Make Hybrid Work: A Framework for the Ultimate Hybrid Working Model

Fundamentally, there must be a “why” for hybrid working.
Organisations in every office-based industry are still grappling to uncover the definitive solution for hybrid working and optimum workplace occupancy levels. But why do companies want remote workers to Return to Office (RTO)? The reasons are influenced by a complex mix of drivers, including:

• A need to optimise real estate and facilities management (FM) expenditure
• To improve collaboration, productivity and team building
• To reinvigorate company culture and living company values
• To support the development of young talent and the natural mentorship from senior colleagues
• To optimise the experience for those working in the office (i.e., an empty office diminishes the employee experience for those who attend regularly).
What is a hybrid working model?

A hybrid working model is the approach that a company adopts to enable team members to work from a flexible mix of locations. That means team members can work from home, remotely, from a client site or a company’s offices. A hybrid working model should be aligned with the company’s culture, vision and values. There are three main types of hybrid working models:

1. **Office first**: Believes office attendance most of the time is critical to company culture or mode of operation.
2. **Blended**: Offers flexibility to work outside the office but expect a balance of time between home and office.
3. **Virtual-first**: Accepts that virtual working most of the time works for their business, people and culture.

**The Great British commute**

Britons have some of the longest commutes in Europe, and the involuntary remote working experiment during the pandemic proved that most organisations could operate effectively without employees traveling into offices. As a result, office workers need more compelling reasons to travel into their place of work.

CBRE’s Client Employee Sentiment Survey showed that people spent an average of 0.8 days per week at home prior to the Covid 19 pandemic. When asked, how many days a week they would now like to work from home or work remotely (in 2022), the answer was 2.8 days a week. This demonstrates an undeniable shift in mindset and preferences towards hybrid working or remote working.

**If businesses want employees to return to the office, they must give them a “why”**

Companies now need to ‘earn the commute’ by providing convincing rationale for employees to increase their workplace attendance. At present, occupancy remains low with only 3% of CBRE clients viewing their occupancy levels as optimal (a third of those surveyed said their occupancy is 40% or lower below optimal occupancy).

CBRE has found that many companies are still firmly on the fence when it comes to their plans for the future of work and the perfect hybrid model for their organisation. Companies are struggling to draw conclusions on office occupancy requirements as the relationship between the employee and office is continually evolving. Coupled with challenging market conditions and increases in the cost of living, companies are hesitant to make a call on their long-term occupancy strategy.

**The role of facilities in increasing workplace occupancy in a hybrid work model**

Whatever the driver, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to increasing occupancy rates. According to Envoy’s 2022 Workplace Trends Report, the top three areas where companies have increased investment to attract employees back to the office are:

1. On-site events and programmes (174% increase)
2. Remote collaboration tools (83% increase)
3. On-site food and beverages (62% increase)

However, evidence suggests that these investments are not having a sustained influence on office attendance. Facilities management (FM) teams need to deeply understand the vision, culture, needs and behaviours of the organisation and its people to find the solutions that will work for individual businesses. Other factors, such as office size, location, and employee demographic, also play a huge role in what solutions will achieve the desired outcomes.

The key element to making hybrid working work is agreeing on why employees should be in the office [e.g., collaboration, teamwork, connectivity, culture, compliance, mentorship] can the company best strategise on the ‘how’.

“Only when the C-Suite agrees on why employees should be in the office [e.g., collaboration, teamwork, connectivity, culture, compliance, mentorship] can the company best strategise on the ‘how’.”

**CBRE Global Workplace Solutions Client**
Our model sets out eight steps that an organisation can take to ensure the success of hybrid working in their workplace. Clear and consistent messaging from leadership and alignment on the roles that functional partners must play is key to the success of this approach. This approach forms part of CBRE’s Making Hybrid Work product which helps clients diagnose the challenges they are facing and provide practical guidance and support across three crucial areas:

- The **Workplace Experience** that employees have when they visit the office
- The **Hybrid Routines** in place to support effective hybrid working routines
- The **Hybrid Behaviours** that are expected from employees and leaders

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1. **Setting up for success**
   Actions:
   - Bring all stakeholders to the table (including real estate, facilities management, IT and HR teams) to discuss hybrid model requirements
   - Establish working groups, conduct employee surveys, and gather input on how, where and when employees work
   - Include diverse groups in the discussions about experience design, adhering to the mantra of “nothing about us without us”
   Outcomes:
   - Ownership of the approach by all key stakeholder groups, derived from bringing everyone into the discussion
   - An approach to hybrid that is business-specific and addresses employee needs

2. **Health check and defining the baseline**
   Actions:
   - Conduct a ‘ways-of-working’ maturity assessment and identify any existing gaps
   - Examine preferences, obstacles, and challenges of the employee base – what do they like about working in the office and working from home or working remotely? What do they need to be successful at work?
   - Review occupancy rates and utilisation data (How to Measure and Use Utilisation Data) from pre-pandemic to identify the baseline (it’s common to see companies expecting a very high occupancy rate, higher in fact than pre-pandemic rates)
   Outcomes:
   - Defined starting point for hybrid model in the form of a health check
   - A view of the current situation that can be matched-up with the vision of the company and expectations of the leadership team

A framework for defining your hybrid working model
3. Defining the vision and the metrics
Actions:
• Gain consensus from senior leaders about the hybrid approach (based on the research from steps one and two)
• Define hybrid working for the organisation and set the guardrails that will lead to its success
• Define metrics – what does good look like? Metrics could be typical measures of productivity or employee sentiment, but could also include physiological, environmental, or cognitive performance-based data to dig deeper into the success of the model
Outcomes:
• Defined vision for hybrid working model
• Guardrails for implementing the hybrid work model
• Defined metrics for measuring the success of the hybrid workplace

4. Designing a robust framework
Actions:
• Design a clear framework for hybrid work that creates a common understanding of the model among employees
• Create clear messaging on the purpose of office attendance and give employees a clear decision-making process for their personal attendance (e.g., implementing a process whereby client requirements come first, team second and individual third)
Outcomes:
• Office attendance that is aligned to business requirements
• Clear rules for all employees to follow for personal office attendance

5. Up-skilling managers and transforming workplace services
Actions:
• Give line managers the necessary tools, skills, and confidence to implement the new ways-of-working fairly and consistently
• Engage with facilities management team to evolve the workplace experience and services to support the hybrid work strategy
Outcomes:
• A frictionless place offering an exceptional workplace experience by providing seamless meeting room bookings, good catering and coffee options, Wi-Fi connectivity, and desk booking, for example
• A thriving office with a polished workplace experience, supported by well-informed leaders

6. Agreeing team charters
Actions:
• Encourage teams to develop “Team Charters” - an agreement between individual teams on their commitment to go into the office
Outcomes:
• A consistent approach to tailoring ways-of-working at team level
• Local ownership for the hybrid model
• Higher occupancy levels

7. Living and learning
Actions:
• Live the new model, giving leaders the opportunity to safely experiment with new initiatives
• Give the model enough time to be lived before tweaking the approach
Outcomes:
• Empowered colleagues who are encouraged to ‘try new things’ without fear of failure
• Embedded behaviours among employee base that supports the new hybrid model

8. Assessing and evolving
Actions:
• Use pre-determined metrics to assess what is working well and what isn’t with the hybrid work model
• Use the data to refine the approach accordingly and adjust to any emerging requirements
Outcomes:
• A hybrid model that is continuously improved and consistently attuned to changing business needs
• Happier employees with a good work-life balance
• A stronger company culture
Tactics for bringing employees back to the office

After completing the eight-step programme, organisations will have developed a bespoke hybrid working model and will have deciphered the drivers that will compel employees to return to the office - if that’s the best place for them to do the work they need to do. To support this strategy and ensure the success of hybrid working, we have collated examples of how CBRE is supporting its existing clients increase occupancy.

Physical
• Adapt the physical office space to include amenities that support work-life balance, such as on-site gyms, wellbeing spaces, games areas, a creche, dry cleaning, hairdressing, and bicycle servicing. This should result in employees feeling supported by the amenities in the office and workers seeing the benefits of going back to the office.
• Collaboration, team connection and face-to-face meetings are the primary reasons for visiting the office, so reconfigure the workplace to offer more ‘we space’ than ‘me space’ - team meeting areas, collaboration spaces and adaptable office areas to take priority over rows of desks.
• Enhance the workplace’s aesthetics to make it trendy, aspirational and a positive place to spend time in. Hydroponics and internal planting, modern design, reading corners or privacy areas and great coffee can all support this programme of updates and the return of employees to the office.

Human
• Double down on improving workplace experience. FM teams can create experience and the feeling of community within an office space, like the feeling of returning to a favourite hotel or restaurant. Being greeted warmly by a friendly face at reception and interacting with a Workplace Host on the office floor can provide a memorable experience and ensure people want to come back. The role of Facilities Management teams should not be underestimated when it comes to bringing employees back and sustaining office attendance.

Digital
• Utilise technology to remove obstacles for remote workers who are visiting the office. Workplace Apps and sensor technology can support employees in planning their commute, booking desks, and meeting rooms, seeing whether colleagues are in and ordering food or coffee.
• Gamify the return to the office through apps that provide rewards points for usage, earning users free meals and drinks in the office. These apps can also have a wellbeing focus, promoting community events like fitness bootcamps or yoga sessions.
• Deliver a more equitable hybrid working experience through enhanced video conferencing (as an antidote to proximity bias) or creating “Zoom-free” days when in the office.
• Bolster the events and social calendar to meet the need of workers coming back for social interaction. The key is to highlight the benefits of the office to make colleagues want to come back the office and turn one-off visitors into repeat visitors.
• Improve communication systems to ensure remote workers and dispersed colleagues know about the benefits of being in the office. Event previews and news stories can support with enticing people back into the office. Good communication systems can also support increasing occupancy on less busy days (like Mondays and Fridays), by promoting the availability of meeting rooms and desks on these days.
• Create a feeling of belonging that is closely linked with the organisation’s Diversity, Equity & inclusion commitments. For example, consider undertaking focus groups with colleagues in diversity networks to understand how the workplace experience and environment could be more inclusive.
CBRE worked in collaboration with global design, engineering and project management consultancy, Atkins, to implement a new Health & Wellbeing committee. The committee aimed to support the wellbeing of colleagues and to encourage return to the workplace.

The committee, named the ‘One Workplace’ team, curates a programme of workplace events and initiatives, which includes celebrations around occasions, such as pancake day, strawberries and cream for Wimbledon and a cream tea event of the Queen’s Jubilee and more regular activities, like having a masseuse in the office. This initiative has had an extremely positive effect on the wellbeing of Atkins employees and was nominated as a finalist at the IWFM awards in 2021 and 2022.

In 2018, CBRE began work on a full refurbishment and transformation of its central London headquarters, Henrietta House. The aim was to create a people-centric office space that supported hybrid work and had desirable amenities to attract staff back to the office. CBRE identified the need for the transformation to be supported by the right technology to make the space employee-centric and digitally enabled. One example of this is the implementation of CBRE’s Host app.

Host is an integrated community app that enables desk and meeting room booking, displays travel information, gives push notifications to raise awareness for events and shows users when their colleagues are also visiting the office to support collaboration. Henrietta House now regularly achieves weekly average occupancy rates of more than 70% and employees feel the benefits of a digitally enabled workplace.
The final word

The effectiveness of the hybrid working framework, and the associated tactics for bringing employees back to the office, relies on companies agreeing on why colleagues should be in the office, only then can the company best strategise on the ‘how’. A clear understanding of what hybrid working is for your business, and consistent guidance on establishing hybrid routines, is essential.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to increasing occupancy rates – instead, hybrid working must be intricately linked to a company’s culture, vision, needs and behaviours. It starts with listening to colleagues and understand their needs.

What we do know is that the workplace must offer some of the benefits colleagues feel when working at home, such as work life balance and focus space, but also something the home cannot. It’s not just about enabling productivity; it’s about creating a community to belong to and offering an experience that you can’t get when working from home.

CBRE’s Making Hybrid Work
How can we help?

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