



Trend Report 2022

Hybrid Heaven or Hybrid Hell?

Welcome to your **2022 Trend Report**, which explores how hybrid working can go exactly according to plan or become the stuff of nightmares

This **Trend Report**, compiled by WORKTECH Academy with added insight from Locatee, is published at a time when organizations around the world find themselves right in the middle of implementing some of the biggest changes in working practices for a generation. As hybrid working hits the headlines, companies are anxiously scanning the horizon for signs that they're doing the right thing – and not about to hit the buffers.

A **'hybrid heaven'** is not hard to imagine. In this utopian scenario, new forms of leadership have emerged, communication and trust abound between managers and employees, the real estate portfolio has been successfully repurposed, and the technology is working seamlessly. The hybrid model is humming and everyone is happy.

But it doesn't take much thought to conjure up an alternative scenario – a **'hybrid hell'** in which there is a disconnect and a distrust between the leaders and the workers inside the organization, 'ghost-town' offices full of empty desks, and a technology infrastructure buckling under the strain. The hybrid model is hurting and nobody is happy.

This Trend Report, draws on academic research, market insights, media reports and stories from around the WORKTECH Academy's global network to discuss ways to find nirvana and avoid sliding into the abyss. The content is organized using the tripartite lens of place, technology, and people – a cornerstone of **holistic hybrid work philosophy**.

Three experts (one in each area) share their views, based on their knowledge and their access to unique user data sets within their organizations. **Nicola Gillen of Cushman & Wakefield** is based in Europe and draws on the company's Experience Per Square Foot tool, which measures engagement and experience, to look at the implications for place in the hybrid era.

Harald Becker of Microsoft is based in North America – he uses his co-innovation work with customers and Microsoft's Work Trend Index 2022 to investigate how technology can enable, not impede, the hybrid model. **John Lang** of employee performance survey company **SHAPE Global** is based in Australia – he analyzes recent data related to how people policies can be reshaped for the new work landscape.

Expert comments, industry insights and case studies on place, technology, and people naturally overlap to form a mosaic of ideas and impressions. Hybrid working is complex and asks new questions of business leaders, real-estate teams, developers, architects, and technology integrators alike. There are many pitfalls, but with careful planning and judicious pilots, could paradise be within reach? Workplace has a patchy history of evidence-based decision-making, but we believe that could be about to change.

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Place

Sustainability

Nicola Gillen on the flight to quality



Cities

Future of the Central Business District

Privacy

The missing link in hybrid offices?



Space to Support Choice and Variety

Place still matters in a work-anywhere model. In fact, the experiential qualities of the office matter more than ever in making hybrid working a success.

There are two key questions around place that companies are currently asking as hybrid working takes hold. The first is: [how much space will we need?](#) The second is: [what type of space will we need?](#) The two are closely connected.

In the post-pandemic era, real estate teams are being asked to address two contradictory demands: design the conditions for a better employee experience while simultaneously engineering spatial economies. Little wonder that we are now seeing the emergence of what has been described as the ‘espresso office’ – smaller but more powerful. Or as Leesman has described it, [‘half the size but twice the experience’](#).

As organizations around the world grapple with these questions, decision-makers are trying to work out the best approach. Workplace has historically lacked a strong evidence base for such significant place-based capital investments, but several companies and institutions are trying to bridge this gap in the hybrid era.

Among them is [Cushman & Wakefield](#), which has set up a [Living Lab in Utrecht](#) to measure collaborative activity in the new hybrid workplace; the firm’s workplace lead, Nicola Gillen, provides an expert view opposite.

Gillen accepts that companies must repurpose their office space to avoid the ‘hybrid hell’ of an ocean of empty desks that nobody wants or uses. But how far they switch to social and collaborative space depends on what the company does – it is all a question of balance. As we showcase here, there is growing research evidence that people want space for privacy and focus, as well as socializing. What is not in doubt is the drive to relocate in high-quality, greener buildings that support health and wellbeing.

Questions of place in the hybrid era extend beyond the office walls. In this report, we look at the future of the Central Business District (CPD) now that office attendance is less predictable and explore how the City of London is reinventing itself. We also report from Japan, where flexible working is finally taking hold and some employers are even helping people leave Tokyo and relocate to the western islands by building apartments there. Space has always been a geopolitical issue in the future of work – more so now, than ever.

Expert View: Nicola Gillen, Cushman & Wakefield

Nicola Gillen is Head of **Total Workplace EMEA** at global real estate service firm Cushman & Wakefield. With access to the company's proprietary **Experience Per Square Foot (XSF)** tool that provides insight into engagement and user experience across its client base, Gillen is very well placed to provide insight into the opportunities – and potential pain points – around what hybrid working means for place.



When it comes to hybrid hell, Gillen sees a number of risk factors around place. Many organizations are still at an inflection point when it comes to making decisions about their physical space. With significant investments on the line, real estate teams can be risk averse, which has the potential to lead to **'seas of empty desks'**.

Low occupancy was a common complaint even pre-pandemic, and the shift to hybrid is only making it more apparent. This lack of balance may lead to under-provision of other settings that are more important in a hybrid environment – smaller meeting rooms and phone booths are a notable aspect of this.

Equally however, there's a risk in tipping too far the other way – Gillen points out that while most people are not coming in to sit at a desk, it would be wrong to say nobody is. This applies particularly to younger people who don't have the setup to work at home. Ergonomic setup is another reason that may be driving the office return, with relatively few people properly set up ergonomically at home.



Overall, when it comes to bringing people back in, Gillen points out that 'The office environment can't be worse than home – it still is in a lot of cases'. This means that hybrid heaven lies in the provision of high-quality, seamless experiences – people will need to be able to get up and move around the office without losing connectivity, find private spaces when they need them, and locate their colleagues easily.

XSF data from Cushman & Wakefield indicates that organizations will need to provide choice and variety in workplace settings to accommodate different preferences and motivations. Although there's a lot that can be done around amenity and food in terms of creating quality of experience, real change has to extend beyond this to create team-based neighborhoods so that employees know where to find their people when they come in.

When it comes to making leasing decisions, Gillen says that hybrid heaven lies in higher-quality, sustainable buildings in better locations: 'There's been a flight to quality – people have higher expectations.' With an increasing emphasis on sustainability as a priority for employees, this also puts the focus on WELL and BREEAM-accredited buildings to a greater degree than ever before. The office will also have a continuing role to play as a focal point for brand and culture. Gillen says: **'The office is the largest physical canvas for brand – it's a key role for space going forward'**.

Case study: Cushman & Wakefield Living Lab, Utrecht

Cushman & Wakefield, for example, has designed its new Utrecht office in the Netherlands as a 'Living Lab' for hybrid working. Two departments which had previously been in different buildings are now sharing space with the aim to encourage teams to learn and innovate with each other.

The project is mainly looking at how to design effectively for collaboration, although the research questions also cover acoustic performance, engagement, neurodiversity, and ergonomics.



Source

Cushman & Wakefield
WORKTECH Amsterdam conference
presentation, April 2022

Located in the Helix building in the heart of Utrecht's Leidsche Rijn area, the design of the space is based on the new direction of the office in which movement, meeting and connection are crucial. Described as the 'next generation six foot office' (after Cushman & Wakefield's experiments with socially distanced desks in the early phase of the pandemic), the priorities are to enable colleagues to socialize, connect and meet each other.

It's a very different approach to interiors for the business, with colorful design that steers away from banks of desks, introducing biophilia and visual and acoustic breaks to create different zones for activity. As part of the continuing project, Cushman & Wakefield will be gathering data from building sensors, regular surveys and occupancy network analysis to really understand how their people are using the space and find answers to the questions that its clients are asking.

The internal team is working in partnership with academic organizations to ensure that the research is conducted with academic rigor and is therefore providing useful insights into the future of workplace. The Living Lab opened in February 2022, so stay tuned for further updates.

Case study: The Future of the Central Business District

As implied by the name, **Central Business Districts (CBDs)** are centralized districts that have historically been built around a pattern of people regularly commuting into the center of cities. With office occupancy down in a hybrid world, CBDs that used to be bustling centers of activity through the working week now face becoming hellish hybrid ghost towns.

With people moving out to the suburbs or further, and with hybrid work here to stay, the question of how CBDs reinvent themselves has become critical to their survival. Professor Tony Travers of the London School of Economics describes this as 'an existential problem...unless they can find ways to get people back, then their restaurants, bars and shops will dwindle.'

Research by Gensler Research Institute sheds some light on what residents now want from their cities and associated CBDs. Here are three key considerations for reimagining dense urban space to better meet people's needs in a hybrid world:

Continue investment in parks to create a healthier, more hospitable city – walkability and outdoor space are key – people want to be able to take green space breaks away from densely built up areas. Green space can also add value to properties surrounding them by introducing programming and activation.

Recalibrate the CBD to be more than just a working destination – the need has shifted towards more mixed-use destinations, with a blend of restaurants, shopping districts, and entertainment. This creates a more convenient and connected downtown community, with the added benefit of increasing local amenity for visiting office workers.

Establish a public realm that encourages interaction and exploration – be to generate an urban neighborhood that is equitable and accessible. The Forum of ancient Athens is a classic example of the public common, a space where people come to mingle, converse, and connect, as well as to conduct business.

The City of London is embracing this new approach, having recently announced a new strategy titled 'Destination City'. Under these proposals, the plans are to develop retail areas, create a team of cultural envoys, and open spaces for leisure use to create a '24/7 city that offers a breadth of opportunities and interests'. The strategy also includes investment in crucial infrastructure, including partnering on an all-network 5G rollout.

Source

Gensler, 2022.

[Future of Central Business Districts](#)

Financial Times, 2022.

[City of London reinvents the Square Mile](#)

Hybrid Heaven? Polycentric Working in Japan

Office-based Japanese companies have traditionally been inflexible when it comes to new ways of working. However, more than two years on from the start of the pandemic, there are clear signs of change. While there is no consensus among employers about what is the optimal form of hybrid, recent research by [Tokyo's Xymax Real Estate Institute](#) indicates that a more flexible, polycentric work style is on the cards.

Based on a survey of companies located across Japan in late 2021, its research creates a picture of change. More than two thirds of the Japanese companies surveyed adopted remote working during the pandemic, and most are still working from home rather than in a hybrid model. However, the study found that, when looking to the future, a majority of employees wanted a hybrid rather than fully remote model. This suggests that a new balance will need to be found.

Source

Xymax, Exploring the Optimal Form of Hybrid Work, 2021.

[Turning the tanker](#)

Financial Times, 2022.

[The great Tokyo Exodus](#)

Intriguingly, the study also found that a larger percentage of companies that used a satellite office to supplement working from home reported that the performance of their employees improved than those who only adopted work from home.

An internal survey at Xymax also suggested that productivity might improve when using a diverse range of workplaces rather than a more binary home/office setup. This supports an argument for a more polycentric approach to workplace strategy.

Some firms are leading this new direction. [Pasona Group](#), one of Japan's largest employment companies, is making plans to relocate many of its headquarters functions from Tokyo to Awaji Island in Western Japan, with 1,200 employees in five new offices by 2024. The company is even buying land to build apartments in order to bridge any shortfall in accommodation. According to business information company Teikoku Databank, more than 350 other companies moved their main offices out of Tokyo and its neighboring prefectures last year.

Hybrid Hell? The Inability to Concentrate

There has been much discussion about the future of the office being for collaboration and social connection – more than half (55%) of businesses surveyed by [Knight Frank in 2021](#) were expecting to increase the proportion of collaboration space in their offices in the next few years. However, research is showing that stripping back private space too far has the potential to result in hybrid hell, where workers are reluctant to come to spaces where they won't be able to focus.

Research by [Steelcase](#), encompassing almost 5,000 office workers across 11 countries, asked people what they felt was most important in the office post-pandemic. Although the top two results were spaces for different types of hybrid collaboration (62% and 64%), following closely behind were the need for privacy and workstations with full or partial enclosure (61% and 58% respectively).

Even pre-pandemic, workers often complained about open-plan offices with a lack of space in which to concentrate. Two years of working in splendid isolation at home has only emphasized the potential distractions caused by other people.

Source

[Steelcase, 2022.](#)

[Personal Spaces](#)

[Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 'How to attract employees back to the office? A stated choice study on hybrid working preferences, Journal of Environmental Psychology, vol 81, 2022.](#)

[Hybrid working preferences](#)

This is backed up by research conducted by [Rianne Appel-Meulenbroek](#), an associate professor at [Eindhoven University of Technology](#). In this study, participants were asked about their location preferences in three scenarios: one with relatively more meetings, one with an approximately equal split between meetings and individual focused work, and one with fewer meetings and more solo focused work. For the third scenario – focused work – 79% said that they would prefer to work from home.

As it's not always easy to divide working days into primarily one activity or the other, this implies a risk for hybrid working when it comes to bringing people back to the office. Both studies show that space for privacy and concentration remains vitally important.



Key Links

[Gensler's City Pulse Survey 2022](#)

[Designing for neurodiversity](#)

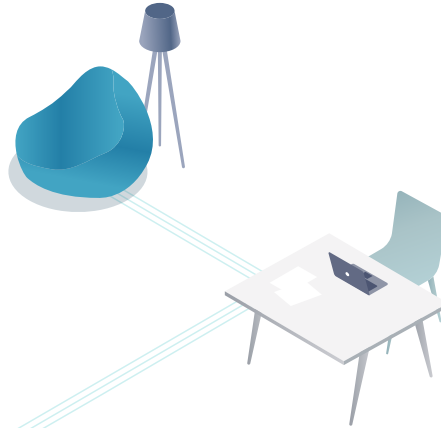
[The Adaptive Workplace: five learnings for the future workplace](#)

[Guide to calculating the space you're really going to need](#)

Technology

Choice

Harald Becker on the great enabler



Connection

Navigating hybrid work ecosystem



Experience

Impact of digital transformation

Digital Tools Should Help, Not Hinder

Technology is the great enabler of hybrid working but it is also in danger of becoming its biggest barrier. How can organizations avoid the tech trap?

Rapid deployment of technology created the conditions for the [hybrid model](#) and provided its key building blocks. But while digital tools are the great enablers, there is also growing recognition that technology can itself be a barrier to flexible new ways of working.

For every workplace study that highlights the productivity benefits of a seamless digital experience and the use of data to create a feedback loop for continuous improvement, another will share horror stories of frustration and time wasted due to poor equipment, faulty systems, and failure to upgrade physical settings and user protocols.

“ We’re all on a learning journey regarding hybrid work – the situation is still fluid... ”

Harald Becker
Microsoft

So how can we avoid a dystopian scenario in which technology stymies hybrid working instead of supporting the very thing that digital capacity created? According to [Microsoft’s Director of Customer Engagements and Insight, Harald Becker](#), whose expert views we sought on this subject, the answer lies in better planning, more experimentation and co-creation with customers to create new digital experiences.

We showcase two [Microsoft pilots](#) with customers in this Trend Report – [Converge](#) and [Salt](#) – which explore ways to connect colleagues more easily in the hybrid work ecosystem and to use food to create more equality between in-person and remote meeting participants. More experiments of this type will be required to make the required breakthroughs.

Technology for hybrid working – as many studies suggest – is not about tech for its own sake but about the impact on employee performance and wellbeing. After an initial honeymoon period in the pandemic, unprecedented access to digital tools in the home led to employee overwork and burnout.

Now, as companies bring people back to the office as part of a hybrid model in which the home still features, there is a need for careful balance in terms of the quality of digital tools that companies provide, how they are used by employees and how they are deployed across a more distributed and diverse landscape of work.

Expert View: Harald Becker, Microsoft

Harald Becker is **Director of Customer Engagements and Insight at Microsoft**. Based in Seattle, he is part of the Modern Work Customer Co-Innovation team working on digital transformation pilots with some of the company's key customers. From this vantage point, he is uniquely well positioned to analyze the role of technology in enabling hybrid work – but he also recognizes that it can sometimes be a blocker to new ways of working.



In a hybrid world where people have more choice in where to work, technology solutions can help answer the question: why should I go to the office? They can provide useful signals, nudges and prompts in terms of bringing employees together with the right colleagues in the right settings at the right times.

Technology can both schedule and enable space for hybrid; provide a seamless experience for the end user with a standardized IT environment on a secure, open platform that avoids 'authentication hell'; and support the strengthening of company culture. Technology can therefore enable hybrid heaven, but a dystopian alternative is all too easy to imagine, says Becker.



Poorly deployed, technology can lead to a dip in employee wellbeing. Burnout from overwork is a particular danger – Microsoft data points to a big increase in meetings and after-hours work. In this scenario, 'yet another new tool or app' is added that's not integrated in people's workflow, and data is used to track employees in ways that can be construed as wrong or unethical.

Harald Becker believes that 'we're all on a learning journey regarding hybrid work – the situation is still fluid and markedly different based on region, industry, work culture and so on'. But better planning and more experimentation will make a difference and help to improve wellbeing. 'We need to apply a co-innovation mindset in which we pilot experiences quickly, evaluate and learn,' says Becker.

It is also important to provide guidance and set-up on simple and comprehensive connectivity packages for both home and office settings – and to strive for inclusivity in terms of meeting the needs of people who have low vision or are neurodiverse.

What guides Becker's approach is access to a wealth of research and insights from [Microsoft's own studies](#), including its [Work Trends Index 2022](#) and [New Future of Work Report 2022](#). In the following pages, we highlight two Microsoft pilot projects: Converge and Salt.

Case study: Converge by Microsoft

Microsoft has worked on a pilot project which uses Teams to help colleagues connect organically and easily in a hybrid work ecosystem. Working in partnership with a large American retailer, the pilot responds to the shift in the role of the office from the only portal for work and to operating within a wider ecosystem of workspaces.

The pilot project, called **Converge**, aims to bridge the gap between the desire for more face-to-face social interaction and the expectation to work flexibly. The solution is hosted on a **Teams app** which is available as an open-source code based on GitHub. Microsoft worked collaboratively with the retailer to create a solution which is easily accessible to users, facilitates organic encounters and is compliant with user privacy restraints.

“ Early on we thought we’d probably get something akin to a wireframe that may or may not work. What we received in the end was an amazing working prototype that enables our business to imagine how things could work. ”

Retail partner survey
respondent

The app can predict where a user’s teammates will be and recommend optimal meeting locations that work best for the team. Users can manually input their work locations, or let the system make an informed prediction, which Converge does by surveying the Outlook calendar of users.

Converge also uses data from **Microsoft Graph** to understand the user’s closest collaborators: managers, team members and people with whom the user has communicated lately on Teams or via email. This list of collaborators appears on the home screen, displaying people’s locations and available time windows. Users can also create custom lists of collaborators.

Users of the app can **view photos** of workspaces, **reserve spots**, discover where colleagues will be working, get recommendations on where they should work, and find non-office meeting sites which are convenient for all parties involved.



Case study: Salt by Microsoft

Microsoft’s **Modern Work Customer Co-Innovation team** has piloted a project which uses food to address inequality of experience between in- person and digital meeting participants. The development team created an aspirational vision of what this process could look like and built a pilot solution to see how it could work in practice.

“ It would be neat to be able to scale this to other situations (i.e. a virtual wine tasting or painting party for the team). It would be amazing to take all the “work” out of it for me as an organizer and I’d pay good money to save the time. ”

Salt pilot participant

The result is [Salt](#), a [Teams app](#) and Outlook add-in that makes it simple for meeting organizers to include food with meetings and send refreshments or gifts to co-workers. Rather than select one ubiquitous food provider or delivery service, the solution works with [Tango](#), a gift card provider that already has the necessary APIs in place. With Tango, meeting attendees can quickly select and redeem gift cards to order their food.

The system is designed to be intuitive and efficient. The event organizer opens the [Salt panel](#) in a meeting invitation and, with a few clicks, includes food, sets a budget, and confirms recipients; they then send the meeting invitation as usual. Recipients who accept the invitation receive and can easily redeem a gift card via Tango.

In Outlook, when a meeting invitee accepts the meeting, a placeholder is automatically put on their calendar to remind them to order or pick up their food prior to the meeting. After the event, the organizer receives one receipt with all the information needed to expense the event with one click, saving time for the organizer and reducing the possibility of error. Project Salt is currently rolled out for broader evaluation at Microsoft.

Hybrid hell? The impact of a poor digital experience

Hybrid working relies on digital technology to enable an easy transition between home and office. There is a multitude of possible fail points and areas of friction along the way. If employees have the right tools and equipment wherever they work from, it can lead to hybrid heaven. However, this can quickly turn to hybrid hell if the digital tools and technology designed to bridge the gap become a barrier.

Global audio visual producer [Poly](#) conducted a ‘[Hybrid Performance Review](#)’ surveying 5,000 US employees and employers to uncover how workspaces, technology and personality traits impact performance.

The key finding of the research was that consistent and equitable experiences between remote and office setups are key, with almost three-quarters (72%) of workers agreeing that their employers can be doing more to create a uniform experience between those in the office and those working remotely.

Source

Poly, 2022.

[Hybrid Performance Review](#)

Here are other ways in which technology can result in hybrid hell if not implemented well, according to [Poly's research](#):

- Clunky video conferencing technology in the office and faulty headsets and poor audio are the biggest technology frustrations for employees.
- Only around a third (36%) of employees say their company has provided adequate technology to connect when working remotely.
- Only 35% of organizations have created new collaboration spaces with video conferencing equipment to bring equality to meetings.
- Less than half (45%) of business leaders rate their company as ‘excellent’ when it comes to supporting hybrid workers with technology.

Hybrid heaven? Designing the ultimate digital experience

The pandemic is estimated to have fast-tracked digital transformation by at least seven years. This means employees are having to get used to the new technology that comes with a 'work anywhere' culture and a more digitalized approach to doing business. Given how much of hybrid working is facilitated by digital technologies, it is critical that firms curate the best digital experience for employees to achieve a successful hybrid work strategy.

A research survey commissioned by [Scalable Software](#) and conducted by independent research company [Coleman Parkes](#) of 2,000 UK hybrid workers found that 79% of respondents say their employer has already realized they need to pay more attention to the digital experience in a hybrid model.

However, around seven hours (6.94) each week are currently wasted due to a poor digital experience. The research found that hybrid workers waste an average of 3.38 hours a week because their employer hasn't provided the right technology to do their job and an additional 3.58 hours are wasted because employees are struggling with technology that simply doesn't work, runs slowly, or because of poor design and inefficient workflow.

Source

Scalable Software & Coleman Parkes, 2021.
[Digital Experience Report](#)

Fieldwork for the study was conducted in July 2021. Respondents use some type of IT in their work, in companies of between 500-2,000 employees.

Hybrid heaven can be achieved when IT and HR teams come together to evaluate the data which shows which new digital tools have been adopted and how they are being used across different locations and roles. These insights can be used to create campaigns that promote uptake and adoption of new technologies, and minimize frustration and barriers.

Organizations are already mapping their customer experiences in great detail, but they have yet to place the same emphasis on their own employees' hybrid working experience. It is time for this to change.



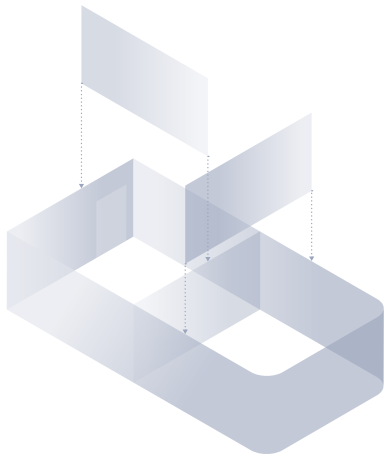
Key Links

[5 Challenges of Hybrid Work – and How to Overcome Them](#)
[Inside Google's push to nail hybrid work](#)
[How tech can build a greener future](#)
[Hybrid working plans are hindered by poor tech](#)

People

Hyper-personalization

John Lang on the individual focus



Wellbeing

Is this the key factor in hybrid?

Trust

Why returners are reluctant



Time to Reset Our Human Systems?

While space and technology can support the hybrid model, the people policies that underpin organizations will ultimately determine its long-term durability.

There are many unanswered questions about hybrid working. But one thing that is generally agreed is that there is some sort of shift in the balance of power going on between employers and workers.

The ‘[Great Resignation](#)’ that led to the decimation of so many middle management posts has exacerbated the difficulties around hiring talent. Regular staff are proving reluctant to the return to the office – especially when so many of their bosses are continuing to work from home – and require a lot of persuasion. As organizations recalibrate, have employees now got the whip hand?

It is clearly a slow process to improve communication and rebuild trust with a distributed workforce. But, despite the evident strain on people, systems, and culture, there are shafts of light as companies carefully plot the way ahead. If the pandemic taught us one thing, it is about the paramount importance of employee wellbeing – health and wellness are

set to be key factors in the decisions about going hybrid or not, and the role of HR departments in managing experience is growing.

There is also a growing focus on supporting the individual at the local level rather offering broad-brush programs around wellbeing. Sydney-based [John Lang of SHAPE Global](#), whose expertise we sought for this report, calls this the ‘hyper-personalization’ agenda: organizations need to know a lot more about their own people, how they work and what makes them tick, than ever before so that the right hybrid roles can be assigned to the right personalities.

While commercial organizations collect data on their staff, academic research is also moving at pace over the hybrid landscape. We report on study findings that show that job satisfaction and professional performance can be enhanced in a hybrid model, also that hybrid workers appear to be more caring, supportive, and forgiving of colleagues.

This idea of the hybrid work environment as a more genuinely caring one – based on a case study conducted by a research team in Austria – offers a new angle. But it links to the familiar idea that ‘hybrid heaven’ will only be reached by a reset of the people policies and human frameworks that provide the scaffolding for most organizations.

Expert View: John Lang, SHAPE Global

Dr John Lang is CEO of employee performance survey company **SHAPE Global**. As the Founding President of the Health and Productivity Institute of Australia, and former CEO of some of the country's top workplace wellness providers, Lang is very well placed to comment on the effects of hybrid working on people. Analysis of the most recent data points from SHAPE Global's surveys further deepens his perspective.



Lang believes that knowing more about how your employees tick is the key to avoiding hybrid hell. Some personality types fare better with autonomous remote work than others and are more suited to the hybrid model. He says there is currently 'a lot of negativity' among employees (which explains the slow return to the office) and a low tolerance for company mistakes: 'What I'm seeing in the data is people expressing the view that "I'm drowning, I'm just afloat".'

When workplace systems such as payroll are under strain and aren't working, when people are mandated back to the office without any choice, and when managers are denied the opportunity develop new models of leadership based on trust rather than presenteeism, that's when the warning signs start flashing, says Lang.



SHAPE Global collects 200 data points for each employee in a 30-minute survey, monitoring everything from attendance to job fit to wellbeing. People adopted healthier behaviors in terms of exercise and diet when working from home in the pandemic, so it will take a lot to convince them to commute again to the office after lifestyle choices have embedded.

Lang believes there is no right answer to hybrid – it should be a flexible model for individuals based on different personality traits. However, reaching hybrid heaven will depend on rebuilding trust between executives and employees, achieving a better fit between people and roles, rethinking the measures of success around culture and engagement, and providing greater purpose and meaning in work.

To make this happen, organizations will need to adapt to a process of 'hyper-personalization of issues at a local level,' says Lang. 'The days of big, broad global wellbeing programs are over. Now the focus should be on local, granular details for teams and individuals. It's all about the employee's journey, not the company's journey.'

Case study: Allstate embraces remote working

For most of its 90-year history, American insurance company **Allstate** was an office-based organization. Even when digital technology transformed the insurance industry, only 20% of Allstate employees worked remotely.

Today, following the pandemic, three-quarters of the firm's 45,000-strong workforce are based at home; 24% are hybrid and just 1% work full-time in the office. Allstate has even closed its corporate headquarters campus for 5,000 staff in Northbrook, Illinois. What lay behind this total transformation?

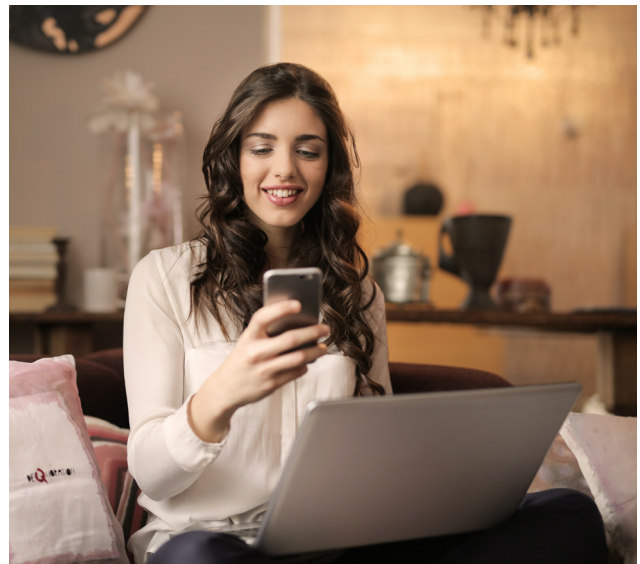
According to **Allstate's Chief Human Resources Officer Bob Toohey**, the company focused on maintaining and growing company culture in response to the rise of hybrid, on training managers to be better hybrid work leaders, and on engaging employees to ensure they're being validated and informed.

Allstate adapted its office spaces to function primarily as places for collaboration and social interaction, introducing smaller facilities to draw in a distributed workforce. It also invested in enhanced video-conferencing facilities. But the key factor that underscored innovation in design and technology was a commitment to think differently about work and build connections through new people policies.

Source
[Computerworld](#)

Toohey explains: 'It's easy to come together when you're in the office, but we have to come together a lot more through communications. So, how do you create more frequent communications? We do quick pulse surveys to learn what's on people's mind. We use those surveys to find out if we're missing anything — if people are feeling they don't have that connection.'

Toohey adds: 'We're also investing a lot in enabling our managers to have the information they need to manage their teams. Employees are customers, too. You have to treat them like customers.'



Case study: Is wellbeing the biggest factor in hybrid working?

Behind the rise of hybrid working are fears that employees face hidden pitfalls in adopting the new model. Survey company **Leesman** examined data from 67,000 workers collected in the second half of 2021 and identified some potential risks for companies in delivering an optimal hybrid structure.

These include a collapse in trust between leaders and workers on the question of working autonomously and a failure of technology infrastructure that will affect hybrid work flows. Leesman data suggests that nine out of ten employees currently feel trusted and feel they have the software applications to work anywhere, so these hidden dangers aren't flashing red in most companies.

What is more concerning is the issue of health and wellbeing. Resistance to heading back on-site is crystallized around feeling unsafe in an office environment and having to suffer a long and cramped commute to get there. Leesman reports that hybrid workers have fewer concerns about both health and commuting than other types of worker, and advises that health considerations will continue to drive decisions about whether to go hybrid or not.

The need to keep a closer eye on employee wellbeing is reflected in other major tracking studies. In February 2022, [Gallup](#) found that fewer than one in four US employees felt strongly that their organization cares about their wellbeing.

This was Gallup's lowest recorded number in nearly a decade of tracking employee engagement – and the slump followed a peak in the early 'honeymoon' period of the pandemic. Gallup suggests that communication with staff has tapered off and many employees are left in the dark about how flexible and hybrid policies will affect their work.

Source

Leesman

[Where are the risks hidden in the hype?](#)

Unispace

[The Reluctant Returner](#)

[Unispace's 2021 report](#), 'The Reluctant Returner', based on a large-scale survey of 3,000 office workers and 2,750 employers in nine European countries, tells a similar story. It suggests that nearly two-thirds of all workers (64%) are 'reluctant returners' and cites concerns over care arrangements and commuting. Health and wellbeing will drive the agenda for some time yet.

Hybrid heaven? Scientific review suggests a caring dividend

Researchers in the social, cognitive and neuro- sciences are actively conducting studies in the field of hybrid work to learn how it is best done and how it is influencing working lives. Academics use multiple definitions of the term 'hybrid work' but what these definitions have in common are periods of work outside of company owned or managed offices. [Positive outcomes from the research so far:](#)

- Hybrid workers are more caring, supportive and forgiving of colleagues – they treat each other with respect and display more confidence in each other.
- People doing tasks that do not require much collaboration with others, but are highly complex, are likely to work better outside company offices than in them.
- Job satisfaction and professional performance can be enhanced in a hybrid model, with a dedicated home office contributing to better work-life balance.
- Daylight, greenery, external views, privacy, art and color all contribute to higher productivity at home.

However, [scientific evidence also suggests that:](#)

- Social networks with fellow employees appear weaker, which is linked to higher stress levels.
- People working outside the office can find it difficult to stop working – they spend more time at the workstation without a break and generally work longer hours.
- There is a 'flexibility paradox' in which the complexities of working in a flexible way outside the office imposes restrictions due to the greater need to impose structure and planning.
- The collaboration network of workers can become static and siloed, with fewer bridges to disparate parts of the company.

Source

Various academic studies compiled by Research Design Connections, Chicago, June 2022.

Hybrid hell? The New York Times on what can go wrong

The **New York Times** has extensively reported on the experiences of hybrid workers over the past three months, indicating what can go right with hybrid working, but, more frequently, what can go wrong. Here is an overview of its coverage:

- There is a lot of chaos regarding hybrid work, with company policies often in flux.
- While management teams at many companies want employees to return to on-site work, large numbers of employees are reluctant to head back to the office and there is some sort of cultural revolt or evolution underway.
- Lots of people perceive that they have done their jobs effectively from home – faced with commutes and having to relinquish some control over their lives (no more lunchtime runs through tree-lined suburbs), employees see no need to return to the office.
- To encourage more on-site time and less remote time (because they believe this will drive business success), many companies are doing things such as relocating their offices closer to employee homes and developing ‘fun’ activities to lure employees back into the office. The ‘fun’ often falls flat.

- Regardless of the confusion and uncertainty, some people are developing hybrid work practices that lead to positive company outcomes and counter potential hybrid work stressors, such as co-workers having views into homes and the potential difficulties of integrating childcare with work.

The tenor of the NY Times coverage is reflected elsewhere. The **BBC’s Worklife** reported how managers are mandating their employees back to in-person work while they continue to enjoy the benefits of working from home. This is leading to a disconnect between senior executives and regular staff, with accusations of double standards being applied. One employee was quoted as saying her company feels fractured: ‘There’s not really a company culture making you want to stay at the job.’ Eminent organizational psychologist **Professor Cary Cooper of Manchester Business School** concludes: ‘It’s not leading by example, is it?’



Key Links

[Employees suspect return to office](#)

[UK companies trial four-day working week](#)

[Will the hybrid model work for older employees?](#)

[Have we reached an inflection point on the journey to hybrid?](#)

Benefits of Locatee Workplace Analytics

Over the coming years, many organizations will be walking a fine line between ascending to a hybrid heaven or falling into a hybrid hell. Those that are most likely to succeed in a hybrid era will take a holistic approach to understanding the needs of their business.

Operating at the intersection between places, people, technology, it's Locatee's mission to enable workplaces that employees love. Our Workplace Analytics platform provides the real picture of portfolio occupancy and utilization so you can avoid costly decisions based on inaccurate data. Locatee's technology is both economical and highly granular for portfolio-wide assessment.

Key benefits of Locatee Workplace Analytics

- Scalable and cost-efficient technology for your entire portfolio using already existing IT infrastructure (WiFi, Ethernet, and sensors if and where needed)
- Overview of portfolio including historical and current data as a solid base for decisions – no more gut feeling
- Long-term cost reduction by optimizing across the whole portfolio and spotting opportunities

Are you ready to step up your workplace analytics game?

Contact us to find out how Locatee can support your workplace and portfolio cost optimization plans.



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