

**The Conference
Board of Canada**



Remote, Office, or Hybrid?

Employee Preferences for Post-Pandemic
Work Arrangements



Contents

1 Key Findings	Appendix A
2 COVID-19 Has Been a Catalyst for Change	32 Methodology
2 The Virtual–Office Work Continuum	Appendix B
3 For Those Considering a Move to Permanent Remote Work	34 Bibliography
9 For Those Considering a Return to the Office	
10 Who Wants to Work at Home and Who Wants to Work On-Site?	
14 For Those Considering Hybrid Work	
18 Who Wants to Work a Hybrid Arrangement Post-Pandemic?	
19 Employee’s Hybrid Work Preferences Depend on Sector, Job Type, and Unionization	
24 Moving Forward—What Needs to Be Done to Make Hybrid Work?	
30 Conclusions	

Key Findings

- Research done using data from the 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey determined that employee preferences regarding post-pandemic work arrangements vary widely along the virtual–office work continuum. On the one end of the continuum are those employees (23 per cent) who want to return to full-time work at the office, and at the other are employees (28 per cent) who want to work remotely moving forward.
- People want to continue doing what they did during the pandemic. If people spent most of their time working remotely during the pandemic, then they want to continue with this arrangement. Similarly, if they spent most of their time working on-site during the pandemic, they prefer to get back to the office full time once it is safe to do so.
- Government employees who split their time between the office and home during the pandemic prefer full-time remote work post-pandemic while those in healthcare and education prefer full-time on-site work.
- Private sector employees in management and professional positions prefer to work full time at the office while private sector employees in clerical/administrative positions prefer full-time remote work arrangements.
- Most unionized employees in the government, health, and education sectors who spent more time working at the office than at home during the pandemic would prefer to work more days at their office than at home when they are permitted to return to work.
- For non-unionized employees (mainly in the private sector), results showed that managers and executives expressed a very different vision for the future of work than do many of the professionals who report to them. Virtually all private sector managers and executives who spent little time working from home during the pandemic prefer to work more days at the office than at home post-pandemic.



COVID-19 Has Been a Catalyst for Change

In early 2020, COVID-19 protocols imposed by governments and public health authorities required many organizations to shift all employees who were able to work from home to do so. While the transition to remote work was sudden for many, the adoption of remote work arrangements by knowledge workers (particularly those working in the technology sector) has been accelerating for years.

“COVID-19 has turbocharged this trend.”¹

Statistics on the use of remote work arrangements before the COVID-19 pandemic varied across countries, industries, and job levels. In the U.S. pre-COVID-19, an estimated 43 per cent of employees sometimes worked remotely and 3.6 per cent of the workforce worked as much or more often from home as in the office.² During the pandemic, the world began the largest work-from-home experiment in history as employees were mandated to work from home.³ Because of COVID-19, companies quickly adopted digital collaboration tools and videoconferencing systems that they had spurned for the last decade.⁴ Why? Because they had no choice.

The rise in remote work will have society-wide impacts and provides us with a rare real-time opportunity to observe the challenges and upsides of the widespread adoption of remote work arrangements. This impact paper was written to provide direction to those employers that are wondering how to best structure work moving forward.

This research has three main goals. First, to review the pros and cons of adopting on-site, remote, or hybrid work arrangements post-pandemic. Second, we use data from the 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey to help better understand employee preferences for their work arrangements for the future. (See Appendix A.) Third, we provide a framework to help guide employers that are planning to make the transition to hybrid work arrangements moving forward.

The Virtual–Office Work Continuum

Post-Pandemic Work Preferences

While many employees have expressed a strong desire to remain fully remote or retain flexible work arrangements post-pandemic, there is little clarity on what the structure of work will actually look like. While there seems to be a consensus among key decision-makers that post-pandemic many employees want to work from home—at least some of the time—there is little agreement with respect to how work should be structured moving forward.

1 Gavett, “Do We Really Need the Office?,” 2.

2 Zhang, Yu, and Marin, “Exploring Public Sentiment on Enforced Remote Work During COVID-19,” 798.

3 Bernstein and others, “The Implications of Working Without an Office.”

4 Berinato, “What Is an Office For?”

The 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 Survey

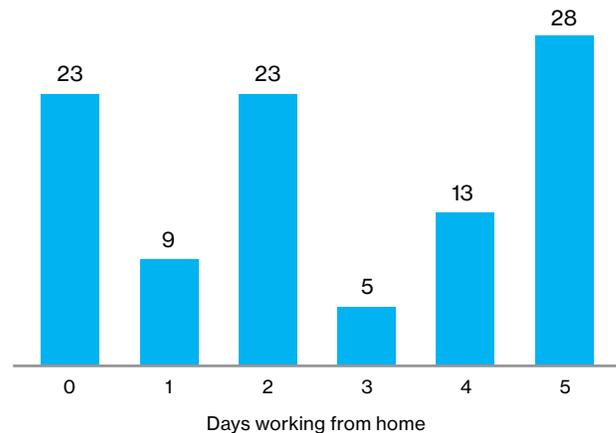
In 2020–21, Linda Duxbury, Chancellor’s Professor, Sprott School of Business, Carleton University, and Michael Halinski, Assistant Professor, Ted Rogers School of Management, Ryerson University, worked in partnership with The Conference Board of Canada to administer the Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey. Just over 26,000 employees from across Canada responded to this survey. Many of our respondents (15,921) were essential workers (nurses, teachers, doctors) who worked on-site during the pandemic and will continue to work near their colleagues in physical workplaces in the future. Our concern in this phase of the research is not those employees. Rather, our analysis focuses in this impact paper on the almost 40 per cent of those who answered the survey (n = 10,103) who told us that they worked from home most or all the time during the pandemic.

When asked their preferences with respect to how they wanted their work arranged post-pandemic, employees who worked remotely during the pandemic provided responses along a continuum. (See Chart 1.) On the one end of the continuum are employees (23 per cent) who want to return to full-time work at the office. On the other end of the continuum are employees (28 per cent) who want to work remotely on a full-time basis. In the middle of the continuum are those employees who, moving forward, want to combine on-site work with remote work. On average, employees in this sample would like to spend half of their time working at home and the other half at the office.

Chart 1

Post-Pandemic: Number of Days per Week Employees Want to Work Remotely

(n = 10,103; percentage of employees)



Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey.

For Those Considering a Move to Permanent Remote Work

Remote Work Has Many Names

People use a variety of interchangeable terms when they talk about “remote work,” including telework, teleworking, telecommuting, distance work, working from home (WFH), mobile work, work from anywhere (WFA), e-working, and the flexible workplace.⁵ If you are confused, you are not alone. In this impact paper we have elected to use the term “remote work”—a work arrangement that allows employees to work at a location outside of the traditional office environment—to refer to the phenomena we are studying.

5 United States Office of Personnel Management, “What Is Telework?”; Alexander, De Smet, and Mysore, “Reimagining the Postpandemic Workforce.”

While research on telework began in the 1970s, interest in this arrangement has grown in recent years, as the tools needed to work and collaborate remotely have advanced. A variety of studies support various conclusions about the advantages

and disadvantages that remote work offers to employers and employees.⁶ A summary of key findings on the pros and cons of remote work are provided below. (See Table 1.)

Table 1
Advantages and Disadvantages of Remote Work

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Employee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saving in time and money (no commute, no parking, eating out, etc.) • Improved productivity as employees are more able to concentrate on individual work tasks and experience fewer distractions from the office • Increases in autonomy and flexibility (i.e., more control over when you work, what you work on) • Increases in job satisfaction, morale, and engagement with work • Increased ability to avoid office politics • Employees with in-demand skills can live where they choose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be lonely working at home • Efforts less likely to be recognized (“out of sight, out of mind”) • May negatively impact career advancement; danger of being overlooked for promotion • Less social contact: harder to get to know colleagues, share ideas, build trust • Fewer spontaneous communications • More difficult to work as a team – especially if others are office-based • Can result in overwork as people do not keep regular work hours • Work–life balance blurring; more difficult to separate work from personal life • Long hours of teleconferencing can be exhausting • Lack of needed equipment and support and challenges with Internet/WiFi
Employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced ability to recruit and retain talent: increased talent pool to choose from as employers can source talent from anywhere in the world with Internet connectivity • Reduction in hassles and costs associated with immigration • Reduction in company costs, mostly due to real estate savings • Employee productivity enhanced • Increased profitability • Reduction in absenteeism • Enhanced disaster preparedness • A more level playing field for organizations that wish to improve diversity, equity, inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More difficult for managers to effectively supervise remote workers • Increases in management’s workload • More difficult to on-board and acculturate new employees • More difficult to mentor employees • Reduces social cohesion in organization • Challenges with data security and regulation • Difficult to schedule team meetings • Negatively impacts the organization’s ability to successfully engage in brainstorming, problem-solving, and knowledge-sharing

Sources: Neeley; Choudhury; Gavett; Frankiewicz and Chamorro-Premuzic; Makarius, Larson, and Vroman; Duxbury and others; Duxbury and Higgins; Schweitzer and Duxbury; Zhang, Yu, and Marin.

6 Neeley, “15 Questions About Remote Work Answered”; Choudhury, “Our Work-From-Anywhere Future”; Gavett, “Do We Really Need the Office?”; Frankiewicz and Chamorro-Premuzic, “The Post-Pandemic Rules of Talent Management”; Makarius, Larson, and Vroman, “What Is Your Organization’s Long-Term Remote Work Strategy?”; Duxbury and others, *Summary Report of Statistics Canada’s Telework Pilot*; Duxbury and Higgins, “Telework: A Primer for the Millennium”; Schweitzer and Duxbury, “Benchmarking the Use of Telework Arrangements in Canada”; Zhang, Yu, and Marin, “Exploring Public Sentiment on Enforced Remote Work During COVID-19.”

The Paradox of Remote Work

Managers are well advised to consider all possible ramifications of expecting all employees to work remotely before selling or modifying their real estate. On the one hand, remote work increases flexibility in how and where employees do their work and may enhance perceived job autonomy and improve job satisfaction, morale, and productivity. Alternatively, it may increase the permeability of the work–life boundary and increase work overload and exhaustion which may lead to declines in employee well-being and poorer relationships with co-workers.⁷

When Is Full-Time Remote Work Appropriate?

Remote work may not work for everyone and not all work can be done productively at home. When is work from home appropriate? Research has found that the benefits of remote work outweigh the drawbacks when employees are working on tasks that require that they work independently and free of distraction for long periods of time; and have the personality and skills needed to work remotely (i.e., they can manage their own time and priorities and ignore household distractions, are good at written communication, and have personal skills that enable them to maintain positive relationships with others from a remote environment). Of note, those who suffer from anxiety, worry, and fear when they are under stress may, however, find remote work more taxing.⁸

During the Pandemic Employees Participated in “Enforced Remote Work” Experiment

Employers and employees should be careful using their experiences with remote work during COVID-19 when engaged in future work strategic planning exercises. Why? Because employees did not engage in remote work in the **traditional** sense of the word during the pandemic but rather participated in an **enforced** remote work experiment. Research has identified multiple critical differences between enforced remote work and traditional remote work.⁹ Key differences between these two work arrangements are summarized below. (See Table 2.)



7 Zhang, Yu, and Marin, “Exploring Public Sentiment on Enforced Remote Work During COVID-19.”

8 Bernstein and others, “The Implications of Working Without an Office.”

9 See, for example, Zhang, Yu, and Marin, “Exploring Public Sentiment on Enforced Remote Work During COVID-19”; Gavett, “Do We Really Need the Office?”; Bernstein and others, “The Implications of Working Without an Office”; Singer-Velush, Sharman, and Anderson, “Microsoft Analyzed Data on Its Newly Remote Workforce”; Petriglieri, “In Praise of the Office”; Berinato, “What Is an Office For?”

Enforced Remote Work Presented Many Unique Challenges

Emerging evidence suggests that the experiences of those who worked remotely during the pandemic were unique in many ways. In a study on the remote workforce, Microsoft identified numerous changes in how people did their work following the onset of the pandemic. They reported that:

- Workweeks were lengthened by, on average, four or more hours.
- Employees signed into work earlier and signed off later to accommodate pressing demands at home.
- The number of meetings that people participated in increased while the amount of time spent in each individual meeting declined.
- Many employees used evening hours and weekends to catch up on work and reported a blurring of the boundaries between work and life.¹⁰

Others attributed the gains in employee productivity observed during the pandemic to increased levels of anxiety: “People were afraid of losing their jobs, of being forgotten, of letting the company down in a crisis” ... and many employees coped by “panic working.”¹¹

Enforced Remote Work Has Notable Benefits

Researchers have identified several benefits of remote work that were realized during the pandemic because almost **everyone** (not just a select few) was working from home. (See Table 2.) These benefits were realized because:

- When everyone is working from home, managers are not making biased assumptions about why people want to work remotely (i.e., they are less committed).
- Remote workers are less concerned about their work efforts being overlooked.
- During this time period at home, children interrupting work became less of a taboo.¹²



10 Singer-Velush, Sharman, and Anderson, “Microsoft Analyzed Data on Its Newly Remote Workforce.”

11 Petriglieri, “In Praise of the Office,” 26.

12 Rothbard, “Building Work–Life Boundaries in the WFH Era.”

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Table 2
Remote Work Versus Enforced Work at Home During COVID-19

Research on Remote Work Tells Us ...	The Reality of Remote Work During COVID-19
It is voluntary—employees considered their situation and preferences and elected to work at home.	Worker had no choice (enforced work at home)—public health mandated work from home.
Optimum results: work from home one to three days a week.	Reality—work from home 24/7.
They have a “home office” that conforms to ergonomic design principles.	Many employees who worked from home during COVID-19 did not have a “home” office and worked where they could find a spot.
Remote workers are supervised by managers who have received training on how to motivate, engage, and evaluate employees who are working remotely.	Managers are also working from home. Many had no training on how to supervise employees who are working remotely.
Remote workers chose tasks to do at home that benefit from the ability to work without interruptions and that require concentration.	During COVID-19 it is assumed that all tasks can be done at home with little to no loss in productivity. Interruptions are common and many reported finding it hard to concentrate with children and partners also at home.
Remote workers have access to everything that they need to productively work on chosen tasks at home/outside the office.	Many employees had to cobble together what they needed to work productively away from the office. Internet sometimes unreliable.
Remote workers understand that you cannot work from home if your children or elderly parents are at home with you and unsupervised.	At many points during the pandemic, employees had to balance working at home with schooling and childcare. Many were also concerned with the health and well-being of their elderly relatives.
Your experiences as a remote worker should not vary with age, gender, marital status, parental status, etc.	Young single people without children or eldercare are having a very different experience with remote work than are employees in the full-nest stage of the life cycle.
Remote work improves work–life balance.	Emergency work from home is destroying work–life balance for parents—COVID-19 means that many employees and their families cannot use time or space cues to separate work and life.
Remote work enhances productivity as expectations with respect to start and stop times, communication protocols, etc., are shared before people start to work at home. Expectations are respected by managers, colleagues, and clients.	Many employees are having to squeeze work in around schooling of children, caring for children, and other demands on their time—they are getting up early or staying up late to get work done. In many cases, productivity gains during the pandemic can be linked to an increase in work hours.
Employers select carefully when determining who can work remotely—this work arrangement is given only to those with the discipline/desire to work outside the office.	All non-essential workers are working from home or laid off. Some of these employees who worked remotely during the pandemic either did not have the discipline to work from home or did not want to work remotely.

Source: Duxbury, “Working From Home During COVID-19: Myths Versus Reality,” (unpublished presentation).



Balancing Work and Family When Working Remotely

Any conclusions regarding the long-term consequences of remote work on indicators of employee well-being and balance are premature. The very technologies that have made remote work possible (i.e., laptops, mobile phones, Internet, e-mail, videoconferencing) have also created a more permeable boundary between work and family roles. Research has shown that the ability to balance work and family when working from home (where work is omni-present) depends to a great extent on an employee's ability to psychologically detach and recover from work by actively managing boundaries between work and family.

Research has identified two types of employees who have different preferences and strategies when it comes to managing the work–life interface: integrators, who tend to blur work and family boundaries, and segmentors, who strive to preserve clear ones.

The impact that these preferences are likely to have on how employees experience different work arrangements are summarized below. (See Table 3.) With this information, companies can begin “structuring remote work that is not only productive but honors everyone’s boundaries over the long term.”¹³

So, Why Not Stay Virtual?

Researchers suggest that post-pandemic many organizations might benefit from closing their offices altogether and going fully remote with 100 per cent distributed teams.¹⁴ Many businesses seem to be considering this option as evidenced by a recent article in which Forbes identified several larger organizations, including Dropbox, ONVU Technologies, Quora, Twitter, Shopify, Slack, and Upwork, that have decided to close their offices altogether.¹⁵ This is perhaps unfortunate as remote work has some very real drawbacks, and recent research has shown that younger employees (Gen Z) want to return to the workplace to socialize with their colleagues, network with others, and learn what they need to do to succeed at work. Before considering a fully remote option, organizations should consider the very real benefits that researchers have shown can be realized by having employees working from a central office.¹⁶

13 Rothbard, “Building Work–Life Boundaries in the WFH Era,”¹⁴.

14 Bernstein and others, “The Implications of Working Without an Office.”

15 Stoller, “Never Want to Go Back to the Office?”

16 Frankiewicz and Chamorro-Premuzic, “The Post-Pandemic Rules of Talent Management”; Bernstein and others, “The Implications of Working Without an Office”; Petriglieri, “In Praise of the Office”; Berinato, “What Is an Office For?”

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Table 3
The Role Segmentation–Role Integration Continuum

Segmented Work and Family Roles	Integrated Work and Family Roles
Segmentors prefer inflexible and impermeable boundaries between work and family roles (i.e., work and family role performance tied to specific time and place).	Integrators prefer flexible and permeable boundaries between roles (i.e., work and family role performance not tied to specific place or time).
<p>Time</p> <p>Segmentors focus on work during work hours and family during family time (i.e., finish work calls during work hours even if it means working later, do not answer work e-mails during family time).</p>	<p>Integrators are comfortable performing work tasks during family time and family tasks during work time.</p> <p>They often engage in work activities outside of regular work hours (i.e., take work calls in the evening) and take care of personal matters during work time (i.e., go to a school meeting at 10 a.m.).</p>
<p>Space</p> <p>Segmentors like to keep work and family spaces separate and make every attempt to differentiate their work role from their family role (i.e., maintain different calendars, have work and family phones).</p> <p>If they are required to work from home, they need a physical barrier between work and home (i.e., a room with a door).</p>	Integrators tend to be comfortable blurring spatial boundaries between work and home and many have offices set up at home.
<p>Benefits and Drawbacks</p> <p><i>Main benefits of segmentation:</i> Segmentors seek to psychologically compartmentalize work and family by separating work and family physically and temporally. This makes it easier for segmentors to focus on whichever role is being given priority and reduces the number of times work interrupts family and vice versa.</p> <p><i>Main costs of segmentation:</i> It is more difficult to psychologically (and sometimes physically) exit one role and enter the other, and moods and stressors from one role domain may spill over into the other domain.</p>	<p><i>Main benefits of integration:</i> Integrators find it easier psychologically and physically to exit one role and enter the other. While integrators have an easier time transitioning between work and family roles, they are also more likely to experience distractions and interruptions, as work and family activities often overlap.</p> <p><i>Main costs of integration:</i> The potential for role blurring is greater, it is difficult to create and maintain boundaries between roles, and roles compete for attention and importance and there is greater potential that work interrupts family and vice versa.</p>
<p>Implications: Structuring Work Moving Forward</p> <p>Segmentors' strong desire to keep work and family lives separate is almost impossible to satisfy while working from home.</p> <p>They are happier and more productive working flextime arrangements, which allows them to manage their time in a way that preserves a clear distinction between work and family.</p>	Integrators typically do not feel the need to separate work and home and found it easier to adjust to remote work arrangements during COVID-19. That being said, even some integrators found the "sudden and fully immersive blurring of work and home boundaries" difficult.

Sources: Duxbury and others; Rothbard.

For Those Considering a Return to the Office

By offering employees the opportunity to work at an office, the employer can address many of the disadvantages inherent in remote work arrangements that can, over time, undermine the health of the organization. Office work, for example, facilitates:

- face-to-face communication, which allows employees to build rapport with other workers;
- collaboration and creativity (workers who are physically able to see, talk, and interact with each other are more likely to collectively develop new ideas);
- socialization (office workers are more engaged and connected with their team);

- coordination and alignment within and between teams;
- efforts to support employee well-being (it is easier to notice when employees need help or support).

Working outside the home also encourages employees to adopt routines and forces even disorganized people to establish habits.

Challenges of working at an office include the costs in time and money incurred by employees who must commute to and from work and employers who bear the costs associated with running an office (i.e., rent, overhead, insurance, office equipment, maintaining compliance with health and safety laws). In addition to these obvious disadvantages, research has shown that employees often have little control over their work environment, their office setting (cubicle, open office concept), or their work schedules.

Who Wants to Work at Home and Who Wants to Work On-Site?

Analysis of data from the Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey helped identify key factors that can forecast, with 80 per cent accuracy, which employees would prefer to work at home versus work on-site moving forward.

Employee's Preferences Depend on How Work Was Structured During the Pandemic

Analysis identified three groups of employees in the sample—all of whom were found to have different work preferences post pandemic:

- **Low remote work:** Employees who worked at home about a day a week during the pandemic and spent the rest of the time working on-site at this time (approximately a third of the sample).
- **Split their time between office and home:** Employees who split their time between work at home and working on-site during the pandemic (approximately 20 per cent of the sample).
- **Worked from home:** Employees who worked only from home during the pandemic (approximately half the sample).

Source: Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey.



Where the Employee Did Work During the Pandemic Is the Most Important Predictor

The most important predictor of whether an employee wants to work mostly from home or mostly from the office post-pandemic is how the work was structured during the pandemic: Did the employee continue to work from a central office? Did the person spend the whole time working from home? Or did the employee split the time between the office and home?

Four Additional Factors Are Important to Our Ability to Predict Work Preferences

Four additional factors were important to our ability to predict who wants to work mostly at home or mostly in the office post-pandemic:

1. Job type—knowledge worker (manager, professional, technical work), not a knowledge worker (clerical, administrative)
2. Industry/sector—government, private, greater public service (i.e., healthcare, education, some not-for-profit)
3. How often the employee engaged in work from home pre-COVID (rarely, a day a week, more than a day a week)
4. Whether or not the employee belongs to a union.

Work preferences are *not* linked to age, gender, parental status, or family type

Finally, it is also important to note that whether an employee wanted to work remotely or at an office 100 per cent of the time post-pandemic did not depend on gender, race, age/generational cohort, marital status, or whether they had children at home. While family income did, in a few cases, impact preferences, its impact on our ability to predict how an employee wanted the work arranged was relatively small. This should reassure employers that are concerned about workplace inclusion issues moving forward.

Employees Who Rarely Worked at Home During the Pandemic ...

... Want to Return to the Office Full Time Post-COVID

The data are unequivocal—knowledge workers, particularly those working in the private sector who rarely worked from home during the pandemic, want to return to the office full time post-pandemic. (See Chart 2.) Similarly, 76 per cent of clerical/administrative workers (in all sectors) who worked primarily in the office during the pandemic would prefer to continue with this arrangement moving forward. These results support the following conclusion—employees (regardless of the job they perform or the sector they work in) who were not exposed to remote work during the pandemic want to return to the office as soon as it is possible.

Our analysis also showed that how employees who split their time between work and home during the pandemic want their work to be structured in the future depends on both the sector they work in and the type of work they are doing.

Employees Who Split Their Time Between the Office and Home During the Pandemic ...

... and Work for the Government Want to Work Remotely Post-Pandemic

Three-quarters of government employees who split their time between the office and home during the pandemic would prefer fully remote work arrangements post-pandemic.

... and Work in Healthcare and Education Want to Return to Their Place of Work Post-Pandemic

This finding for this group of employees is in striking contrast to our overall findings. Three-quarters of those employed in healthcare and education want to return to their place of work when it is safe to do so.

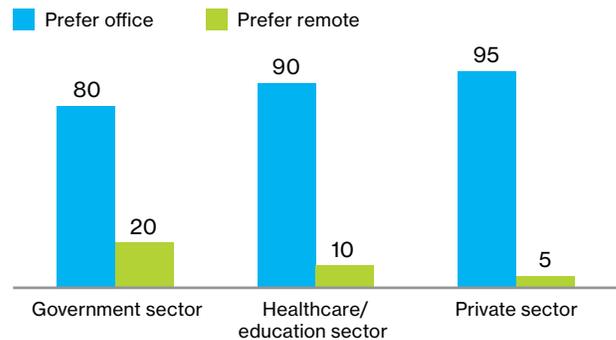
... and Work as Managers and Professionals in the Private Sector Want to Return to the Office

Two-thirds of private sector employees working as managers and professionals want to return to the office full time when pandemic restrictions are lifted.

Chart 2

Preferred Work Arrangements Post-COVID-19: Employees in Low Remote Group

(n = 1,114; percentage of employees)



Source: 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey.

... and Work in Clerical/Administrative Positions in the Private Sector Want Remote Work

A similar proportion of the clerical/administrative workers in this sector, want full-time work from home post-pandemic. We anticipate that private sector executives may face challenges with respect to reconciling these two very different sets of preferences moving forward.

Employees Who Worked Remotely During the Pandemic ...

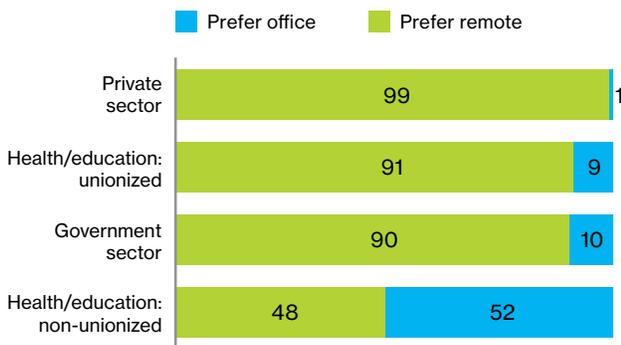
... With One Exception Want Remote Work Moving Forward

With one exception (unionized employees in healthcare and education), employees who engaged in remote work on a full-time basis during the pandemic want to continue with this work arrangement. Within the government sector, the preference for remote work arrangements was impacted by the employee's level of experience with remote work pre-COVID (the more experience, the higher proportion of the group who preferred remote work moving forward).

Non-Unionized Employees in Healthcare and Education Want to Return to the Office

In the healthcare and education sectors, unionized workers wanted to continue to work from home on a full-time basis while responses from non-unionized employees in management positions were more divided. (See Chart 3.) It is expected that executives in these sectors may face challenges with respect to reconciling these differing preferences in the future.

Chart 3
Preferred Work Arrangements Post-COVID-19: Worked Remotely During Pandemic
 (n = 4,948; percentage of employees)



Source: 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey.

What Conclusions Can Be Drawn From the Data?

There are three main conclusions that can be drawn from the data with respect to work arrangement preferences.

1. People want to continue with the work arrangement that they have grown accustomed to throughout pandemic. For example, if employees spent most of their time working remotely during COVID-19, then they likely want to continue with this arrangement. Similarly, if employees spent most time working on-site during the pandemic, they want to work in the office full time when able to.
2. Government and private sector employees with any type of experience with work from home before the pandemic would prefer to continue working from home full time when the pandemic is over.
3. For employees working in education or healthcare (and to some extent the not-for-profit sector), unionization impacts how they want their work structured post-pandemic. Unionized employees who engaged in full-time remote work during the pandemic want to work from home full time after the pandemic is over. Non-unionized employees, however, are fairly evenly split with respect to where they want to work when regulations allow.

Finally, we observed two substantive differences in work preferences post-pandemic that may present future challenges. The first point of discrepancy was observed in the sample of private sector workers who split their work time between home and office during the pandemic. In this case our analysis shows that two-thirds of the private sector managers and professionals in this group want to return to the office full time



when the pandemic restrictions are lifted, essentially the same proportion of clerical/administrative workers who want full-time work from home post-pandemic. The second point of discrepancy was observed in the sample of those working in healthcare and education who engaged in full-time remote work during the pandemic.

In this case, the unionized workers in these sectors wanted to continue to work from home on a full-time basis while non-unionized employees in management positions were more divided as to their preferred work structure post-pandemic, with half wanting to return to the office on a full-time basis and the other half stating that they prefer full-time work from home. We anticipate that executives in these sectors may face challenges with respect to reconciling these two very different sets of preferences moving forward.

For Those Considering Hybrid Work

While many knowledge workers say they want a hybrid work arrangement, this begs the question—what do we mean by the term “hybrid work”?

Organizations Are Defining Hybrid Work in a Myriad of Different Ways

Hybrid work can be defined as “working with employees who are co-located in the same physical space as well as employees working remotely.”¹⁷

Others say that it is “some combination of virtual and office-based work.”¹⁸

In 2021, Apple implemented what it is calling a hybrid model whereby all employees work at a central office Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, and spend the other two days working remotely. Employees spend their days at the office in meetings, attending client events, training, and socializing while their time at home is reserved for work that requires concentration (i.e., data analysis, reading) and video meetings.¹⁹

Choudhury noted that hybrid work can be conceptualized as either “majority remote” (fewer than 50 per cent of employees co-located in physical offices) or “25/25” (employees will spend only 25 per cent of their working hours in the office and at no point will the company have more than 25 per cent of workers co-located.)²⁰ Deloitte Canada has implemented a hybrid model called the “Next Normal,” which gives employees the flexibility to choose when they work at the office, client site, or at home. The Bank of Canada has indicated that it intends to use a hybrid model whereby a majority of the bank’s employees will have the ability to work remotely for up to 50 per cent of the time, balanced over a two-week period. McKinsey outlines how hybrid work can be best conceptualized as a continuum with six possible work structures under the “hybrid” label.²¹

But what exactly do experts and organizations mean when they say *some* days at the office and *some* days at home? Until we can answer this question more definitively, we must accept that we do not really know what employees or

17 Mortensen and Haas, “Making the Hybrid Workplace Fair.”

18 Bernstein and others, “The Implications of Working Without an Office.”

19 Barrero, Bloom, and Davis, “Don’t Force People to Come Back to the Office Full Time.”

20 Choudhury, “Our Work-From-Anywhere Future.”

21 Alexander, De Smet, and Mysore, “Reimagining the Postpandemic Workforce.”

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employers are considering when they use the term hybrid work. A hybrid model is more complicated than a fully remote one and can be implemented in a myriad of ways. Leaders are a long way from knowing how it will work, but employees want answers. The challenge moving forward is to find the right hybrid model for your organization and to make it work.²²

Hybrid Work Is Here to Stay

Research by the University of Chicago concludes that the shift to remote work will not end post-pandemic.²³ The authors identify four factors that they feel will lead to a permanent shift to remote and hybrid work arrangements:

1. Perceptions about working from home have improved since the start of the pandemic, with fewer people viewing remote work as “shirking from home.”
2. Workers and employers are now more open to the idea of remote work in one form or another. They support this claim by noting that “the pandemic drove a mass social experiment in which half of all paid hours were provided from home between May and October 2020 ... which helped workers and organizations overcome inertia related to the costs of experimentation, as well as inertia stemming from biased expectations about working from home.”²⁴

3. Data show that many firms and employees made significant investments in equipment and infrastructure to support working from home during the pandemic and are loath to see this outlay wasted.
4. Many employees have adjusted to work at home and do not want to return to the office even when it is safe to do so.

It took time for employees to get used to working from home, but many people have now established “routines” to govern their work from home (i.e., when they work, when they take breaks, how they communicate with others, how they can manage their time and energy) and most do not miss the daily commute.²⁵

Hybrid Work Arrangements Are Key for Talent Recruitment and Retention

A recent survey by Harvard Business Review (HBR) highlighted the need for firms to consider the tightness of the labour market and potential, and hiring and retention challenges when making decisions on how to structure how employees work.²⁶ It concluded its article by declaring that firms that order people back to work at the office risk an “exodus of talent” to other firms that offer hybrid work arrangements and encouraged businesses to recognize that “work from home is here to stay.”²⁷

22 Barrero, Bloom, and Davis, “Don’t Force People to Come Back to the Office Full Time.”

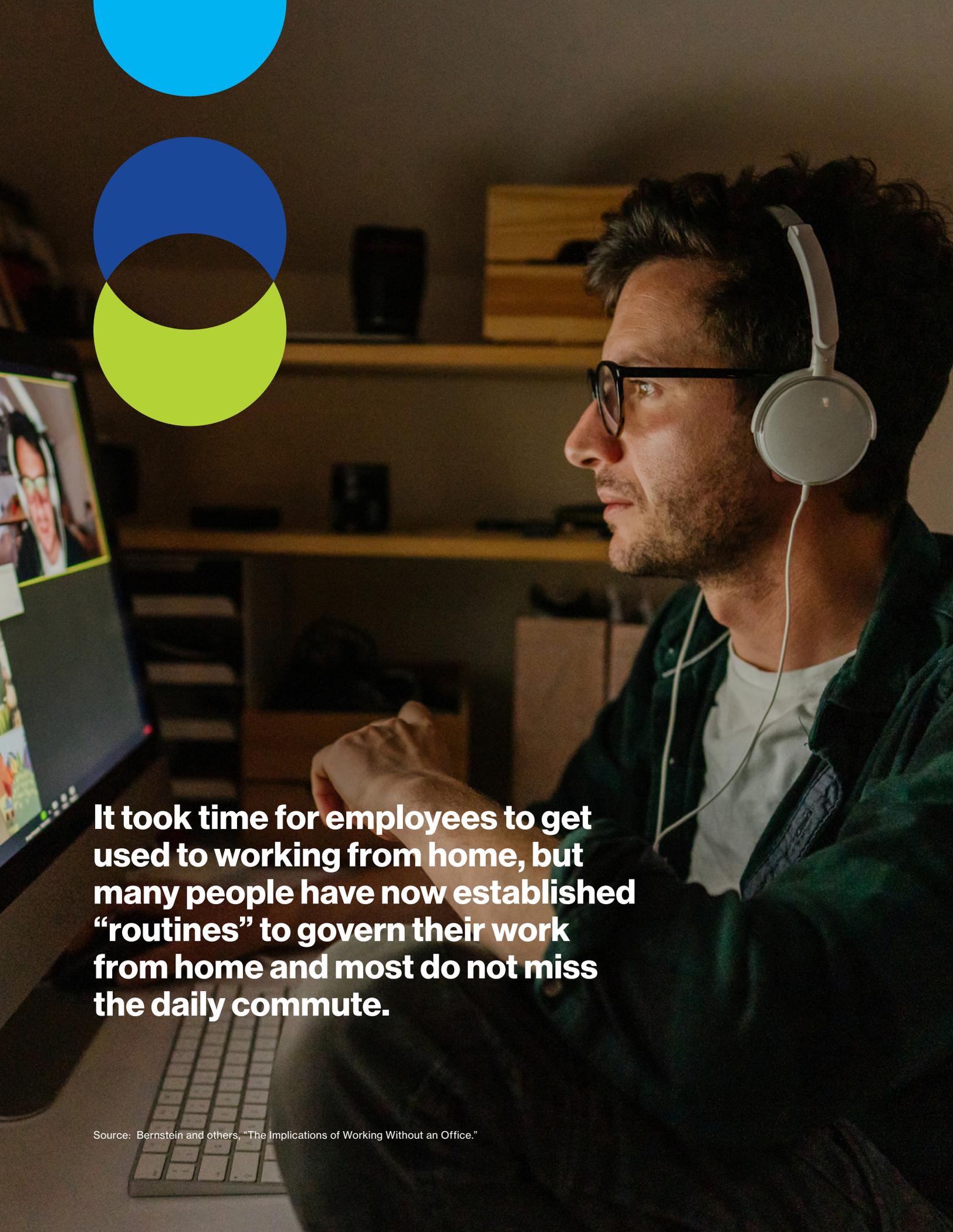
23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 2.

25 Bernstein and others, “The Implications of Working Without an Office.”

26 Barrero, Bloom, and Davis, “Don’t Force People to Come Back to the Office Full Time.”

27 Ibid., 5.



It took time for employees to get used to working from home, but many people have now established “routines” to govern their work from home and most do not miss the daily commute.

Source: Bernstein and others, “The Implications of Working Without an Office.”

Implementing Hybrid Work Arrangements—the Devil Is in the Details

Some argue that hybridity offers the benefits of remote working alongside the critical strengths of traditional, co-located work.²⁸ Conversely, others argue that the hybrid model “threatens to produce the worst rather than the best of both worlds” if challenges related to scheduling and task delegation are not addressed.²⁹

The benefits that many employees and employers experienced when all non-essential employees worked virtually may be lost when other work arrangements (i.e., hybrid and fully on-site models) are adapted.³⁰ Numerous challenges have been outlined with respect to resources and visibility that must be dealt with if hybrid work arrangements are going to work efficiently over the long term. (See Table 4.)

Not All Employees Have the Required Competencies to Thrive in a Hybrid World

Mortensen and Haas introduced the idea of hybrid competence in their article on the future of work. They pointed out that hybrid work requires employees to be ambidextrous—able to balance and navigate between and across two forms of work in a way that being fully co-located or fully remote does not.³¹ Employees with high levels of hybrid competence are strong at

relationship-building; willing to ask for, find, and claim resources they may not have easy access to; good at networking; and able to provide evidence of their trustworthiness when working virtually. Employees who do not have these skills may find themselves out of synch with colleagues and managers in a hybrid world and are better suited to fully on-site work.

The Impact of Hybrid Arrangements on Work–Life Balance

What impact will the multiple simultaneous disruptive changes in work triggered by the pandemic have on employees’ ability to balance work and family demands? The jury is still out with respect to this issue. Many work–family scholars argue that transitioning to fully remote or hybrid work arrangements will give employees increased flexibility to balance work and family life, while also freeing up time that was previously spent commuting to and from work. Others disagree, arguing that remote work will do little to help “essential workers” who are unable to access such arrangements or mothers of younger children who have reported higher levels of greater work–life conflict, stress, and burnout when engaged in remote work during the pandemic.^{32,33}

28 Mortensen and Haas, “Making the Hybrid Workplace Fair.”

29 Bernstein and others, “The Implications of Working Without an Office.”

30 Mortensen and Haas, “Making the Hybrid Workplace Fair.”

31 Ibid.

32 Dunatchik and others, “Gender, Parenting and the Rise of Remote Work During the Pandemic.”

33 Zhang, Yu, and Marin, “Exploring Public Sentiment on Enforced Remote Work During COVID-19.”

Table 4
Challenges Faced by Employers Implementing a Hybrid Work Arrangement

	Resources	Visibility
Office workers benefit from	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quicker access to technology and better access to the infrastructure needed to support their work and demonstrate their competence • Faster and easier access to information that is current and nuanced • Better access to emotional and task-related social support from peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credit for collective output more likely to be given to those who are at the office and more visible • Employees who are seen at work more likely come to mind when it is time to staff an important new project
Remote workers are challenged by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technological set-up and poor infrastructure (slow connections, inability to access certain resources from home, less sophisticated home office set-up) that makes it more difficult for employees to demonstrate their competence • Not being present for informal interactions, leaving them feeling out of the loop • Feeling more isolated and lacking the connections that provide social support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No-one sees the late nights or early mornings or how hard the employee is working to deliver on obligations

Sources: Mortensen and Haas.

Who Wants to Work a Hybrid Arrangement Post-Pandemic?

Analysis of data from the Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey determined that approximately half (4,948) of the respondents who had engaged in enforced work from home during the pandemic indicated that they wanted to continue some form of hybrid work arrangement moving forward. Additional analysis of the data revealed two very different but approximately equally sized groups of employees (i.e., clusters) within this sample of remote workers. Cluster one is made up of unionized employees who work mainly in technical/professional positions in the government, healthcare, or education sectors.

(See charts 4 and 5.) The second cluster includes managers, executives, and knowledge workers, half of whom work in the private sector. (See charts 6 and 7.)

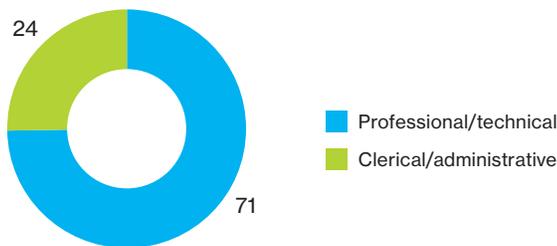
Once we identified these two clusters, we were able to predict how employees in each of these two groups wanted to split their work time between the home and the office post-pandemic with a reasonably high degree of certainty (approximately 80 per cent). More specifically, we could predict if employees wanted to work a **“high remote hybrid”** arrangement (i.e., more days at home than the office) or a **“low remote hybrid”** arrangement (i.e., more days at office than at home).

Employee’s Hybrid Work Preferences Depend on Sector, Job Type, and Unionization

Cluster One: Unionized Employees

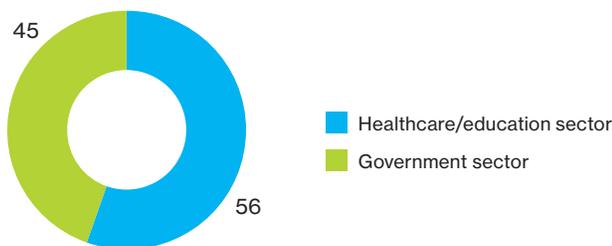
- All (100 per cent) of the employees in this cluster are unionized.
- The majority are knowledge workers (professional/technical) – one in four is in a clerical/administrative position.
- Employees work in healthcare, education, and government – none of this group was in the private sector.

Chart 4
Cluster One: Job Type
 (n = 2,547; percentage of employees)



Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.
 Source: 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey.

Chart 5
Cluster One: Sector
 (n = 2,547; percentage of employees)

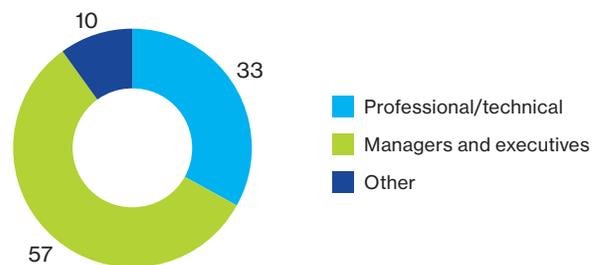


Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.
 Source: 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey.

Cluster Two: Non-Unionized Employees

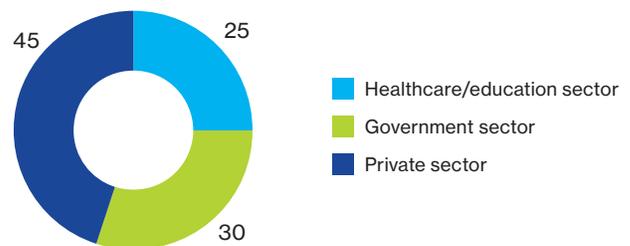
- None of the employees in this cluster is unionized.
- The majority of the employees in this group are managers and executives – the rest are mainly knowledge workers in professional/technical positions.
- Half of the employees in this group work in the private sector – the rest work in management and executive positions in healthcare, education, and government.

Chart 6
Cluster Two: Job Type
 (n = 2,401; percentage of employees)



Source: 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey.

Chart 7
Cluster Two: Sector
 (n = 2,401; percentage of employees)



Source: 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey.

Low Remote Hybrid Versus High Remote Hybrid Arrangements

How Do Employees Interpret “Split” Time Between Work and Home?

Data analysis determined that employees had two different sets of preferences when it comes to how they wanted to split their time between work and home.

- One group of employees want to spend more time at the office than at home (i.e., work from home one or two days a week and work from the office the rest of the time). In the discussion below we refer to this as a preference for a **“low remote hybrid”** arrangement.
- The other group of employees want to spend more time at home than at the office (work from the office one or two days a week and work from home the rest of the time). In the discussion below we refer to this as a preference for a **“high remote hybrid”** arrangement.

Source: 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey.



Key findings are described below. It should be noted that when presenting the results, we elected to show only those calculated with larger sample sizes, as some conditions had very few respondents. We use the labels “unionized employees” and “non-unionized employees” when describing the hybrid work preferences of respondents in these two different groups.

Hybrid Preferences of Unionized Employees

Sector Is Critically Important to the Hybrid Work Preferences of Unionized Employees

Sector is the most important predictor of the percentage of time unionized employees want to spend working from home versus on-site post-pandemic. Other predictors of importance to unionized employees include the amount of time they spent working from home during the pandemic and how often they worked from home before the pandemic. (See Chart 8.)

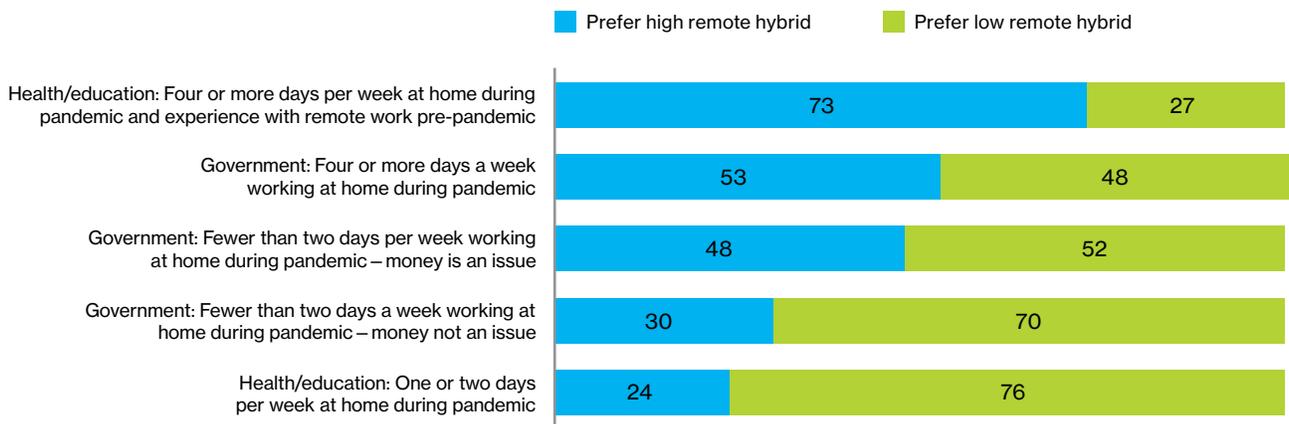
While we also noted an impact associated with financial status, whether or not the respondent had a home office, and gender, in most cases these additional variables did little to help the prediction beyond what we observed from analysis featuring experience with work at home before and during the pandemic.

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Chart 8

Hybrid Preferences of Unionized Employees

(n = 1,503; percentage of unionized employees)



Source: 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey.

Almost none of the unionized employees in the government or healthcare samples reported working between two and four days a week at home during the pandemic. And virtually no unionized employees in the healthcare or education sectors worked from home more than one day a week or more before the pandemic.

The following four conclusions can be drawn from our analysis:

1. Unionized government employees who spent most of their time working from home during the pandemic want to spend three or four days per week working from home post-pandemic (i.e., high remote hybrid arrangement).
2. The majority of unionized employees working in healthcare or education who spent more time working at the office than at home during the pandemic want to spend one or two days a week working from home post-pandemic (i.e., low remote hybrid arrangement).
3. The hybrid preferences of unionized employees working in healthcare or education who spent virtually all their time working from home during the pandemic **and** who also had experience working remotely pre-pandemic are split. Half of these employees expressed a preference for a low remote hybrid arrangement while the other half want a high remote hybrid arrangement.
4. Family finances impact the hybrid work preferences of unionized government workers who split their time between working at home (one or two days a week) and working at the office (three or four days a week) during the pandemic. More specifically, we note that the less money is perceived to be an issue in the employee’s family, the more likely the employee is to express a preference for a hybrid arrangement where they spend more of their time working from the office than at home. These findings imply that within the government sector, clerical and administrative staff want

to spend more of their time working from home than the office post-pandemic while their colleagues in better-paying professional and technical positions want the reverse—a hybrid arrangement where they spend more time at the office than in remote work.

In summary, with one notable exception, most unionized employees in the government, healthcare, and education sections would prefer to work a low remote hybrid arrangement (i.e., one or two days at home, the rest of the time at the office) post-pandemic. Decision-makers within the government sector do, however, need to recognize that most of their knowledge workers who worked remotely over the past year and a half want a high remote hybrid arrangement moving forward.

Hybrid Preferences of Non-Unionized Employees

Experience With Remote Work Before and During the Pandemic Key to Work Preferences

A number of conclusions with respect to the prediction of how often non-unionized employees (many of whom are in the private sector) want to work from home can be drawn from the data. First we note that the prediction of how often and employee wants to work from home depends on how much time that employee spent working from home during the pandemic. (See charts 9, 10, 11, and 12.)

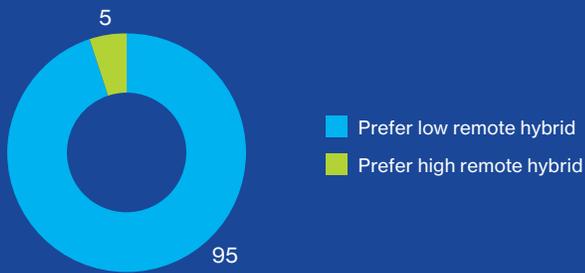
The analysis also shows that virtually all of the managers and executives in the sample who spent little time working from home during the pandemic prefer a low remote hybrid arrangement (i.e., one day at home, four days in the office) when the pandemic is over. In addition, virtually all of the professional employees in the non-unionized sample who often worked from home pre-pandemic and who spent almost all of their time working remotely during the pandemic want a high remote hybrid work structure post-pandemic (i.e., one day at the office, four days at home). It would appear from these data, that for non-unionized employees (many of whom work in the private sector), managers and executives have a very different vision for the future of work than do many of the professional people who report to them. This is unfortunate given the strong association between access to hybrid work arrangements and the ability to recruit and retain in-demand professionals post-pandemic.



Hybrid Preferences of Non-Unionized Employees

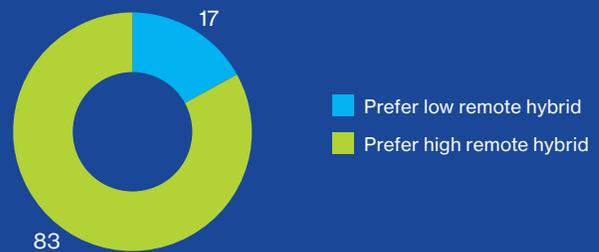
Preferences depend on how much time they spent working remotely during the pandemic and whether they were able to engage in remote work pre-pandemic.

Chart 9
One Day or Less Working at Home During Pandemic
(n = 272; percentage of non-unionized employees)



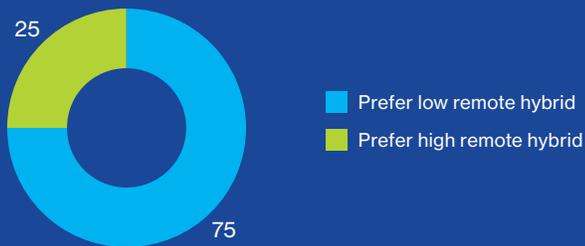
Source: 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey.

Chart 11
Four or Five Days Working at Home During Pandemic and Two or More Days a Week Remote Pre-Pandemic
(n = 190; percentage of non-unionized employees)



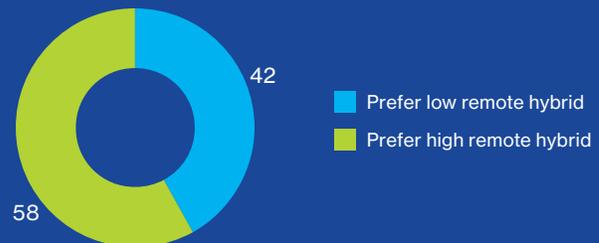
Source: 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey.

Chart 10
Two or Three Days Working at Home During Pandemic
(n = 256; percentage of non-unionized employees)



Source: 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey.

Chart 12
Four or Five Days Working at Home Pre-pandemic and Some Experience With Remote Work Pre-Pandemic
(n = 757; percentage of non-unionized employees)



Source: 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey.

Moving Forward— What Needs to Be Done to Make Hybrid Work?

“No playbook has been written that companies can follow moving forward—but it is starting to be written now.”³⁴

There is a world of possibilities with respect to how to structure future work—there is the office, there is remote work, and there is the myriad of structures described using the catch-all phrase “hybrid work.” The future will be increasingly digital, flexible, and remote-friendly.³⁵ To determine the model of work that is best for their organization, team leaders need to decide their place on the office–virtual continuum. This decision is by no means simple and depends on the leaders goals and objectives.³⁶

34 Bernstein and others, “The Implications of Working Without an Office,” 7.

35 Markarius, Larson, and Vroman, “What Is Your Organization’s Long Term Remote Work Strategy?”

36 Alexander, De Smet, and Mysore, “Reimagining the Postpandemic Workforce.”

Choose Your Model— Where on the Office–Virtual Continuum Do You Belong?

To determine the model of work that is best for your organization, team leaders need to consider the following:

- What are the goals or objectives of the firm’s leaders moving forward: Real estate costs? Employee productivity? Access to talent? Employees’ experiences at work?
- What jobs are best suited for remote work?
- Is remote work a privilege or a requirement? If it’s a privilege, what criteria should be used to decide who may work remotely?
- Can a flexible schedule include regular face time to build relationships and trust?
- What is the minimum expectation for on-site presence, if any?
- What protocols can you put in place to ensure that employees in the office are in synch with those working from home?
- How do you remain flexible given that plans can change at any moment?
- How do you help your employees manage stress levels through the transition?

Sources: Knight; Alexander and others.



This last section of this impact paper was developed to assist you in making decisions on how to best structure work in your organization/ team moving forward. Included in this section are numerous questions that must be addressed during the strategic planning process as well as specific challenges that decision-makers need to address to thrive in a world that has been irreversibly changed by the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁷

Determine How to Measure the Productivity of Employees Who Are Working Remotely

Hybrid work arrangements are likely to be offered to those employees who can get their work accomplished remotely—the vast majority of whom will be knowledge workers.³⁸ “Knowledge workers apply subjective judgment to tasks, decide what to do to when, and they can withhold effort by not fully engaging their brain without anyone noticing. This makes attempts to improve their productivity or measure it very difficult,” particularly if this worker is rarely physically co-located with his or her manager.³⁹ While an overview of how to measure the productivity of knowledge workers is beyond the scope of this impact paper, we caution executives that you **must** identify ways to evaluate knowledge workers on their outputs, not their inputs (which has traditionally been conceptualized as the hours employees put into work), for remote and hybrid work arrangements to be successful.

Update Company Policies to Fit the Needs of a Dispersed Workforce

Remote and hybrid work arrangements are likely to require companies to update their policies to fit the needs of a dispersed workforce. This is particularly true of human resources policies relating to recruitment, retention, onboarding, and training and development. Policy development will require experts to examine the nature of the work as well as the experience level of the workforce to determine who could plausibly be allowed to work remotely. Employees who are engaged in independent tasks that do not rely heavily on collaboration or coordination with others are ideally positioned for remote or hybrid work arrangements. New workers would benefit from an initial period in the office to build relationships and gain implicit knowledge that cannot be absorbed remotely. Finally, while individual employee preferences about how they would like their work to be structured should be taken into consideration during the strategic planning process, leaders need to make it clear that when decisions are made with respect to remote and hybrid work arrangements, the primary focus is on an employee’s ability to work effectively outside the office—not employee convenience.

37 Information included in this section comes from the following sources: Alexander and others, “What Employees Are Saying About the Future of Remote Work”; Bernstein and others, “The Implications of Working Without an Office”; Birkinshaw, Cohen, and Stach, “Knowledge Workers Are More Productive From Home”; Choudhury, “Our Work-From-Anywhere Future”; De Smet and others, “It’s Time for Leaders to Get Real About Hybrid”; Gavett, “Do We Really Need the Office?”; Knight, “How to Manage a Hybrid Team”; Makarius, Larson, and Vroman, “What Is Your Organization’s Long-Term Remote Work Strategy?”; Mortensen and Haas, “Making the Hybrid Workplace Fair”; Neeley, “15 Questions About Remote Work Answered”; Peppercorn, “How to Negotiate a Remote Work Arrangement”; Rothbard, “Building Work–Life Boundaries in the WFH Era.”

38 Peter Drucker coined the term “knowledge worker” to describe a person whose job involves handling or using information.

39 Birkinshaw, Cohen, and Stach, “Knowledge Workers Are More Productive From Home.”

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Communicating to employees about how work is to be structured post-COVID-19 is considered critical to the organization's ability to manage this change. Those employees who are recipients of detailed communications on what has been decided and what decisions are pending are five times more likely to report increased productivity than those who are "in the dark."⁴⁰ A detailed vision on how work will be structured post-pandemic has also been found to reduce employee anxiety and feelings of burnout. Our best advice, therefore, is for organizations to communicate with employees what they know as well as what they are uncertain about.

Organizations that opt to adopt a hybrid (or fully remote) work plan need to invest in communications technology and familiarize employees with asynchronous communication modes such as Slack and shared Google documents.

Modernize Organizational Norms for Meetings

Several questions have been posed regarding organizational norms with respect to meetings that need to be clarified before implementing hybrid work practices.⁴¹ Specifically, decision-makers need to determine the answers to these questions: Who needs to attend which meetings, for how long, and in what format? How can meetings be redesigned in a way that maximizes efficiency, accelerates effective decision-making, and builds connectivity and social cohesion? The answers to these questions are not clear, and companies will need to figure them out by trial and error. Current research outlining what types of work are better done in person than virtually and vice versa are summarized below. (See Table 5.)



40 Alexander and others, "What Employees Are Saying About the Future of Remote Work."

41 De Smet and others, "It's Time for Leaders to Get Real About Hybrid."

Table 5
When Should Hybrid Teams Members Meet in Person?

	Face-to-Face Communication – In-Person Meetings	Asynchronous Communication Channels
When:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When there is a need for creativity • When the issue(s) that people are dealing with are complex • When there are high levels of interdependence within the team • When people need to communicate difficult information to others • When the goal of the meeting is to build relationships or strengthen/repair connections among team members.⁴² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When sharing objective data and factual information
Why:	<p>“Face-to-face communications create significantly more opportunities for rich, informal interactions, emotional connection, and emergent ‘creative collision’ that can be the lifeblood of trust, collaboration, innovation, and culture.”⁴³</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives people time to process information and compose responses after some reflection and thought

Sources: Ringel; Alexander, De Smet, and Mysore.

Help Managers Adjust to the Challenges of Managing in a Hybrid Work Environment

Hybrid work arrangements are often dynamic and have variations across employees. For example, some people may work alternating days at home and at the office, significantly reducing how often they see co-workers and managers with opposite schedules.

McKinsey’s research has shown that managers have (and will continue) to bear the brunt of the shift to remote work. The challenges facing those who will be required to manage teams with remote and co-located employees include staying informed about what their direct reports are doing and facilitating their access to needed

resources (including their manager’s time). These issues are exacerbated when the manager is also working remotely.

Skills and behaviours that leaders and managers found to be effective when managing teams that were located primarily on-site may not translate to a hybrid virtual approach where they are interacting with some employees face-to-face and others virtually.⁴⁴ So, this begs the question—what should managers do differently moving forward? Our review of the literature uncovered numerous pieces of advice and suggestions that may help managers cope with the challenges they are likely to face managing in a hybrid world. Key suggestions compiled from a variety of sources are summarized below.⁴⁵ By defining and embracing some if not all of these new behaviours, managers should have greater success managing in a hybrid world.

42 Ringel, “When Do We Actually Need to Meet in Person?”

43 Alexander, De Smet, and Mysore, “Reimagining the Postpandemic Workforce,” 7.

44 Ibid.

45 Alexander, De Smet, and Mysore, “Reimagining the Postpandemic Workforce”; Alexander and others, “What Employees Are Saying About the Future of Remote Work”; Choudhury, “Our Work-From-Anywhere Future”; Knight, “How to Manage a Hybrid Team”; Makarius, Larson, and Vroman, “What Is Your Organization’s Long-Term Remote Work Strategy?”; Mortensen and Haas, “Making the Hybrid Workplace Fair”; Neeley, “15 Questions About Remote Work Answered”; Singer-Velush, Sharmon, and Anderson, “Microsoft Analyzed Data on Its Newly Remote Workforce”; Thomason, “Help Your Team Beat WFH Burnout”; Zhang, Yu, and Marin, “Exploring Public Sentiment on Enforced Remote Work During COVID-19.”

Advice for Managers of Hybrid Teams

What do managers need to do to be effective in a hybrid workplace? They need to:

- Clarify with team members how they would like to structure their workdays and workweeks.
- Create an accurate map of your team's hybridity configuration—who is working where and when—and communicate this to the team. Follow up with the team to identify the challenges they face with this configuration and discuss what you can do to overcome them.
- Offer flexible—not just remote—work arrangements. Be flexible about the hours that people work and the hours when people eat their lunch and when they take breaks.
- Agree on norms on how often team members should communicate and how people would prefer this communication to occur—video, phone, Slack, social media, face-to-face.
- Clarify with your team who should be copied on various types of messages, when recipients need to acknowledge receipt of a message, when communications technologies are to be shut off, acceptable response times, and how urgent requests are to be handled.
- Discuss with team members which tasks and decisions need to be completed synchronously and which do not. Plan for some asynchronous collaboration.
- Connect on a one-on-one basis with people on critical projects and with team members who need more contact. Make sure that team members are set up to do the work and feel connected to the workplace.
- Build a shared mindset within the team by setting team goals, providing shared information and context, clarifying the purpose of the team, and proactively trying to connect in-office and remote workers.
- Encourage frequent breaks to combat risk of fatigue or burnout.
- Observe when direct reports are behaving differently than they typically do (e.g., fewer e-mails, none or less engagement in group conversations, increased absenteeism), as such behavioural changes may be the early signs of burnout. Ask how you can support them.

Sources: Alexander, De Smet, and Mysore; Alexander and others; Choudhury; Knight; Makarius, Larson, and Vroman; Mortensen and Haas; Neeley; Singer-Velush, Sharmon, and Anderson; Thomason; Zhang, Yu, and Marin.



Fostering an Organizational Culture That Supports Hybrid Work

While the potential benefits that might be realized by introducing hybrid work arrangements are substantial, history shows that mixing virtual and on-site working might be a lot harder than it looks. As McKinsey pointed out, many of the challenges that organizations can expect to experience with hybrid work arrangements can be linked to organizational norms guiding how work should be done, how people are viewed by others, and how employees should interact with each other—in other words, by the organizational culture within the firm.⁴⁶

Many organizations have deeply ingrained “cultures of face time” in which hours at work are used as indicators of productivity and commitment and managers rely on a “line-of-sight” management style to ensure that work is advancing.⁴⁷ This type of culture needs to be shifted to one that supports remote work if one wants any type of hybrid work arrangement to be successful. Actions that companies can take to move away from a culture of face time are outlined below.

46 Alexander, De Smet, and Mysore, “Reimagining the Postpandemic Workforce.”

47 Zucker, “Breaking Free From a ‘9 to 5’ Culture.”

Moving Away From a Culture of Face Time

Organizations that wish to move away from the culture of face time need to:

- Start at the top—leadership must model working remotely. A lack of support from senior executives and managers can prevent meaningful cultural change from occurring.
- Focus on clear goals and outcomes to encourage efficiency, empowerment, and alignment. Instead of saying “Here is all the work that has to be done, say “Here are the outcomes we are looking for.”
- Reinforce the culture by:
 - scheduling relationship-building activities (e.g., town halls, lunches)
 - administering pulse check surveys to see how people are feeling
 - sending out intentional communications about key organizational programs and initiatives.
- Develop and use objective measures to evaluate employee productivity and contributions.
- Challenge the existing culture by answering the following questions:
 - How long should people take for lunch (or should they take a lunch)?
 - When should people be at their desk working?
 - How available should someone be outside of standard work hours?
 - What is the end of a typical workday?

Sources: Zucker; Makarius, Larson, and Vroman; Alexander and others.

Ignore Culture at Your Own Risk

Companies that do not factor the need to change the culture into their planning exercises risk having two organizational cultures emerge – the culture of face time and the culture of the disenfranchised who are working remotely.⁴⁸

The culture of face time is likely to dominate as those who work on-site will continue to benefit from the positive elements of co-location and in-person collaboration. The cultural rift can become more problematic if the pattern of promotions and job assignments favours those who are working on-site at the expense of those who are working remotely. When this occurs, remote workers start to feel isolated and marginalized and organizational performance deteriorates accordingly.

Cappelli at Wharton echoes this view, arguing that remote workers are at risk of getting left behind in organizations where hybrid arrangements are widely used if steps are not taken to address the organizational culture.⁴⁹ To avoid a bifurcated culture, managers and leaders should take care not to come into the office every day, as many employees will see this as a sign that the company is only tolerating virtual work. Instead, managers should make every effort to work remotely themselves, as this will signal that people do not need to be in the office to be productive or get ahead: “In a hybrid virtual world, seemingly trivial leadership decisions can have outside effect on the rest of the organization.”⁵⁰

Conclusions

Many organizations are currently exploring how they will structure work post-pandemic. Leadership teams are negotiating with a diversity of key stakeholders regarding the future of work in their sector. Managing a workforce in which some employees are co-located in an office and others are doing their jobs remotely presents a variety of challenges. People working remotely tend to want more flexibility and freedom in terms of when they do their work while at the same time those in the office want more structure. Compromise will be necessary but challenging to negotiate.

The issue is further complicated because employees’ needs and preferences with respect to how they want their work to be structured are (as demonstrated in this impact paper) highly varied. How do you manage all these different preferences while treating everyone fairly? Ultimately, you are left with a difficult problem to solve. The complexity of the situation, along with the repercussions that are likely to arise when leaders made poor choices, mean that it is unlikely there will be a “one and done” plan any time soon. Without a road map or playbook for what the “next normal” should look like, employees at all levels must collectively adopt a test-and-learn mindset – experimenting and piloting as individuals, teams, business units, offices, and organizations take new approaches to work. On a positive note, most organizations have the time they need to make the proactive and intentional types of changes needed to thrive in a post-pandemic world.

48 Alexander, De Smet, and Mysore, “Reimagining the Postpandemic Workforce.”

49 Cappelli, “In a Hybrid Office, Remote Workers Will Be Left Behind.”

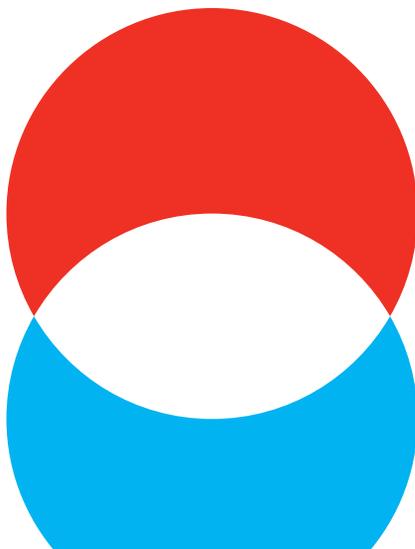
50 Alexander, De Smet, and Mysore, “Reimagining the Postpandemic Workforce,” 7.

This impact paper provides business leaders with key information to help them plan for the future. We suggest that they begin this journey by familiarizing themselves with the pros and cons of adopting on-site, remote, or hybrid work arrangements and deciding where they wish to position their organization on the virtual–office work continuum. Second, we suggest they use the findings from the Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey to help them predict how many of their employees will prefer each of the following types of work arrangements post-pandemic—full-time remote work, full-time at the office, low remote hybrid, and high remote hybrid. This analysis will help them better estimate their employees’ preferred work structures. Armed with these estimates, readers should use information in the final section of this impact paper to plan the transition back to work.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, leaders of organizations who have decided that hybrid work arrangements are in their future need to:

- make sure that they get the infrastructure right (i.e., make sure that people have access to the technology and software they need to do their work, connect to their team and colleagues);
- be clear that designing and implementing a new hybrid operating model will take years—employees are likely to have to return to work long before plans for hybrid work are finalized;
- be willing to start from scratch, question everything, and make intentional decisions with a clear, evidence-based rationale;
- conduct experiments and learn from the outcomes what works best for their organization and leaves them better positioned to meet their goals and objectives—however these have been defined.

And remember “it is going to be hard, but hard does not mean impossible.” Good luck.



Appendix A

Methodology

In 2020–21, Linda Duxbury, Chancellor’s Professor, Sprott School of Business, Carleton University, and Michael Halinski, Assistant Professor, Ted Rogers School of Management, Ryerson University, worked in partnership with The Conference Board of Canada to administer the 2020–2021 Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 survey. This research seeks answers to the following research question: Can we predict how employees would like their work to be structured post-COVID-19?

Data

To answer our research question, we drew data from our Employee Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 dataset. Our survey was administered to employees across Canada working in a variety of sectors (e.g., private, public, and not-for-profit sectors, healthcare, education, trades). The survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Survey questions were related to work–life issues (e.g., work and family demands, stress, coping techniques) and COVID-19 (e.g., impact of COVID-19 on work and family demands).

In total, 26,024 Canadian employees provided responses to our survey. In this impact paper, we focused only on responses from employees whose jobs can be done remotely post-COVID-19. The first step in our analysis, therefore, required us to remove from our dataset those respondents who were unlikely to be able to work remotely post-pandemic (e.g., nurses, public school teachers, those working in retail, production, construction). The analysis undertaken here focuses on the 10,103 respondents who worked in jobs that could be done remotely.

Two survey questions were critical to the analysis:

1. When COVID-19 is over, what percentage of the time would you like to work from home/remotely?
2. Which of the following statements best expresses your feelings about working from home:
 - a. I can hardly wait to get back to the office—I do not like working from home.
 - b. There are some advantages to work at home and some disadvantages. Post-COVID I would like to split my time between going into the office and working from home.
 - c. I love working from home and would like to continue with this arrangement post-COVID.

The first question was used to separate the sample into three sub-samples: (1) those wanting to work exclusively from home post-pandemic; (2) those wanting to work exclusively at the office post-pandemic; and (3) those who wanted some form of hybrid work arrangement post-pandemic. The second question was used in the decision tree analysis to classify respondents as described below.

Data analysis

Decision trees enable researchers to identify groups, discover relationships between those groups, and predict future events using statistical algorithms. In this study, we used decision trees to statistically identify the factors that are important in classifying respondents based on their response to the second question listed above.

The data analysis involved three steps. First, we combined samples of those wanting to work exclusively from home with those wanting to work exclusively from the office (i.e., the extreme cases), and used decision trees to classify these respondents into the two groups (question 2, respondents who selected responses “a” and “c”).

Second, we conducted cluster analysis on the remaining data (those who responded “b” to question 2) to help us identify subgroups within our sample of respondents who want to work in a hybrid arrangement. Cluster analysis (also called segmentation or taxonomy analysis) is an exploratory analysis that identifies structures within the data. Our cluster analysis identified two distinct clusters: Cluster 1 respondents were unionized workers, while Cluster 2 respondents were non-unionized workers.

Third, we used the responses to question 1 to calculate the distribution of those respondents who answered “b” to question 2. This analysis revealed that respondents had two different visions of hybrid work: low remote hybrid (wanted one to two days at home and the rest of the time at the office) and high remote hybrid (wanted one to two days at the office and the rest of the time at home). We then used decision trees to classify the preferences of respondents in Cluster 1 for the two forms of hybrid work and the preferences of respondents in Cluster 2 for the two forms of hybrid work.

Limitations

- The data were collected in phases two and three of the pandemic. Since that point in time, employees’ views may have changed regarding their desire to return to the office.
- All data are self-reported and, thus, susceptible to self-report bias.
- We were unable to triangulate our employee data with other data sources (e.g., employers, spouses). While we would have liked to investigate how employers (e.g., policies, leadership behaviour) or spouses (e.g., spousal work and family demands) may shape employees’ perceptions related to returning to work, our single-source data did not allow us to do so.



Appendix B

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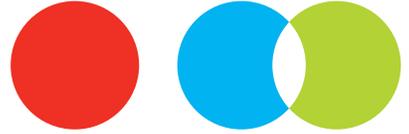
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