

# Should Your Office Be Permanently Remote (or Hybrid)?



When COVID-19 shut down offices around the country, many employers found themselves operating remotely for the first time. Now, some are wondering if they should stay remote permanently, or shift to a full-time hybrid model, rather than return to having everyone come in every day.

Here are some pros and cons to consider:

## Pros:

### **Reduced operating costs**

Permanently eliminating some or all of your physical office space will save money for your company – though you might not have realized just how much. Data from Global Workplace Analytics shows that if employees who can work from home do so at least half the time, total savings for the U.S. economy would equal \$700 billion.

### **Reduced environmental impact**

According to the same Global Workplace Analytics survey, less commuting equals less greenhouse gas emissions - 54 million tons less, to be exact, if 79% of the workforce worked from home at least half the time.

Remote companies also generate less food and plastic waste, since there's less or no physical office space to stock with snacks and products. Energy bills also tend to be lower, with fewer HVAC systems and in-office appliances to run.

### **A chance to increase employee diversity**

Not having employees tied to a physical location opens your hiring pool to talented people around the country or even the world. You'll have more opportunities to increase the diversity of your workforce not just in terms of geography, but cultural background, ethnicity, race, age, experience and gender as well.

Remote opportunities are also often sought out by semi-retired individuals, people with disabilities and those with a lot of family responsibilities (such as family caregivers). These individuals may not want to be in a traditional office environment but have a lot to offer to your organization. Operating remotely will allow you to access an employee population that would otherwise be unavailable to you.

### **Flexible schedules**

Working parents with children learning at home will appreciate the ability to take a homework-help break at 4 pm and the flexibility to work when they feel the most productive.

So will everyone else. Flexible scheduling is the most sought-after non-insurance benefit (following generous paid time off), according to a recent survey from Unum.

### **Increased employee retention**

Remote employees tend to have longer tenures, according to a report from Owl Labs, and they tend to work through mild illnesses for which an office employee might need to take a sick day.

### **Opportunity for greater physical spacing**

Even with widely available vaccines, COVID-19 and other infectious illnesses are likely to be with us for the long term. Fully remote employees don't need to worry about catching (or spreading) an illness at the workplace, and hybrid workplaces operating at reduced capacity on any given day allow employees to spread out more.

## **Cons:**

### **Technical difficulties**

Maintaining many one-person offices around the country (or the globe) is no small feat for even the best-equipped IT department. When something goes wrong with the Internet, the phone or a crucial software program (as it inevitably does), a remote employee becomes somewhat of an island. You'll need the talent and bandwidth to troubleshoot daily technology mishaps.

And hybrid workplaces, unfortunately, require you to provide both onsite and offsite IT assistance.

### **In-home distractions/lack of space**

Working from home is not for everyone. Not all employees can work in a home environment, either because of distractions, inability to create adequate space or simply because they like to be in an office environment, working with other people.

However, there are ways to mitigate these distractions by offering a subsidized coworking space to certain employees.

### **Difficulties with collaboration**

Building a remote company culture is harder. Your employees may feel disconnected from the company unless you consciously work to create outreach programs and opportunities to socialize. You'll also need to invest in collaboration and project management tools that support your team's ability to work together.

Some companies, whether hybrid or fully remote, institute either core days or core hours during which the whole team is expected to be working and available. This can help with both engagement and meeting logistics.

### **Less work-life balance, perhaps**

Work-from-home arrangements are generally hailed for promoting work-life balance, but as with many other things, the pandemic muddled the waters.

Travel and many entertainment options remain less available to many people, leaving more work to do and less life to live. Forty percent of remote employees say they struggle with unplugging from work, according to a Remote.co survey, making them more prone to burnout.

## **Seek a middle ground**

Take an honest look at your results following your post-COVID shift to remote or hybrid work. How are you and your employees doing? Is there an interest in working remotely all or some of the time for the foreseeable future? Market forces aside, is your company operating better, worse or about the same?

Going fully remote is a pretty extreme step for a lot of companies. A recent study from IBM found that an overwhelming majority (75%) of surveyed employees preferred the idea of a hybrid work arrangement, with an option to come into the office a few times a week.

Before going fully remote, you may want to consider a hybrid arrangement to better suit the preferences of a broader group of employees.

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