QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY IRC

How Do You Determine the Best Work Model for Your Organization or Team?

Re-Evaluating Fully Remote, Hybrid or Working from the Office Models

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Introduction

Many organizations that implemented post-COVID-19 work models (remote, hybrid or in office) should be evaluating their choice regularly, to ensure that they retain their competitive advantage and continue to attract the right human resources. It is my recommendation that a review be conducted after the first six months to ensure that the model continues to support the strategic direction of the organization.

61% of Canadian organizations have moved to a hybrid work environment because this was the preferred model by many employees.[1] We know that a hybrid work environment assisted with employee engagement and made some jobs more appealing to individuals who preferred to work from home some of the time.

Fully remote work (or working from home) provides organizations with a greater geographical human resources pool to harness. Remote workers can live far away from the office, and as long as their IT systems are intact and they have high speed internet, they are productive. There is a very limited requirement to return to the office for work.[2]

When re-evaluating your model, organizations need to review several steps to determine the best model prior to making any changes. These steps must consider the organizational philosophy/ culture, rules of work including collective agreements and employee relations, and ongoing productivity.

1. Determine the Organization's Work Philosophy

The first step in reviewing the type of work model to implement is determining the organization's philosophy and what it values. A hybrid or remote model will be successful if employees feel valued and trusted, and this must be woven throughout any model chosen.

Core hours of work need to be considered, particularly for hybrid or remote options. What is most important for productivity – working on the clock (9 am to 5 pm), getting the job completed at anytime of the day, or a combination of both? Core hours e.g., 10 am to 2 pm or 9

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[1] Benefits Canada Staff. (2022, August 3). *61% of Canadian employers using Hybrid Work Model: Survey*. Benefits Canada.com. Retrieved November 23, 2022, from https://www.benefitscanada.com/news/bencan/61-of-canadian-employers-using-hybrid-work-model-survey/

[2] Wigert, B. (2022, March 15). *The future of hybrid work: 5 key questions answered with data*. Gallup.com. Retrieved November 23, 2022, from https://www.gallup.com/workplace/390632/future-hybrid-work-key-questions-answered-data.aspx

am to 5 pm need to be established if this is important to the organization. Some people feel that they are more productive at 3 am, whereas others like the structure of a 9 am to 5 pm day.

Consideration must also be given to the amount of time in the office, and the type of work that different people do. Is there work that needs to be performed in person, in the office? Can all work be performed remotely? Does a combination of both work best? In some situations, people can work two days remotely, and the remaining three days in the office. Some organizations split employees, some working in the office for two weeks and then switching. Other employees do not like working remotely, and this must also be a consideration when developing a plan.

One method to determine the best approach is to survey staff and managers to gather their input. This is key in developing a successful sustainable model. This can be formally conducted through surveys or focus groups.

2. Determining the Impact to Operational and Capital Costs

Operational costs remain quite high with the traditional office setting. By utilizing a hybrid model, some of the organizational footprint can be reduced, however, space is still required for the days those employees are required on site. IT investments may also be required to ensure that data is secure, and staff are productive without down-time because of their systems.

Utilizing a fully remote workforce enables significant savings with the reduction of on-site workspace. Some space will be required for occasional face-to-face meetings, but it would be very limited. Like the hybrid system, investments in IT would also be required.

Below is a comparison of the different models of work and the influence on the organizational footprint and operational costs.

Hybrid:
- Requires less footprint than in-person return
- Requires "hoteling" space and a plan for use
- Increased IT costs

Fully Remote:
- Significantly reduced footprint therefore significant savings in rental space/office furniture
- Increased IT costs
- Improved access to talent (since you are not limited by physical location)

Working in the Office Full-time:
- No savings with office furniture or footprint

3. Productivity and Measurement of Productivity

There are many mechanisms to ensure productivity when everyone is working in the office. Some of the systems include direct observation, metrics that assist in determining key performance indicators, software to measure productivity and face-to-face meetings with managers.

Below are a few thoughts to consider when moving to a different type of hybrid or remote structure.

Hybrid:
- Requires formal plan for measurement, possibly software
- Assumed to be more productive than in-office based on personal preferences[3]
- Productive employees in office will continue to be productive at home

Fully Remote:
- Requires formal plan for measurement, possibly software
- Limited supervisor ability to supervise and coach – innovative solutions required
- On average, people work a full hour more than in-office or hybrid[4]
- More effective than hybrid[5]
- Productive employees in office will continue to be productive at home

Working in the Office Full-time:
- Traditional measures of productivity can continue to be used

4. Organizational Culture

The organizational culture which further supports employee engagement and productivity is an enabler that cannot be ignored. A hybrid model is very appealing for many workers, because they have the benefit of working from both home and the office on a pre-determined schedule. This creates savings in both commuting and childcare expenses (before and after school) as well as satisfaction that you are part of a team and can meet in-person with your supervisor for coaching.

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[3] Zwets, B. (2022, June 8). *Hybrid workers are more productive and engaged*. Techzine Europe. Retrieved November 21, 2022, from https://www.techzine.eu/news/applications/80560/hybrid-workers-are-more-productive-and-engaged/#:~:text=Hybrid%20employees%20ar

[4] Data is from the Owl Labs report "State of Remote Work 2021"; cited in Forbes in "In-office vs. remote vs. hybrid work two years later: The impact on employee efficiency" and "3 new studies end debate over effectiveness of hybrid and remote work."

[5] Ibid.

In a fully remote setting, employees realize the benefits of personal savings, but miss out in knowing team members on a personal basis. In addition, coaching is not completed in person. Remote settings allow individuals to apply for positions that may not be otherwise available to them because of the distance of the commute.

Listed below are a few considerations when re-evaluating the current models and the impact on employee engagement.

Hybrid:
- Empowering for many
- Flexibility with schedule
- Reduced turnover
- Reduced cost to employee with decreased commute time and other costs associated with attending work in person
- 74% of C-suite workers report career advancement because of hybrid work[6]
- 73% of millennials self-reported that their career growth has benefited from working in a hybrid environment[7]
- Gen Z noted that they are less likely to say their personal career growth has advanced[8]

Fully Remote:
- Loneliness and poorer work life balance noted[9]
- Increased burnout is possible
- Greater opportunity for employees living in rural areas
- Reduced cost to employee with decreased travel time and other costs associated with attending work in person
- Supports hiring of marginalized groups who may not be living in the geographic area of the organization

Working in the Office Full-time:
- Risk of flight because of lack of organizational flexibility
- 70% of Gen Z want access to an office all or some of the time[10]

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[6] Ibid

[7] Ibid.

[8] Kelly, J. (2022, June 9). *What different generations think about hybrid work*. Forbes. Retrieved November 21, 2022, from https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2022/06/07/what-different-generations-think-about-hybrid-work/?sh=2620b37c4890

[9] Data is from the Owl Labs report "State of Remote Work 2021"; cited in Forbes in "In-office vs. remote vs. hybrid work two years later: The impact on employee efficiency" and "3 new studies end debate over effectiveness of hybrid and remote work."

[10] Rozentals, A. (2022, March 18). *Council post: In-office vs. remote vs. hybrid work two years later: The impact on employee efficiency*. Forbes. Retrieved November 21, 2022, from https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2022/03/18/in-office-vs-remote-vs-hybrid-work-two-years-later-the-impact-on-employee-efficiency/

5. Policy

During implementation of model changes that may impact employees, supporting policies are important to ensure everyone knows the rules of work. Managing expectations is a challenge for managers and policies need to be clear, inclusive and concise.

Coupled with well documented position descriptions, supporting policies also prevent role and responsibility confusion. Outlined below are a few policy considerations to reflect upon during your re-evaluation.

Hybrid:
- Days required on site
- Core hours of work
- IT support – is the employee responsible for bringing IT equipment on site for repair?
- Cyber risks and data breach

Fully Remote:
- Cost of hotel and travel when employees are required to come on site – who covers the cost?
- Core hours of work
  IT support – how do computers/devices get upgrades and repairs? Are they shipped?

Working in the Office Full-time:
- Employee requests to change into a hybrid or fully remote model

Conclusion

There are many considerations that must be made prior to implementing a hybrid or fully remote workplace and re-evaluating the chosen model is also important to ensure ongoing alignment with the strategic directions. By taking the time and assessing what the organization requires prior to implementing, it will ensure better success, and re-evaluation will assist in the model's sustainability. Re-evaluation should be ongoing and using six-month evaluation period provides you with an opportunity to refine your work model. The post-pandemic period is a great time to assess and take the time to complete a thorough review.

About the Author

Elizabeth Vosburgh, CHRE, is a human resources executive and consultant, who has served as Senior Vice President, with more than 30 years experience. Through her efforts, she has steered the planning and execution of numerous and varied projects. She has a proven track record and is passionate about promoting and inspiring a workplace culture that supports positive staff engagement.

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