

How to define your hybrid work model

Three principles for effective communication and collaboration post-pandemic



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1. INTRODUCTION

Ford is working on it. Along with CitiGroup and Target and Twitter—plus Google and Microsoft.¹ And just about every organization in business a year after COVID-19 first required the work world to shelter in place. The “it,” of course, is a hybrid work model, one that accommodates employees working from the office and/or home without forcing “normal” business operations to skip a beat.

And if the past year is any indication, business hasn’t skipped a beat, at least not from abandoning traditional offices. In fact, according to a recent PWC study², remote work has worked: 83% of employers and 71% of employees think it’s been successful. Productivity by and large actually improved, thanks to employers:

- investing in laptops, infrastructure, and home office equipment;
- flexing work schedules to accommodate home child care;
- Introducing new benefits and training.

“If there’s one thing we’ve learned over the last 12 months, it is that a lot of our assumptions around work and what employees need has shifted,” according to Kiersten Robinson, Ford chief people and employee experiences officer³. Employees most need communication about post-COVID vision and policies, according to a McKinsey study⁴ that claims the clarity

boosts employee well-being and productivity. If your business hasn’t communicated your post-pandemic policies, though, you’re not alone—68% of McKinsey’s respondents claim their organization has either not or only vaguely communicated a vision for post-pandemic work.

Predictions about that vision abound. Andrew Hewitt, senior analyst at market research firm Forrester, expects about 60% of companies will offer a hybrid work model, while 30% of companies will be back in the office, and 10% will be fully remote.⁵ “We’ve been playing remote work on easy mode. We’ve all been doing the same thing, everybody has had equal access to information and promotions... It will get harder in 2021 with hybrid,” he claimed. A Gartner analyst agreed. “In a lot of ways, it’s going to be more disruptive than when we went all remote,” said Brian Kropp, vice president of research at Gartner.⁶

One aspect of hybrid work is certain—the need for communication and collaboration tools that support continued productivity and business operations. Over 70% of executives expect to raise spending in this area, according to the PWC study.⁷ But along with the technology, you’ll need a vision for how your business’s hybrid work model supports communication and collaboration. This white paper aims to help you define that.

1 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/03/30/hybrid-office-remote-work-citigroup-ford-target/>

2 <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/library/covid-19/us-remote-work-survey.html>

3 <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/03/17/ford-launching-flexible-wfh-plan-as-employees-return-this-summer.html>

4 <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/what-employees-are-saying-about-the-future-of-remote-work>

5 <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/09/success/remote-work-covid-pandemic-one-year-later/index.html>

6 <https://www.seattletimes.com/explore/careers/the-hybrid-office-is-here-to-stay-the-shift-could-be-more-disruptive-than-the-move-to-all-remote-work/>

7 <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/library/covid-19/us-remote-work-survey.html>

2. WHAT IS A HYBRID WORK MODEL?

Let's first define and examine the component parts of a hybrid work model—one that supports any and all combinations of worker types while ensuring no lapse in communication and collaboration either internally or with customers.

Worker types could include:

- in-office workers
- employees who choose to work at a remote location, like a coffee shop or library
- work-from-home (WFH) workers
- workers who are part-time at home and part-time in the office
- workers who are in transit between locations, either in a car or bus, train, etc.

Your company's breakdown of worker types will be different from that of companies in other industries, and the mix of worker types will constantly shift. Employees with shorter tenures may be required to start as in-office workers, while experienced veterans may find WFH makes them more productive. As employees change roles, their work location may shift, and as the pandemic evolves, there is no doubt worker types will evolve along with it.

POTENTIAL HYBRID WORK MODELS

USE THIS MODEL IF SEEKING TO MAXIMIZE...	FULLY ONSITE		PARTIALLY REMOTE		PRIMARILY REMOTE			
	Access to the worksite		Team collaboration and employee choice		Occasional collaboration with options to preserve employee choice and manage cyclical space needs			
CUSTOM OPTIONS	Always onsite	A/B	Anchor and flex	Fixed in and out	Periodic	Seasonal	Fully fluid	Never onsite
	Fully onsite	Onsite for rotating A/B teams	Onsite "anchor" days with team; choice of onsite vs. offsite for "flex" days	Some fixed days onsite; others must be offsite	Majority remote, but onsite once per month or quarter	Onsite vs. offsite depending on season	Working location left to employee	No option for onsite work

Source: <https://www.bcg.com/en-us/publications/2021/identifying-postpandemic-work-model>

3. THE NEW NORMAL

Planning your hybrid work model should be more conscious and thoughtful than simply extending WFH flexibility while allowing some workers back in the office. After all, for all its benefits, remote work has its downsides—especially during COVID shutdown, many employees experienced feeling anxious, depressed, and listless.

27%

Reported an inability to unplug⁸

15%

Pointed to loneliness and distractions at home as the biggest struggles⁸

Bottom line, if 2020 was the year of forced rethinking about where and how we worked, 2021 can be the year of proactively designing a hybrid work model that minimizes remote work risks and delivers greater purpose to in-office activities. And that hybrid work model needs to prioritize communication among the two constituents who matter most—your customers and your employees:

- Employees need to be able to reach and collaborate with each other—their productivity and ability to work together relies on their ability to communicate. When asked what changed the most about working remotely, 41% pointed to how they communicate and collaborate.⁹
- Customers need to be able to reach your business and vice versa—at the core of any customer experience is the ability to engage with your business, whether via your website, email, phone, or safely in person.

HOW MANY WAYS CAN YOU SAY “HYBRID”?

You'll find no shortage of articles on returning to the hybrid workplace. And that's to be expected. But there's a complicated maze of phrases in the media used to describe a simple concept:

- Flexible work
- Local hybrid
- Remote-friendly hybrid
- Remote first

The sheer volume of articles and phrases just points to the fact that, in an era of uncertainty, getting the next phase of working right is a high priority for most businesses.

⁸ <https://buffer.com/2021-state-of-remote-work>

⁹ Ibid

A blurred background image of three business professionals walking in a modern office hallway with orange walls. A woman in a blue blazer is on the left, talking on a phone. A man in a dark suit is in the center, smiling and holding a phone. A woman in a dark blazer is on the right, carrying a folder and talking on a phone.

4. THE KEYS TO HYBRID SUCCESS

Designing communication and collaboration for your hybrid work model shouldn't be difficult, and won't be if you keep three principles at the forefront:

Flexibility

Business at the Center of All Communications

Crazy Simple

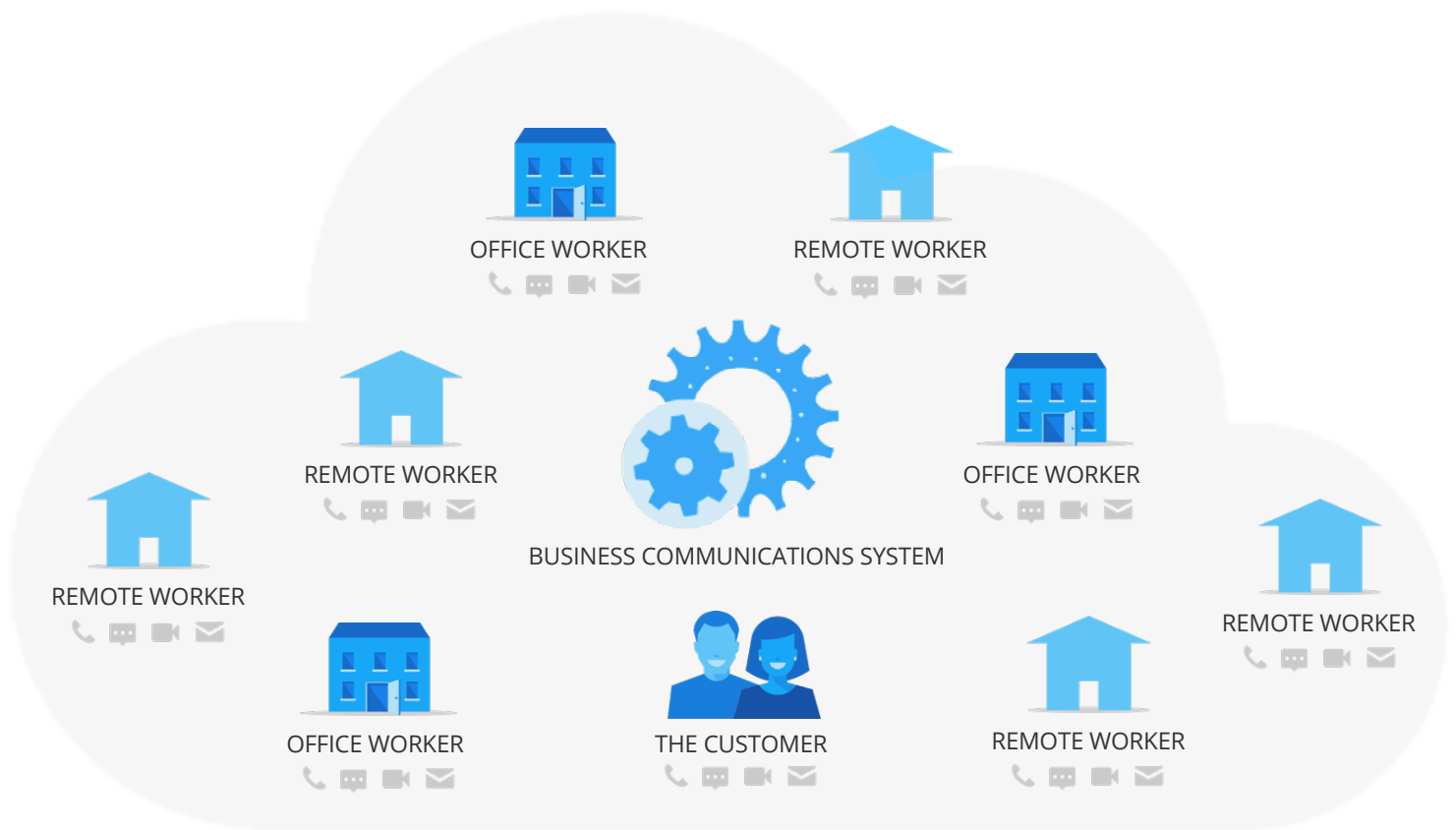


FLEXIBILITY

If COVID-19 taught us anything, it's flexibility, but that's a vague concept. Applied to communication and collaboration, it means a hybrid work model requires your solution to stretch and expand, ebb and flow as the model takes shape and changes. Hybrid work isn't a static concept—by nature it implies that where people work will change over time, so your communication solution has to embody elasticity.

Think about it—your hybrid work model has customers, employees (or worker types), and lots of locations. None of that should challenge or trip up your communication and collaboration technology. Customers should be able to reach your employees in the same way—with the same phone number, whether they answer the call from St. Louis or Colorado Springs or from the library or train or from inside the office. And vice versa. Employees should be able to quickly and seamlessly collaborate with each other regardless of their physical location. Elastic communications technology doesn't care about “where.” Location of either employee or customer is a nonissue. And it needs to be a central feature of your hybrid work model.

Elastic communication also supports the unpredictability of a hybrid work model—when employees decide to move to a rural location where your business doesn't have an office, customers and employees can still reach that employee without awareness of the move.



KEEP BUSINESS AT THE CENTER

This next principle is one of the most important. When your hybrid work model communication technology puts your business at the center of all communication and collaboration, customers reach you the same way they always have. Your business phone number doesn't change, nor do your employees' business phone numbers. Employees should never have to share personal phone numbers, because their business phone travels wherever they go. And all communication should be unified in the cloud such that you or your IT leader can measure, secure, and manage them regardless of location.

Management capabilities should let you add phone lines for unexpected growth or remove them when no longer needed. You should enjoy one console to manage permissions, set up hunt groups, set up auto attendants, and more, regardless of employee and customer locations. Government and healthcare businesses will also want to ensure their hybrid communication solution is compliant with industry standards. Small businesses that could be crippled with litigation will want to ensure their hybrid communication solution lets them archive data. And businesses with call centers—again, wherever they are—will want to continue analyzing performance and coaching external-facing sales team members. With an integrated, cloud-native unified communication and collaboration platform, your hybrid work model can ensure all conversations travel through the business.

WHEN SECURITY MATTERS

Not only did COVID send most workers into more than a year of remote working, but it also spawned an increase in cyberattacks, according to one study¹⁰. In a Threatpost survey, a full 40% of companies reported a spike in cybercrime as they enabled remote working.

As you plan your hybrid work model and choose its cloud communication solution, make sure security is a priority. As workers transit between home, office, or another remote location, they increase the risk of mobile device theft. Look for communication solutions that feature:

- **Secure Data and Access:** emails, voicemail messages, and document files should all be encrypted in storage and while being transmitted. Plus, login access to the applications on both mobile devices and PCs should have single sign-on protection with passwords stored server-side.
- **Server and Client-Side Backups:** multiple copies of email and document files should be regularly backed up on both the cloud server and the client device.
- **Endpoint Protection:** PCs, mobile phones and other devices, and voice services should have multi-factor authentication and strong password protection, and mobile devices should be remote wipe-able in the event of theft.
- **Identity Protection:** You should be able to manage, enable, and disable services for workers, and access controls should allow for granular sharing permission. Password management should also be very granular, based on user role.

- **Infrastructure Security:** Your cloud provider should have multi-tenant platform security as well as secure their network and their physical infrastructure. Look for employee background checks, redundant internet service providers, secure email gateways, and an experienced security team. Data centers should be audited regularly and should be compliant with pertinent regulations.
- **Privacy Protections:** Look for comprehensive privacy policies and compliance with data protection standards. Your provider must protect your customer data in the same way your business does.
- **Security Management:** Ask your provider how they collect logs, whether they have automated monitoring and alerting in the event of a breach, if they keep audit trails and event logs and what their internal security practices are.

Hybrid work models will be complicated enough without cybercrime threatening their success—or your business operations. Secure cloud communication should be worry free, and a top priority as your business moves into the next era of work.

¹⁰ <https://threatpost.com/coronavirus-poll-cyberattacks-work-from-home/153958/>



CRAZY SIMPLE

Planning a hybrid work model in the midst of a global pandemic is complicated enough. Your hybrid communication and collaboration solution shouldn't be. Frankly, we believe communication should be a nonissue just like physical location. It should be so crazy simple and easy that it just works—it requires none of your attention at all.

Spend your time thinking about office desk setups and plexiglass dividers, or whether and when employees need to wear masks. Review the COVID-19 Employer Information for Office Buildings¹¹ that the Centers for Disease Control added to its website in early April. Focus on your vision for the culture-building activities you'll plan for in-office gatherings, or how you'll train managers to support that culture as they grow and challenge their teams. That should be the complicated part of your hybrid work model. Not the communication technology.

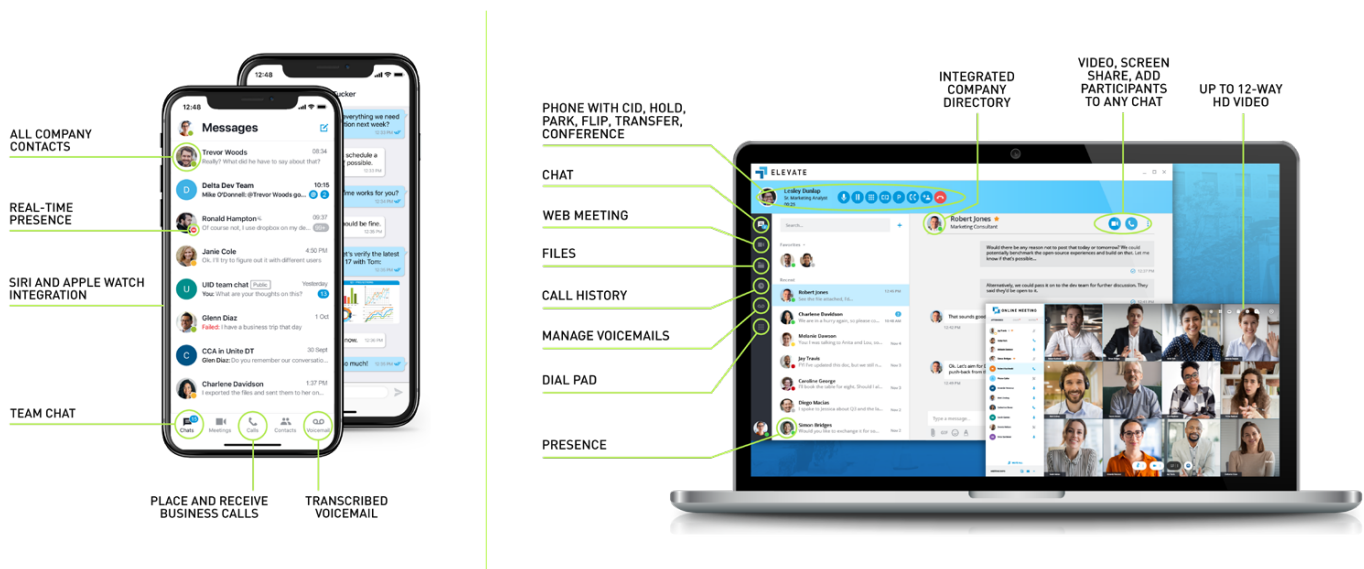
Let's illustrate a bit further what we mean by "crazy simple," at least for your communication and collaboration technology. One suite of tools should deliver all that you need—a business phone system with desktop and mobile applications, the ability to conduct virtual meetings with video, contact center solutions, security, chat capability, even secure and easy file storage and email or productivity applications. A central, single management platform and a service record that makes deployment super easy. Uptime so good, so reliable, that the system rarely goes down. One system that delivers on whatever communication need your employees may have, wherever they are. For instance, one system should let them:

- Participate in a group meeting via video conference
- Chat with a colleague to get a quick answer to a question
- Present to customers via a webinar

¹¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/office-buildings.html#:~:text=CDC%20recommends%20wearing%20a%20cloth,spreading%20it%20to%20others>

- Discuss final points for the deal from the phone in their office, the phone in their car, the phone at home, or wherever their laptop or PC happens to be located
- Share and collaborate over a document with colleagues securely
- Respond to a high volume of customer calls via a contact center
- Or send and receive emails with links to a recorded video conference or that include automatically transcribed notes

AND THAT'S ELEVATE



Flexible, business-centric, simple communication and collaboration technology is what Elevate offers. A cloud-based unified communication and collaboration platform, Elevate enables users to be more productive and share ideas and content through a single system, regardless of location. Elevate seamlessly integrates all your communication tools—desktop and mobile phones and computers voice; video conferencing, and chat; secure file sharing, email, and contact center—into one easily manageable solution oriented around your hybrid work model and its employee's needs and workstyles.

QUESTIONS? CONTACT US TODAY!

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