and work futures.

David Cook
Talent Acquisition Specialist, The Lane Construction Corporation

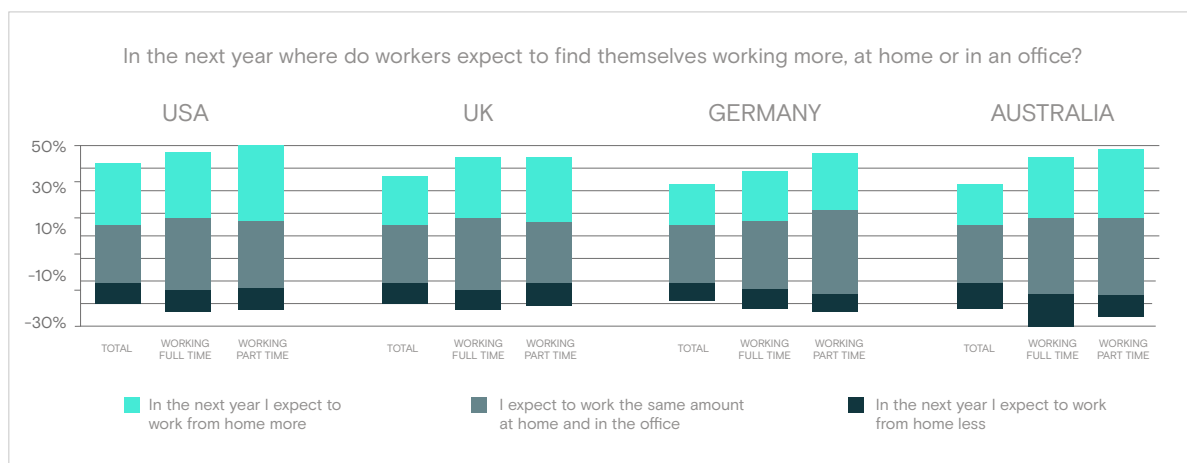Experienced Recruiter and Recruitment Manager.

Section 1:
The Hybrid Business World

Hybrid work isn't going anywhere

Research shows that hybrid work is here to stay. The workforce is expecting to work from home the same amount of time, if not more, in the year ahead, as they have in the previous year[1].

As such, the broad challenge for business leaders now is to find a workable solution that balances the expectations and needs of their workforce with those of the business.

For many businesses, the necessary structures for businesses and employees to best manage the evolution to hybrid working are not there, yet, which is leading to confusion and leaving ways of working open to interpretation. Research found that 38% of global hybrid workers say their biggest challenge is knowing when to work remotely and when to work in-person. This lack of clarity is likely because only one quarter (28%) of business leaders have agreements for hybrid work that clearly define why and when to go into the office[2].

In the next year where do workers expect to find themselves working more, at home or in an office?

	USA	UK	GERMANY	AUSTRALIA

- In the next year I expect to work from home more
- I expect to work the same amount at home and in the office
- In the next year I expect to work from home less

1. Foresight Factory | Base: 611-3885 online respondents per country aged 16-64, 2022 March
2. Microsoft 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report

How can business leaders get intentional about defining hybrid structure?

Taking an 'intentional' approach to a hybrid structure requires businesses to not only think about the what (delivery), but also the who (employees) and their why. This begins by listening to the needs, wants and motivations of the workforce.

Increasingly, it is the job of business leaders to balance employee interests with the success of the organisation, aligning everyone around the most impactful work. Speaking on the matter, Satya Nadella, Chairman and CEO, Microsoft, says; "Thriving employees are what will give organizations a competitive advantage in today's dynamic economic environment[3]."

42% of US workers would consider quitting if they had to go back to the office full-time[6].

To achieve 'hybrid-harmony' means understanding the nuances and individualistic nature of the workforce more than ever – and being cognisant and appreciative of the differing way employees want to live their lives.

What's clear is that these decisions cannot be based on homogenous assumption, as findings reveal that more than half (54%) of people managers believe company leadership is out of touch with employees[7]. This lack of connection can also create a perception gap when it comes to employer and employee perspectives on performance within the hybrid context. For instance, Microsoft's annual Work Trends Index Report found that over half (54%) of global leaders fear productivity has been negatively impacted since a shift to remote or hybrid working[8]. But, conversely, 81% of global employees say they are as productive or even more so compared to a year ago[9].

Microsoft has coined this phenomenon 'productivity paranoia' where, in the hybrid world, leaders fear that lost productivity is due to employees not working, even though hours worked, number of meetings, and other activity metrics have increased.

This is something to be wary of, productivity paranoia risks making hybrid working unsustainable. Business leaders need to be mindful of deploying old ways of thinking (about productivity) in a hybrid world. Instead, they must pivot from worrying about whether employees are working enough – to helping them focus on the work that's most important.

3. Microsoft 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report | 4. Microsoft 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report | 5. Adecco Global Workforce of the Future Whitepaper (2022); Fiverr Return to Office Survey (October 2022) | 6. IBID | 7.Microsoft 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report | 8. IBID | 9. IBID

42%

of US workers would consider quitting if they had to go back to the office full-time.
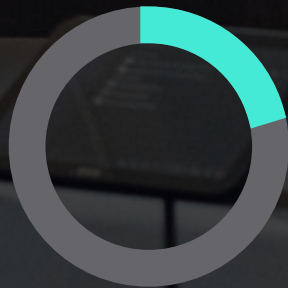
21%

1 in 5 (21%) said they would not return to the office, regardless of the incentives.

A shift in traditional motivators

While compensation is still one of the key reasons that people either stay in, or leave, a role. With a global cost of living crisis and rising inflation on the cards, the Foresight Factory has found that the costs associated with work are also now being brought into question.

60% of consumers say they do not save as much money as they would like to because the cost of living is too high[10]

This economic shift is redefining conversations about being able to afford to go to work. What was, until recently, a conversation about the cost of the transport like rail and fuel on salary, is now being overshadowed by the increasing price of energy. In the immediate term, the increased cost of powering a home office, and heating during the day while working from home, is adding to the complexity of where employees should work to balance the books. For the first time this winter, it will be cheaper for some to commute instead of powering their home office.

> **"** What's happening now, and I'm sure we all appreciate this, with this cost-of-living crisis and energy crisis, so many people who are used to working from home, with the lovely hot sunshine in the summer, are now migrating back to the office because it's cheaper for them to travel than it is to heat their homes. **"**

Simon Thorpe
Managing Director, Expressions Partnership, UK

10. Foresight Factory | Base: 603-3803 online respondents per country aged 16-64, 2022 March

A MOMENT FOR SELF REFLECTION

For the future to look bright, we need to figure out how to harness the power of a hybrid world and find ways to ensure certainty for all. That includes ensuring productivity and delivery can continue, but that it does so in harmony with the wellbeing and changing needs of the workforce.

Businesses need to use this moment of self-reflection to be intentional; to interrogate their operations, redefine what their hybrid strategy means (and how it works) and question if the model for work is still relevant and effective today.

As part of the period of evaluation, businesses must commit to intentionally driving a positive, inclusive and effective hybrid culture – built on the voices and views of the workforce, delivered via solid technological solutions. Businesses that do so will gain a competitive edge in the evolving digital era.

Section 2: Spotlight on trends in the hybrid world

Trend #1.

The culture of 'work' has evolved

There is always a natural evolution to the way workers work. And it's no secret that the tensions experienced by members of the modern workforce have resulted in them rejecting the traditional ideals of the workplace. But this call for change in the employee-employer relationship was taken out of everyone's hands in the face of COVID.

As a result, in a post-pandemic world, the way the workforce see 'work' is changing again. The need for a salary remains the primary focus, of course, but there is a growing need for employment to work for them too. There is now far more 'purpose behind the paycheck'. Work-life balance and job enjoyment are now becoming just as important as paying the bills[11].

What was once a recruiter's market, is now an employee's market. The hybrid and remote working worlds have created new challenges for business leaders, not just in attracting and retaining top talent, but also in keeping current employees engaged with their work and company culture in the short term.

Arguably, those that get it right and embrace the change will be the clear winners in the new world.

But what do employees want?

Employees want jobs with more work-life balance

11. Foresight Factory | Base: Audience Filter among 1126 online respondents who are working full, part time or now retired from work aged 16-64, GB, 2022 January

Hybrid work isn't going anywhere

Foresight Factory has found that less than half (43%) of respondents are happy with their work-life balance[12]. This discontent could continue to grow, as there is a growing disconnect between employers and employees when it comes to the role of remote working going forward.

While 50% of global leaders say their company is planning a return to the office full-time within the next year, 52% of employees say they are considering a switch to remote or hybrid in the year ahead[13]. It is likely that if the possibility to go hybrid doesn't come from their current employer, they'll find an employer who can offer it.

If we aren't able to address this issue, we risk facing a continuation of The Great Resignation as people look for ways to find roles that give them the balance they need to be happy. In fact, almost a third (30%) of people say they intend to change career paths to improve their overall happiness and over a quarter (27%) say they intend to retrain or go back to study to improve their overall happiness[14] – meaning they aren't just potentially going to move jobs, they could leave industries entirely[15]

1

'Doing a job I enjoy[16]'

Tops the list. To achieve this business leaders need to remove tensions and barriers, like poor technology solutions, to enable employees to enjoy their jobs.

2

'Flexible working hours'

Ranks third on the list and is considered more important than getting recognition and status for work achievements. Having the right processes, culture and technology in place to ensure the workforce is empowered to work flexibly is key.
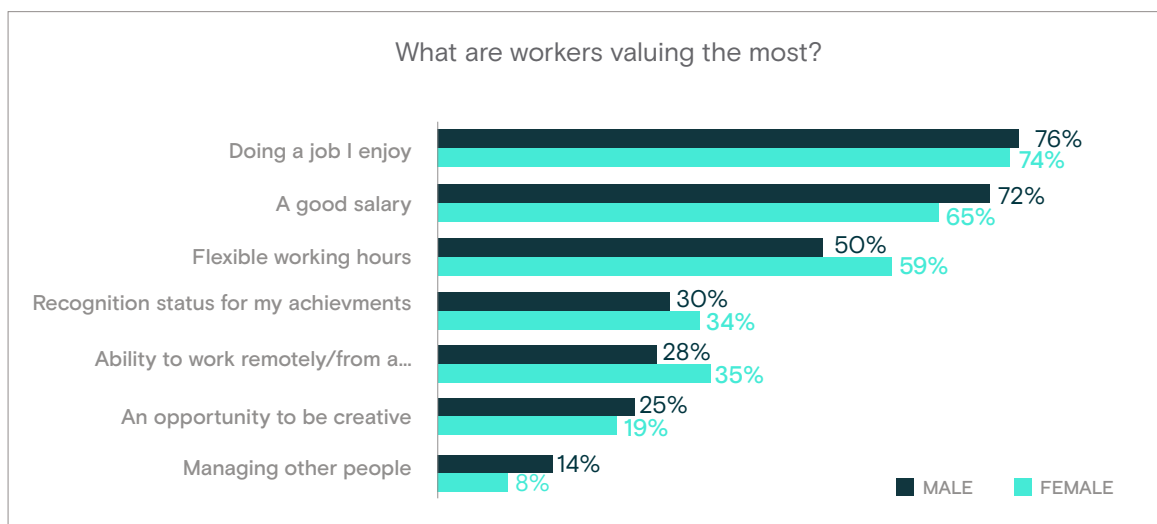
3

Women favour remote work

With additional caring responsibilities, women are more likely to favour remote working and flexible hours than their male counterparts. Evidencing that even within a broad workforce, there needs to be recognition of employee differences to ensure needs are being met.

12. Foresight Factory | Base: 742–1617 online respondents per country aged 16–64, 2022 January | 13. Microsoft 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report | 14. Foresight Factory | Base: 742–1617 online respondents per country aged 16–64, 2022 January | 15. IBID | 16. Foresight Factory | Base: Audience Filter among 1126 online respondents who are working full, part time or now retired from work aged 16–64, GB, 2022 January

Conversely, when exploring the most common reasons for leaving a job in 2022, employees cited pay, advancement opportunities and not getting enough flexibility on working hours[17].

What are workers valuing the most?

	MALE	FEMALE
Doing a job I enjoy	76%	74%
A good salary	72%	65%
Flexible working hours	50%	59%
Recognition status for my achievments	30%	34%
Ability to work remotely/from a...	28%	35%
An opportunity to be creative	25%	19%
Managing other people	14%	8%

Redefining a company's culture is a complex task. From a day-to-day perspective, it is important for business leaders to define a hybrid strategy that has clear and intentional tactics. They must help employees to create greater balance between work and life, while encouraging people to connect by coming together at physical sites to get the social and cultural interaction they crave.

17. PEW Research Center, Great Resignation Topline, United States (February 2022)

Trend #2.
Employee wellbeing must be a top priority

Wellbeing has become a key priority for us all in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The stress and strain of a life in lockdown, working from home, separated from loved ones at a time of international crisis left many feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope. As a result, not only are we all far more aware of the need to take care of our physical health, but our mental health too.

As life gets back to 'normal', the focus on our mental wellbeing remains, and the global workforce is keen to ensure this focus continues – especially at work. In fact, over half of workers (53%) globally say they are more likely to prioritize their health and wellbeing over work than before the pandemic[18].

While some years ago it would have felt unnatural for businesses and employers to be part of the mental health ecosystem, times have changed, and it's become central to managing this potential health crisis.

Hybrid working, and specifically working from home, could lead to feelings of isolation. This makes it more important than ever to ensure teams have the right technological solutions to help them feel, and be, more connected with each other. These primarily role-focused tech solutions can also be used to deliver wellness programmes, such as virtual yoga lunch breaks, to ensure employee wellbeing.
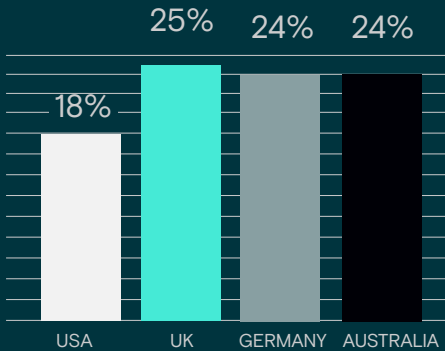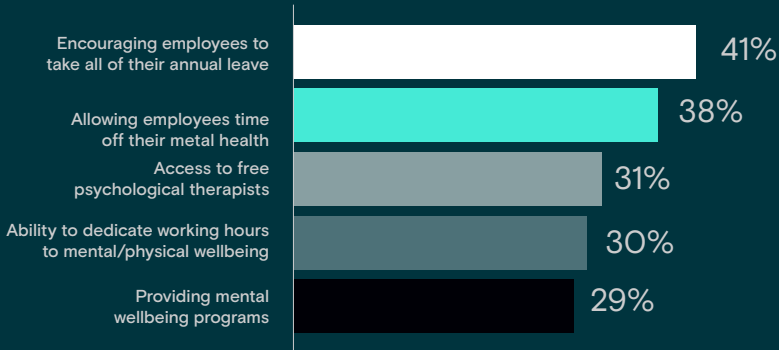
53%

of workers say they are more likely to prioritize their health and wellbeing over work than before the pandemic.

% of employees who say their mental wellbeing has worsened over the last 12 months

	25%	24%	24%
18%			

USA UK GERMANY AUSTRALIA

What employees view as a must have from employers

Encouraging employees to
take all of their annual leave — 41%

Allowing employees time
off their metal health — 38%

Access to free
psychological therapists — 31%

Ability to dedicate working hours
to mental/physical wellbeing — 30%

Providing mental
wellbeing programs — 29%

Companies should prioritise the mental health of employees even if it means they have to charge customers higher prices

USA UK GERMANY AUSTRALIA

100%
80%
40%
20%
0

TOTAL WORKING FULL-TIME WORKING PART-TIME   TOTAL WORKING FULL-TIME WORKING PART-TIME   TOTAL WORKING FULL-TIME WORKING PART-TIME   TOTAL WORKING FULL-TIME WORKING PART-TIME
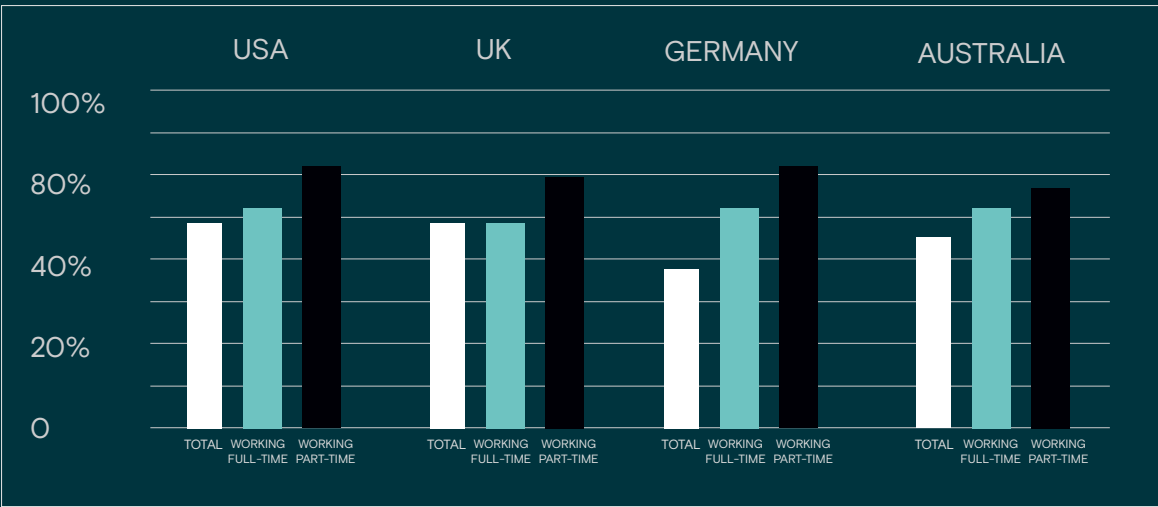
Burnout is a real issue of concern

The feeling of burnout among employees, which reached new heights during the COVID-19 pandemic, is continuing as the pace of life and work accelerates. In fact, 36% of global employees say they have suffered burnout in the last 12 months from 'working too hard[19]', this is a feeling that is greatest among Gen Z (405) and Millennials (42%)[20].

As a result, mental wellbeing has declined in the workforce. Research in USA, UK, Germany and Australia shows that around one fifth of workers believe their mental health has worsened in the last year[21].

Mental wellbeing can have a very real impact on the stability of workforces, with a quarter (23%) of global employees saying they have taken a career break due to burnout[22]. Again, these numbers are highest among the younger population of the workforce, including 26% of Millennials and 31% of Gen Z[23].

As a result, many employees want support for their wellbeing – including – time off for mental health, access to therapy and formal mental wellbeing programmes[24].

Increasingly it will become more commonplace for businesses to help manage burnout, encouraging employees to take time off to disconnect and establish healthy boundaries between work and personal lives, and provide guidance on how to optimize wellness. Business leaders need to consider how they can help employees manage the risk of burnout through technologies that can help manage and alleviate their cognitive load.

The potential for digital burnout caused by strained virtual communication remains a possible pitfall. For instance, EPOS research has previously found that 26% of employees are left feeling frustrated, irritated, or annoyed by bad audio and 19% experience moments of stress at work due to bad audio[25] – and 56% believe good audio will prevent moments of stress at work[26].

At EPOS, we understand that we hear with our ears, but we listen with our brain. Professionals today spend hours in hybrid meetings with artificial sound environments. This can lead to mental fatigue and lower our ability to focus and perform at our best.

Poorer concentration and productivity have an immediate impact on business output, but the more insidious and cumulative effect will be that of increased fatigue and dissatisfaction amongst workers.

This, in turn, can lead to burnout and employee churn. Employers need to face down these new challenges with the same rigor they did in 2022 and invest in new solutions to support their employees' wellbeing, satisfaction, and productivity.

Employees believe that prioritization of their mental health is important, and although they require financial investment, they believe the cost is one that businesses should meet – even if it means passing it on to their customers[27].

A key issue with working from home, that emerged during the pandemic, was being able to draw a line between personal and professional time when both happened at home. One easy-to-implement idea is that of 'compartmentalisation', where those working from home are encouraged to mirror elements of their normal office-based life to enable them to differentiate work from non-work time.

19. Adecco Global Workforce of the Future Whitepaper (2022) | 20. IBID | 21. IBID | 22. IBID | 23. IBID | 24. IBID | 25. EPOS Understanding Sound Experiences, 2021 report | 26. IBID | 27. Foresight Factory | Base: 588-3747 online respondents per country aged 16-64, 2022 March
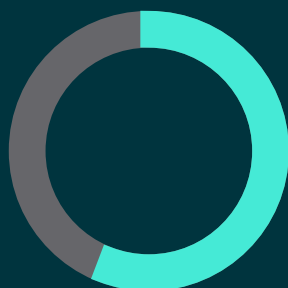
36%

of employees say they have suffered burnout in the last 12 months from 'working too hard'

53%

of employees saying they have taken a career break due to burnout

56%

believe good audio will prevent moments of stress at work

"
Corporate mental health policies have become more robust and more proactive. Wellness programs are paid for by companies, and this was rarely heard of before COVID – it might have been something your insurance company would provide or reimburse you for, but now companies are really proactive in saying, 'hey, we offer you this subscription, we'd like you to participate in this program,' so there is a general trend across all employers. This proactivity is much needed for folks that work hybrid or 100% remote, as mental health is a real challenge. "

David Cook
Talent Acquisition Specialist, Lane Construction, USA

"
One of the things we've been advising people to go and do, and it sounds a bit strange, but it does work, is to actually 'commute' to and from work. So, in the morning, wake up, get dressed for work, 'commute' as a walk around the block, go to the shop, get a pint of milk, paper, whatever. Get yourself in the headspace of coming back to the workplace through your front door, and when you log off in the evening, go back for another walk around the block. Commute back home. That sounds crazy, but it gets people into compartmentalising. "

Simon Thorpe
Managing Director, Expressions Partnership, UK

Trend #3.
The culture of 'work' has evolved

As more and more people work either remotely or on a hybrid basis, the role of the physical office has invariably had to change. Offices of all sizes are less populated than before, which has created opportunities to rethink how they are designed.

One emerging trend is that the office is being designed to be more flexible, feel more comfortable, and look more inviting. Workspaces are, in effect, being turned into a 'second home' for employees. Not only for the benefit of those who cannot work from home, but to encourage those who have the flexibility to choose to come in.

But what are the new or reprioritised benefits of face-to-face time in the office?

Workspaces are being turned into a 'second home' for employees.

The office as a space for culture

Back in the 1980'S MIT professor Thomas Allen published his thesis on the theory of proximity, he found that most collaboration happens within an 8m radius and drops to almost zero by 50m. The eponymous 'Allen Curve' is as relevant today as it was 40 years ago.

Today, both employees and employers agree that while hybrid working is advantageous, having access to a physical working environment is vital – not only for collaboration and relationship development but also so people have a space to go to when they want to be together.

Research from the Foresight Factory has shown that, globally, half of employees (50%) feel they miss time spent with colleagues in person now they can work remotely. But what's changing is that the time they do spend together isn't just about collaborative working now. The office is fast becoming a place to socialise and build relationships.

The data shows that colleagues come into the office to recapture what they miss at home: the social connection of being with other people. Younger people are especially keen to use the office to establish themselves as part of their workplace community and feel more connected to their co-workers: younger generations are particularly looking to connect with senior leadership (78% of Gen Z and Millennials vs. 72% Gen X and older) and their direct managers in person (80% Gen Z and Millennials vs. 76% Gen X and older)[29].

Many organizations are already waving goodbye to assigned desks in favor of team pods, and swapping solitary personal offices for open plan spaces, encouraging collaboration and culture building. As a result, the traditional layout of physical office spaces is undergoing a radical reimagining as organizations tackle ways to enable optimal spaces for hybrid teams.

The physical office needs to be a space that maximises collaboration and creativity, especially as employees want their office trips to be 'worth it'. This means business leaders need to be intentional about defining what the office is for and when, i.e., team meetings, brainstorming and planning. Leaders should do this by involving staff in the decision-making process and helping them to feel more comfortable and connected.

> **"** I think it is also wrong to have to come into the office just for the sake of coming in. I think you should go in because, for example, there is an event where it would be good for everyone to be there together. Companies should make space when it makes sense for everyone to be together. There should be a more purposeful connection for everything we do. **"**

David Cook
Talent Acquisition Specialist, Lane Construction, USA

29. Microsoft 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report

Trend #4.
The culture of 'work' has evolved

As we move into the Fourth Industrial Revolution – the growth of digital - our reliance on tech is only set to increase. And as we spend more time away from our desks and offices, our reliance on tech solutions will grow with it.

That means not only will we need the skills to use that technology, but our roles in the workplace will need to have a greater focus on technology. As a result, tech will evolve from being a specific team of people, to in some degree being part of all our roles.

The role the physical office must play within this context is also important. Business leaders and IT decision makers need to ensure they are creating equitable workplaces – one that provides the same opportunities – and visibility – for remote and on-site employees.

Proximity becomes even more vital for new joiners and new business opportunities where the learning curve can often be the steepest and the scope for proximity is most valuable.
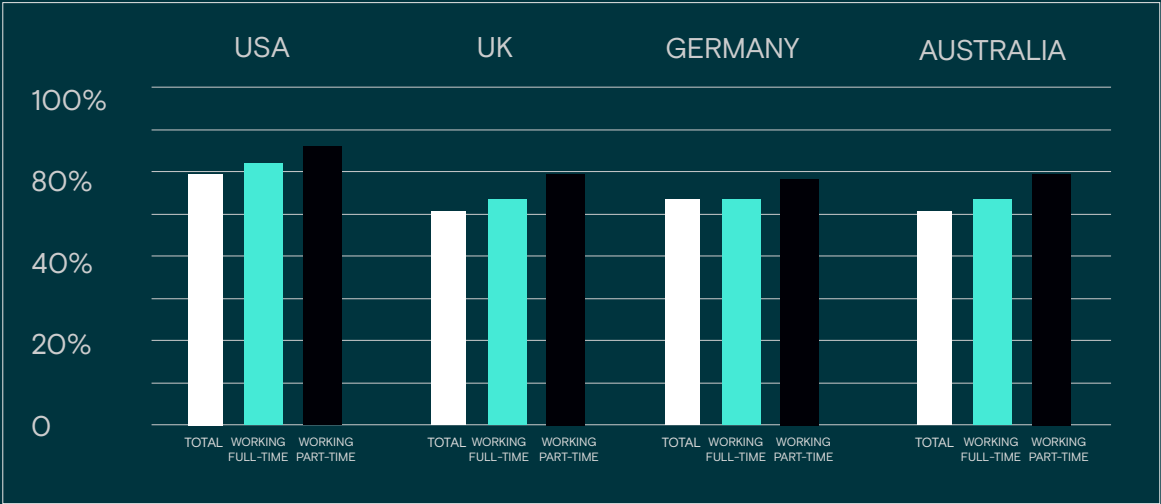
Training for the future

The pandemic had many impacts, and some of them were positive. In fact, finding ways to grow and learn new skills was a big part of the social conversation during the height of COVID-19.

Around the world people of all ages are keen to keep learning. Of those working full-time, over 60% of people say they have a strong or moderate need to learn more[30]. Research shows if people can't learn and grow, they leave.
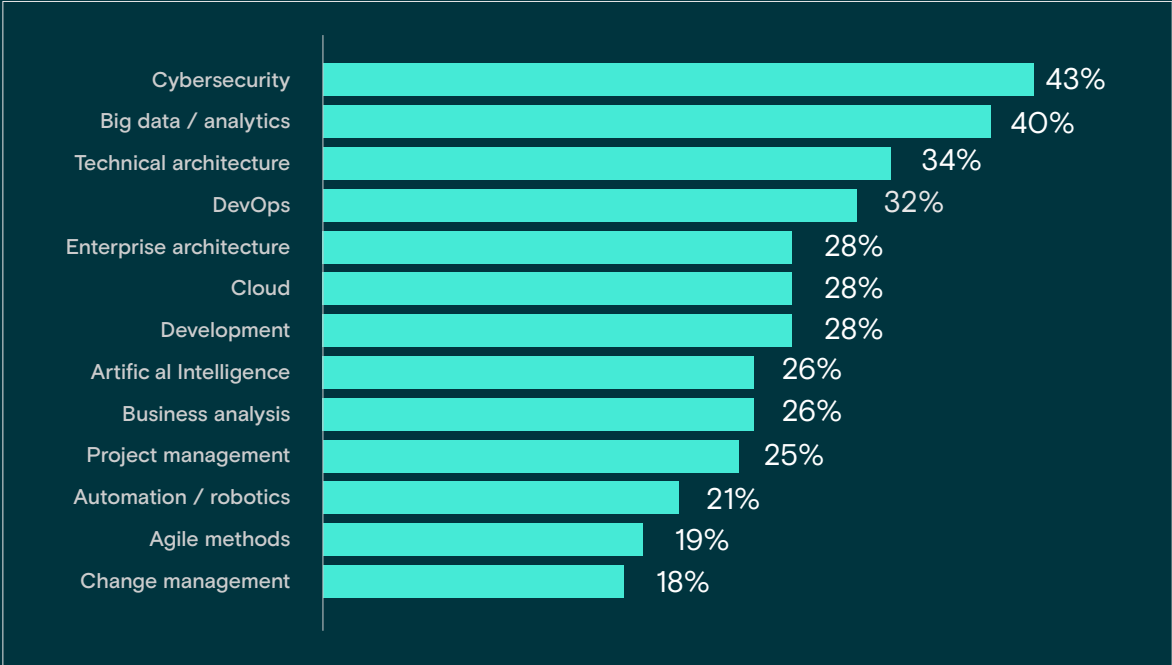
As employees embrace a new "worth-it" equation, they're increasingly turning to job-hopping, the creator economy, side hustles, and entrepreneurship to achieve their career goals. Rather than ignore or fight these trends, the best leaders will prioritize learning and development to help both people and the business grow.

30. Foresight Factory | Base: 602-3817 online respondents per country aged 16-64, 2022 March; Adecco Global Workforce of the Future Whitepaper (2022)

Employees who feel a strong or moderate need to learn more

Where business leaders say there is a tech skills shortage

Cybersecurity	43%
Big data / analytics	40%
Technical architecture	34%
DevOps	32%
Enterprise architecture	28%
Cloud	28%
Development	28%
Artific al Intelligence	26%
Business analysis	26%
Project management	25%
Automation / robotics	21%
Agile methods	19%
Change management	18%

This need for self-development translates directly to the workplace, with almost half (44%) of global employees who want to stay at their current company saying they want to progress or upskill for a new job at the same company[31].

But as more and more roles rely on technological skills; a skills gap is emerging. Two thirds (67%) of Global Digital Leaders report having a skills shortage in their organisation that prevents them from keeping with the pace of change[32].

Key shortages exist in cybersecurity, AI and even areas like project management[33], but the future workforce is already doing things differently and are growing up tech savvy.

Whereas previous generations relied on face to face contact, the emerging workforce is familiar with communicating through technology. For instance, 61% of Gen Z say they use a group chat daily, compared to only 29% of baby boomers[34]. The working landscape is ever more demanding of employees, who are expected to rapidly upgrade existing skills, or pick up new ones.

Businesses must invest in tech solutions that enable people of all levels to feel connected and involved, not excluded, and removed, from the business at large, and find ways to onboard new team members and train remotely to upskill their workers and enable more autonomy.

This poses the opportunity for businesses to use their office space as a collaborative and connective space for on and offsite training. Some businesses are already tapping into the consumer familiarity with virtual education tools such as video tutorials and e-learning to engage employees with training sessions.

While such channels were especially relevant during peak-pandemic, the advantages of digital training remain – enabling global workforces, flexible schedules, and equal support for employees regardless of whether they work remotely or not.

31. Foresight Factory | Base: 602-3817 online respondents per country aged 16-64, 2022 March; Adecco Global Workforce of the Future Whitepaper (2022) | 32. Harvey Nash / KPMG CIO Annual Report (2021) | 33. IBID | 34. Foresight Factory | Base: 799-4869 online respondents per country aged 16+, 2022 March

There is also a need to use collaboration technologies to find accessible and easy ways for employees to communicate in ways that works for them, now and in the future.

Currently there is lots of room for improvement, 43% of global remote workers say they do not feel included in meetings, only 27% of companies have created new hybrid meeting etiquette to ensure all workers feel included and engaged[35].

When it comes to developing hybrid working strategies, it's therefore imperative that we can balance the progressive with the current levels of capability to ensure that everyone is able to contribute.

> " There are significant differences in the way that people from different generations work. For instance, older generations (like boomers) tend to rely more on phone calls, while younger generations (like Gen Z) prefer electronic communication and may be less inclined to speak to others in person. This can be a challenge when it comes to hybrid work, as it can hinder opportunities for younger generations to interact and communicate with their colleagues. "

Tracey Follows
CEO, Futuremade, UK

35. Microsoft 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report

Digital leadership

Digitalisation, which enables people to work remotely or in hybrid setups successfully, requires a cultural shift led by expert communicators. Successful digital transformation requires everyone in the company to embrace new ways of thinking, KPIs and governance. A confident and united leadership team is fundamental to lead this change and future-focused companies are ensuring that digital leadership is dispersed throughout the business.

This shift has led to a repositioning of the role of IT within the workplace. No longer a service department that manages packaged solutions, IT has become a key role, responsible for driving innovation across the business and ensuring business continuity. In fact, 57% of global digital leaders are tasked with building new ways to realise business potential[36].

61% of North American organizations are expecting to increase their IT budget in the next year[37]

Chief Information Officers are often now customer facing, closer to the business, and tasked with creating resilient, digitalised cultures and influencing other members of the C-suite to incorporate new innovative technologies and processes within the overall strategy.

65% of global IT leaders are a member of the operational board/executive management team[38]

As part of any hybrid working strategy, business and IT decision makers need to invest in technology and collaboration solutions that marry up to worker needs. Ultimately, this means optimizing performance and minimizing sub-par audio experiences. With so many solutions on the market, decision makers need to make sure they are investing in equipment that features future-proofing technologies like active noise cancellation or AI for enhanced voice pick up.

36. Harvey Nash / KPMG CIO Annual Report (2021) | 37. IBID | 38. IBID

Section 3:
Conclusion

As employees will likely end up being split across different approaches to work locations, both between and even within companies, tech-based solutions are sought after to bring cohesion and collaboration to – and avoid feelings of exclusion in – desynchronised work environments.

But despite the ways in which technology has changed the workplace, it is not a substitute for leadership and culture. Leaders today face the challenge of harnessing the capabilities of technology while retaining a sense of culture and community that can keep employees engaged and motivated for the long term.

What's clear is that there is no one size fits all approach to hybrid, businesses are figuring out what works and some are making big bets. However, in order to succeed, every business needs to consider what employees want, they need to be intentional about what their hybrid strategy is, and they need to see technology as the key to solving the hybrid puzzle.

Business leaders must ensure that they are shaping hybrid strategies that are adaptable by factoring in individual needs, they need to show employees that they care. This includes creating feedback loops where leaders listen to employees and act consistently. Currently, only 43% of employees say their company solicits employee feedback at least once a year—meaning over half of companies (57%) may rarely, if ever, ask and hear about their employees' experience at work[39].

To ensure that decisions are driven by the most up-to-date information, leaders need to consistently take a pulse on how their employees are doing. There is enormous pressure on business decision makers to shape successful hybrid work models. Businesses today are also facing challenges across multiple fronts, and so when it comes to investing in technology and collaboration, every dollar spent matters.

Business leaders need to be proactive in discussing their strategy for the long-term, including what collaboration investments they need to make, conversations between, CEO, CPO, CTO, and the employees at large.

39. Microsoft 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report

It will be crucial to listen to employees needs and demands, particularly when it comes to technology and collaboration solutions. There is no one approach to hybrid work that will work for every organization. To foster a long-term hybrid work strategy businesses must reconsider what we know about office design, work culture and digital transformation. At the core of a connected and productive workforce lie communication and collaboration tools that allow teams to connect and work together effectively, regardless of time or location. Businesses need to tailor investment to match the function and needs of employees.

But with the right 'intentionally designed' hybrid strategy and technology solutions, businesses can future proof and create work environments, both physical and virtual, that will stand the test of time.

Increasingly, the scope of the digital leadership role within any organization is going to change, and technology leaders will need to play a critical role in shaping hybrid strategies, particularly as more and more businesses recruit talent across a more geographically diverse network.

From small huddle rooms to large conference spaces, Microsoft Teams Rooms solutions create an inclusive meeting experience optimized for today's hybrid workplace. Microsoft Teams Rooms let you transform any meeting room into a spatially rich, video-powered collaboration space.

That's why business leaders need to be intentional when it comes to equipping workforces with collaboration solutions for hybrid working, this means working closely with technology leaders to validate tech solutions that match the specific requirements of employee roles as well as individual preferences.

Methodology

Foresight Factory Research is delivered via an online methodology using panel-based recruitment. Samples are provided by CINT, Kantar and their trusted partners. Surveys are designed to be interactive and accessible via mobile, desktop and tablet devices. Interlocking quotas are set on age, gender and region, while data is weighted to be nationally representative on age, gender and region for the offline population per market.

Appendix

1. Foresight Factory | Base: 611-3885 online respondents per country aged 16-64, 2022 March | 2. Microsoft 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report | 3. IBID | 4. Adecco Global Workforce of the Future Whitepaper (2022); Fiverr Return to Office Survey (October 2022) | 5. IBID | 6. IBID | 7. Microsoft 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report | 8. IBID | 9. IBID 10. Foresight Factory | Base: 603-3803 online respondents per country aged 16-64, 2022 March | 11. Foresight Factory | Base: Audience Filter among 1126 online respondents who are working full, part time or now retired from work aged 16-64, GB, 2022 January | 12. Foresight Factory | Base: 742-1617 online respondents per country aged 16-64, 2022 January | 13. Microsoft 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report | 14. Foresight Factory | Base: 742-1617 online respondents per country aged 16-64, 2022 January | 15. Foresight Factory | Base: 742-1617 online respondents per country aged 16-64, 2022 January | 16. Foresight Factory | Base: Audience Filter among 1126 online respondents who are working full, part time or now retired from work aged 16-64, GB, 2022 January | 17. PEW Research Center, Great Resignation Topline, United States (February 2022) | 18. Microsoft 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report | 19. Adecco Global Workforce of the Future Whitepaper (2022) | 20. IBID | 21. IBID | 22. IBID | 23. IBID | 24. IBID | 25. EPOS Understanding Sound Experiences, 2021 report | 26. IBID | 27. Foresight Factory | Base: 588-3747 online respondents per country aged 16-64, 2022 March | 28. NO SOURCE GIVEN | 29. Microsoft 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report | 30. Foresight Factory | Base: 602-3817 online respondents per country aged 16-64, 2022 March; Adecco Global Workforce of the Future Whitepaper (2022) | 31. Foresight Factory | Base: 602-3817 online respondents per country aged 16-64, 2022 March; Adecco Global Workforce of the Future Whitepaper (2022) | 32. Harvey Nash / KPMG CIO Annual Report (2021) | 33. IBID | 34. Foresight Factory | Base: 799-4869 online respondents per country aged 16 +, 2022 March | 35. Microsoft 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report | 36. Harvey Nash / KPMG CIO Annual Report (2021) | 37. IBID | 38. IBID | 39. Microsoft 2022 Work Trend Index: Annual Report

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