

*Build Your Hybrid Workforce*

**CRAFTING EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE  
AND REIMAGINING CULTURES**



How to Enable and Empower Your  
Employees for Hybrid Success

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# THE FUTURE OF WORK

For years, most companies operated with the belief that in-person interactions were required for sustainable productivity and effective collaboration. Without a physical office bringing people together it was thought culture couldn't be built or maintained, communication would suffer, and innovation would stall.

Now we are all facing the new reality that COVID has taught us: people can live and work from anywhere. And by and large, many employees embrace this new normal. Pew Research<sup>1</sup> reports that 56% of the surveyed adults who are working from home all or most of the time say "it has been very easy for them to have the technology and equipment they need to do their job."

Further, 80% of remote workers stated meeting deadlines has been very or somewhat easy since going remote. Indeed, work has changed, and our attitudes towards it have changed even more fundamentally.

Of course, it's not all or nothing, remote or in-person, when it comes to work structure. If endless Zoom meetings have taught us anything, it's that face-to-face interactions are nice too. Which is why a recent Work Trend Index<sup>2</sup> survey of 31,000+ full-time employees across 31 countries shows that 67% of us want more in-person work than we had during the pandemic but 73% want more flexible options than pre-COVID. And companies who want to keep and acquire talent are prepared to accommodate.

COVID-19 has ushered in a new vision for what the future of work looks like.

## Hybrid work is inevitable

Business leaders are on the brink of major updates to accommodate what employees want: the best of both worlds.



**66%**

of leaders say their company is considering redesigning office space for hybrid work



**73%**

of employees want flexible remote work options to stay



**67%**

of employees want more in-person work or collaboration post-pandemic

The Work Trend Index survey was conducted by an independent research firm, Edelman Data x Intelligence, among 31,092 full-time employed or self-employed workers across 31 markets between January 12, 2021 to January 25, 2021.

The advantages of a hybrid work model offer exciting possibilities, but it's not an easy transition for companies to harness the positives and overcome the greater challenges that emerge with this shift.

Especially when the change has been so abrupt:

*"Without an existential shock like the COVID-19 pandemic, you would have needed change management programs to convince and motivate people to make the desired changes. In this case, there is no time to consider any alternatives; no time to resist. You wake up and the new way of working simply exists – there is no alternative and there is no option to return to how things were. This amount of change – had it been gradual – would have taken decades."*

*–Professor Benjamin Laker, Professor of Leadership, Henley Business School*

Now that we've (somewhat) settled into this new paradigm, one thing we've noticed with BurnAlong clients is that they've gone from trying to clone the office digitally to re-imagining new ways of working. As we begin to grapple with the permanency of a hybrid model, this innovation is only going to increase. As Barbara Humpton, the CEO of Siemens U.S.A. puts it:

*"The interesting thing about the [hybrid COVID] transformation for us was at the beginning everyone was looking to do the digital equivalent of what they were doing before. It is only now that people are asking, 'What can we do differently?'"*

The thought of all the new solutions, tools, and mechanisms we will discover in the coming months is exciting! But before we jump into the future, it's helpful to understand where we are and what the reality of the situation looks like for our diverse workforces.

Thus the rest of this guide will give you two things.

- **First**, we'll cover employee and employer attitudes to remote and hybrid work and show you the research to really unpack how different segments of your employee base (gender, age, seniority, family status) have experienced work changes.
- **Second**, we'll look at practical solutions you can adopt to maintain, even strengthen, teams and culture while reimagining the "office."

Let's dive in.

# HYBRID WORK IS HERE TO STAY

Let's start with the obvious. A lot of people like the flexibility of working from home. There are definitely downsides but the flexibility of not having a commute, working near your pets, reduced childcare costs, and less strict dress codes is appealing (Bloomberg).<sup>3</sup>

That attitude and desire is true across all company sizes. As Cisco's CEO, Chuck Robbins put it:

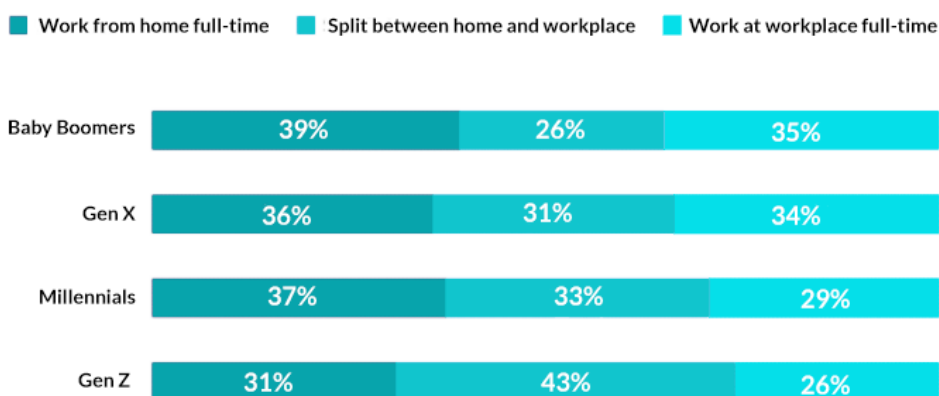
*"We are definitely going to be hybrid. We think that is really the wave of the future. It's not going to be a free for all. It's going to be a structured, hybrid, workplace where we are going to try and take all the good things we learned during the pandemic, and couple that with all the great things we knew with what we used to call normal."*

—Chuck Robbins, CEO, Cisco

## The data says, people like working from home.

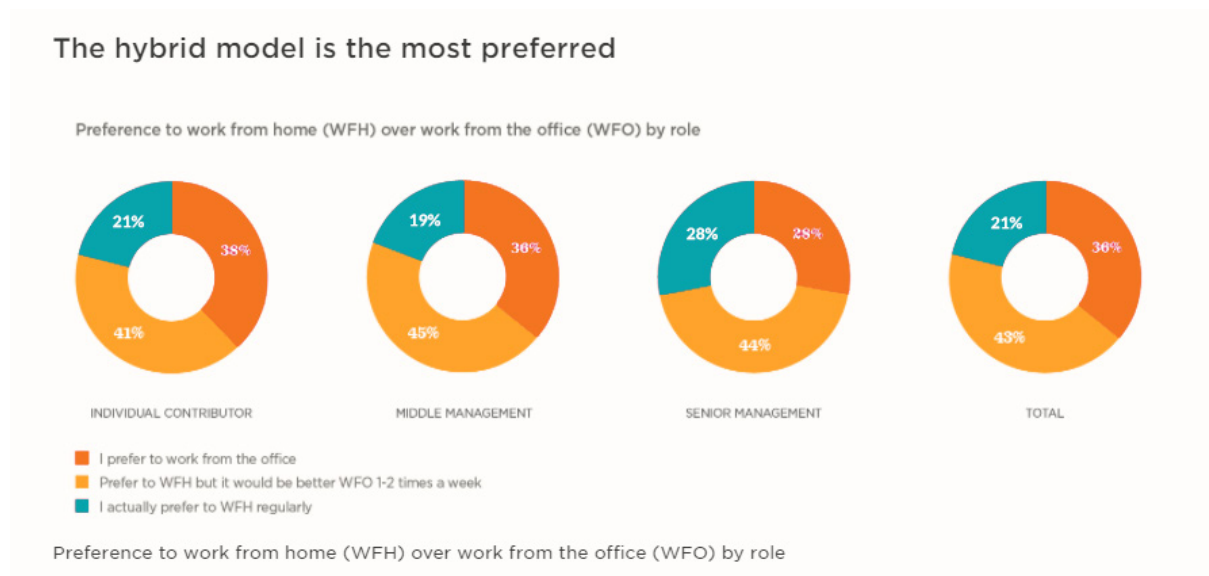
The Salesforce 2020 Global people survey shows the vast majority of people's ideal work arrangements are either fully remote or hybrid. And this is true across all generations:

### Most Appealing Work Scenario



An even more recent PWC survey on remote work reinforces that finding. Interestingly enough, middle management, which has been cited as bearing the brunt of communication challenges in white collar jobs during COVID-19, was still overwhelmingly in favor of remote or hybrid. Only 36% stated they preferred to work from the office full time.

As companies are implementing the next phases of returning to the office, Bloomberg<sup>4</sup> has found that employees are actually quitting if their employers are limiting their options or forcing a return to a fully in-person environment. Though not without challenges, many are now prioritizing working for an employer who offers flexibility in schedules and the ability to work remotely (or with a hybrid schedule).



Brian Elliot<sup>5</sup> started a Slack forum that surveyed over 10,000 people and landed on the compelling results that employees do indeed want not just flexibility but they are willing to find a new job to find it:

- 76% of those surveyed want flexibility on where they work
- 93% want flexibility on when they work
- 56% are open to new job opportunities that may provide them more flexibility
- 21% are likely to jump ship in order to get that flexibility

“Remote work and hybrid are here to stay.”

- Sara Sutton, CEO of FlexJobs

## Hybrid or Remote will be the future because companies are on board too

But it's not just employees driving the change. Companies are realizing they can save money, recruit talent from anywhere, and not suffer the long-feared drop in productivity after all. A Capgemini report found that:

- 75% of orgs expect 30%+ of employees to be working remotely
- 25% of orgs expect 70%+ of staff to work remote

Further, 53% of Fortune 500 CEOs say two or three days per week in the office is the optimal set-up with 39% saying four or five days.

So while the pendulum will swing back a little from the pandemic realities, it's not coming back all the way to where it was:

*"Nearly three in ten organizations expect more than 70% of their employees to be working remotely in the next 2-3 years."*

Source: Capgemini Research Institute, Remote workforce survey, September - October 2020, N=500 Executives

It's not just that companies can't put the genie back in the bottle. Before the pandemic, the major fear of remote work stemmed from a perception that there would be a massive loss of productivity and drop in employee engagement coming from a lack of in-office interaction. But the COVID-19 remote work experiment has alleviated the bulk of those concerns. Study after study has shown productivity has actually increased at most workplaces.

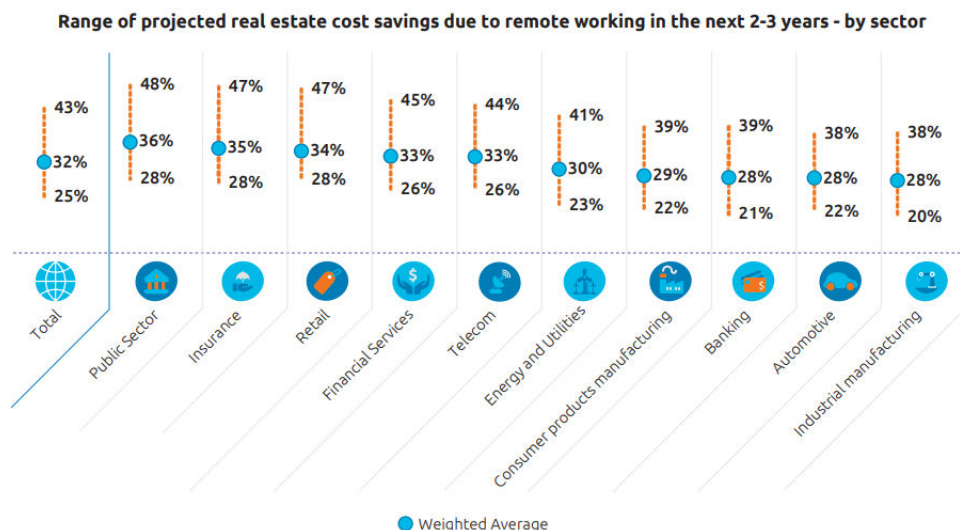
For example, one Gallup survey covering the early part of the pandemic finds that the share of American employees “engaged” at work reached its highest level since data began being collected in 2000. Another survey, by Quantum Workplace, a software firm, takes the views of thousands of people and finds that the share of “highly engaged” employees leapt during the pandemic. “Covid-19 may be the best thing that ever happened to employee engagement”, argues Josh Bersin, an analyst involved in the survey.

In fact, COVID may have created a moment of enlightenment around the academic research. As HBR so poignantly stated back in 2017:<sup>6</sup>

*"Not one study suggests that working in an office eight hours a day, five days a week maximizes employee productivity, satisfaction, or performance. In fact, any data that exists on work in an office reveals that most employees aren't engaged, waste a lot of time in the office not working, and that employee underperformance persists despite the omnipresence of management. Even worse, the direct costs of maintaining the traditional office-based workplace are high. CBRE estimates that the typical company in the U.S. spends upward of \$12,000 per employee per year for office space. It's hard to find a return-on-investment case for office space, and much harder still to find any company that makes a compelling one."*

It is clear companies find the connection between higher productivity and cost savings compelling.

**Organizations expect substantial real estate cost savings from remote working**

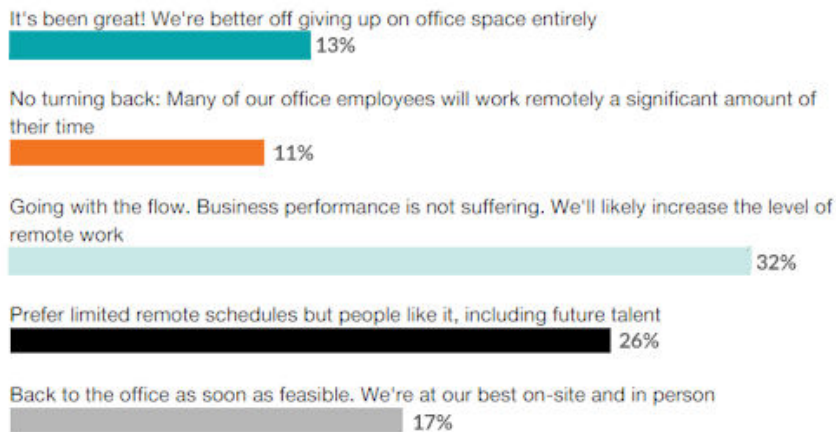


*"70% of organizations believe that the productivity gains of remote working are sustainable beyond the pandemic."*

Source: Capgemini Research Institute, Remote workforce survey, September - October 2020, N=500 Organizations

That's not to say all companies appreciate this new reality. According to PWC<sup>7</sup> there's a pretty wide dispersion of those who embrace-the-change, resign themselves to it, or fly in the face of the trend:

**By design or default, most US companies are heading toward a hybrid office workweek**



**"The 9-to-5 workday is dead."**

- Brent Hyder, Salesforce's chief people officer

A major source of tension here that's worth pointing out is the degree to which remote/flex work is desired by employees vs. employers. José Maria Barrero, Nick Bloom, and Steven Davis,<sup>8</sup> three economists, surveyed thousands of Americans and concluded that:

- **After the pandemic**, the average employee would like to work from home nearly half the time.
- **Employers** are less keen, but their expectation that a fifth of working time will be spent at home (one day a week) is a big change from the previous norm.

Wherever you land, however, one thing is clear. Hybrid work is now an undeniable fact.

# THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF REMOTE AND HYBRID WORK

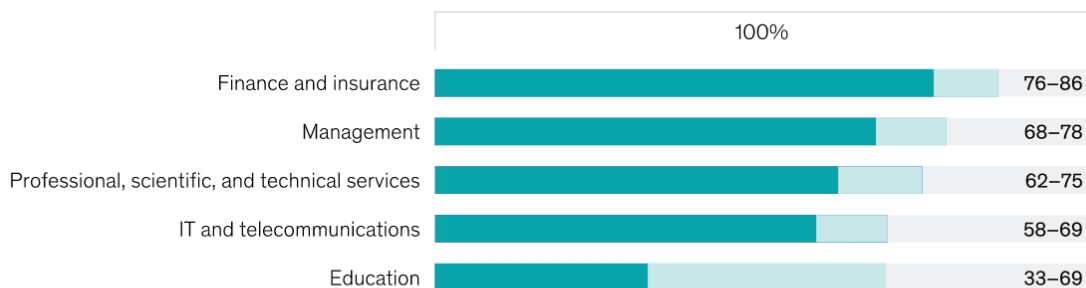
So if our starting point is the fact that remote and hybrid work is desired by most employees and has unique advantages to companies too it makes sense to think really carefully about how these work arrangements function for people. After all, if we're going to design an optimal culture we need to know what pain points need to be addressed.

As you might expect, certain industries are more suited for remote work given the functions required. The knowledge industry, in particular, is best suited for remote and hybrid work as noted in McKinsey's research with finance, management, technical services, IT, and education leading the way with effective potential.

## The finance, management, professional services, and information sectors have the highest potential for remote work.

**Potential share of time spent working remotely by sector in the United States, %**

■ Effective potential (no productivity loss) ■ Theoretical maximum

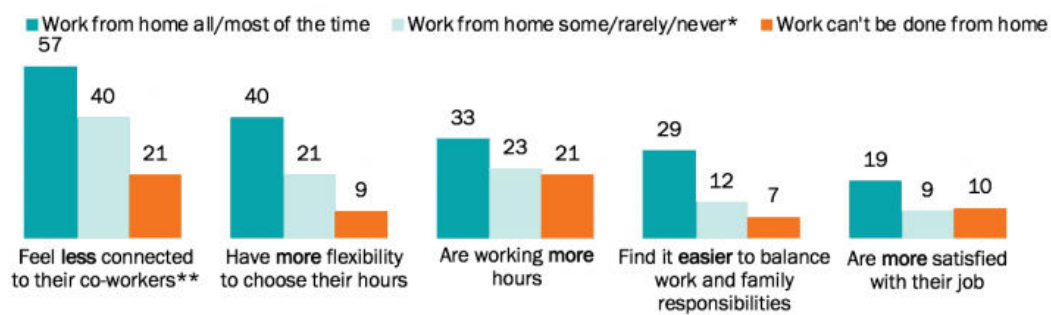


Note: The theoretical maximum includes all activities not requiring physical presence on-site; the effective potential includes only those activities that can be done remotely without losing effectiveness. Model based on more than 2,000 activities across more than 800 occupations.  
Source: McKinsey Global Institute analysis

**McKinsey  
& Company**

### Four-in-ten adults working from home all or most of the time say they have more flexibility to choose their hours now than before the coronavirus outbreak

Among employed adults who are working in the same job as before the coronavirus outbreak, % saying that, compared with before the coronavirus outbreak, they ...



\* Based on those who say that, for the most part, the responsibilities of their job can be done from home.  
 \*\* This question was not asked of those who are self-employed and do not have any employees.  
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 13-19, 2020.  
 "How the Coronavirus Outbreak Has – and Hasn't – Changed the Way Americans Work"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

It turns out, perhaps somewhat predictably, that there are serious differences in how we've experienced these transitions depending on race, age, marital status and more (note: we are talking here about people who still have full-time employment and not the unfortunate realities so many others faced in losing their livelihoods during the pandemic).

Here are some key pain points that need to be addressed by business leaders when considering the appropriate work model for your organization.

## Generational Differences

Let's start with generational differences. 60% of Gen Z<sup>9</sup> (aged 18 to 25) survey respondents shared they were “merely surviving or flat-out struggling right now.” There is speculation here that this might be due to how many of them are new in their careers and single, thus, without a built-in support system they can easily access when working fully remotely. Isolation is impacting younger, and much older, generations thus impacting productivity and emotional wellness.

Also, younger generations are experiencing burnout at a slightly higher rate than their older colleagues. Capbemini found that ~61% of employees aged 31-40 were experiencing burnout with the longer hours many are working in a fully remote environment.

As we look back to lessons learned with a fully remote set-up and look forward into the hybrid reality, it is important that business leaders keep the generational differences at the forefront. Unique offerings to address the core pain points of your workforce, specific to their generation, will not only help you retain talent but attract top talent that is looking for employer-support in the future of work.

## Gender Inequality

The pandemic has had an uneven impact on genders; similarly, the shift to remote work--which was a direct result of the pandemic--has also impacted genders in disproportionate ways. Over the course of the last year, we have seen that remote work can exacerbate existing inequalities seen during in-person work.

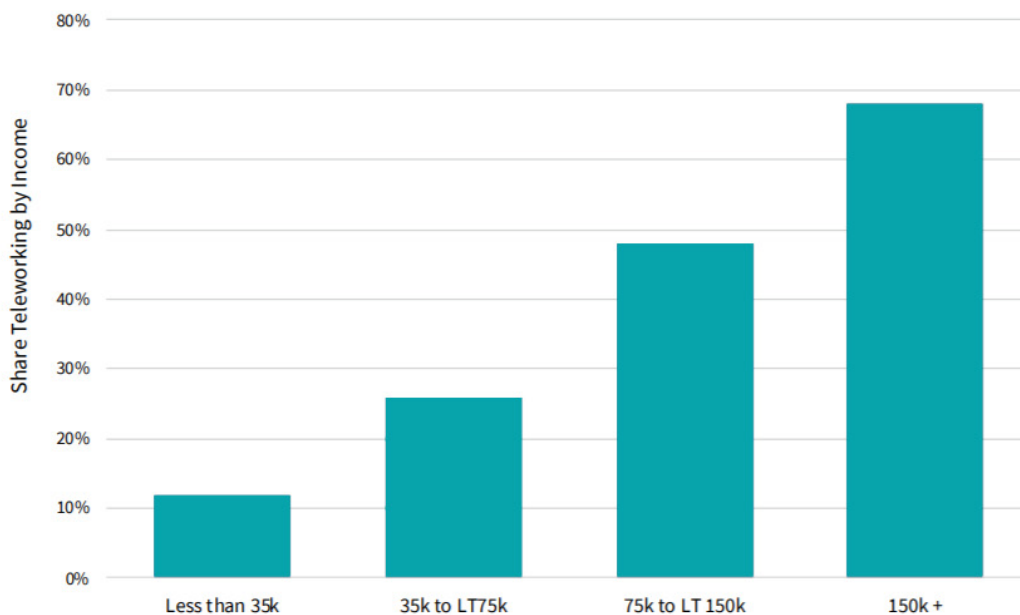
According to Harvard Business Review,<sup>10</sup> even with Zoom and other virtual options, it is challenging to create casual collisions that occur in the office and lead to networking with decision makers (who are still mostly male). This can have an impact on career advancement, inclusion in highly visible projects, and developing allies and sponsors with male colleagues.

While there is much discussion on how remote work might actually level the playing field, it is important that companies pay close attention to the rate of promotion, retention of female employees, and for signs of burnout across their workforce to ensure gender differences are addressed before they impact your workforce.

## Race or Socioeconomic Differences

There is a clear contrast across classes and socioeconomic statuses when it comes to remote work. Pew Research<sup>11</sup> indicates that 76% of employed adults with a lower income indicated their job responsibilities could not be done from home--compared to 63% of respondents with middle incomes and 44% with upper incomes.

Diving into the numbers, the UCLA Center for Neighborhood Knowledge<sup>12</sup> broke down the switch to telework by specific income levels. They find a direct correlation between higher incomes and the ability to move to fully remote work with 68% of those making \$150k+ making the switch; nearly 50% who made between \$75k-\$150k were able to move to remote. This is in stark contrast to only 12% of those with household incomes below \$35k being able to work remotely.



Source: UCLA Center for Neighborhood Knowledge

In the same UCLA<sup>13</sup> study, they found that nearly six months into the pandemic, 34% of White workers were able to switch to working remotely with 44% of Asian workers. However, Black and Hispanic workers were able to shift to remote work at 26% and 27%, respectively.

Additionally, Pew data shows that there are also differences in who was able to work remotely across education levels. 62% of respondents with a bachelor’s degree or more indicated their work could be done from home, however, only 23% responded similarly without a four-year college degree.

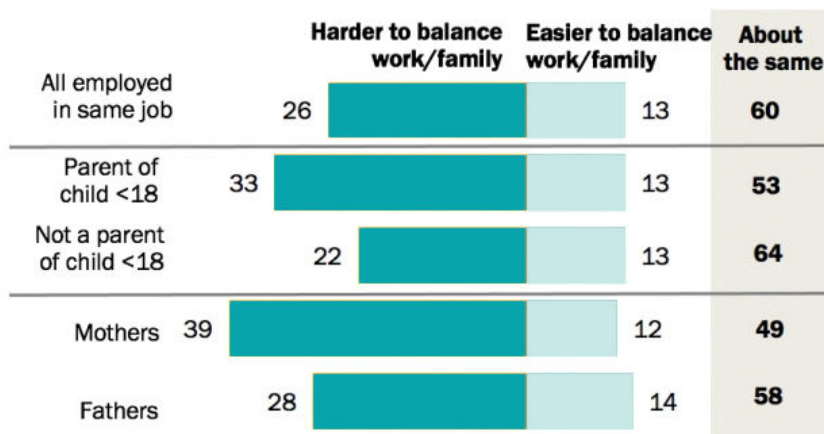
## Family vs. Single Dynamics

For those with families, the burden of balancing work and family is a challenge. Capgemini found that employees, particularly those in the “young parent” age group of 31-40 felt more burned out in a remote environment.

Pew Research found that working mothers indicated increasing challenges in managing work and family responsibilities. Plus, a Work Trend<sup>14</sup> study by Microsoft found that working mothers indicated 56% were struggling or merely surviving.

### About four-in-ten working mothers say it's harder now to balance work and family responsibilities

Among employed adults who are working in the same job as before the coronavirus outbreak, % saying that, compared with before the outbreak, it is ...



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 13-19, 2020.

"How the Coronavirus Outbreak Has - and Hasn't - Changed the Way Americans Work"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

For those who are married, whether they have a family or not, an Edelman study<sup>15</sup> found that 46% of respondents who were married reported they were thriving in a remote environment versus 33% of those who were single. These findings indicate the social support of partners plays a significant role in the overall wellness and productivity of employees who are working remotely.

These core differences and inequalities speak to much larger societal issues that the pandemic only exacerbated. As companies develop new policies to protect their diverse workforces, it is vital to consider the varying needs and challenges core demographics are experiencing with remote work. While it might seem the “easy” answer is to encourage everyone to return to the office, it might not be a viable option for all of your employees. Therefore, tread lightly and conscientiously as you forge a way forward for your organization.

## WHAT CHANGED WITH REMOTE WORK?

Beyond the core differences experienced across diverse workforces, there were other more logistical and operational challenges. While companies innovated overnight to accommodate the shift to remote work, we are now faced with the opportunity to reimagine some of these same challenges for hybrid work, with employees both at home and in-person.

Here, we will look at what got harder in fully remote work before diving in to how to enable success, learning from the pitfalls and triumphs of 2020 remote work, with hybrid models.

# Communication

With the copious amounts of technology available to support communication efforts, both real-time and asynchronous, there were a plethora of options available to organizations. However, not everyone seemed to connect with the new formats and the shift from in-person connection--and it showed in their productivity according to Hibob<sup>16</sup> data.

## Job performance while WFH and communication with your manager

	No, I have a lot of trouble getting in touch with my manager	I can sometimes get in touch with my manager when needed	Yes, I can often get in touch with my manager when needed	I can always get in touch with my manager when needed	Total
I am not able to perform my job well at home	16%	30%	31%	23%	100%
I am able to perform my job sufficiently at home	4%	18%	52%	25%	100%
I am able to go above and beyond while working from home	2%	9%	31%	58%	100%
All respondents	7%	20%	43%	30%	100%

A cross-tab between communication with manager and WFH productivity

Twenty-five percent of men indicated remote work made it harder for them to communicate compared to 17% of women in a recent Flexjobs study.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, 21% of male respondents indicated that it was harder for them to manage relationships with coworkers in a remote setting (compared to 16% of women).

A key reason for the communication gap is that video calls can limit the amount of physical queues or body language that in-person interactions facilitate. While every person is different, as business leaders, it is vital to consider the balance of asynchronous communication<sup>18</sup> and in-person/virtual connections. In addition, new best practices have emerged to improve communication and limit the constant barrage of notifications with time blocking for concentrated work and setting boundaries<sup>19</sup> with actual team agreements.

## Networking

Without in-person networking events, sponsored happy hours, and professional conferences, networking with colleagues and fellow professionals was made more difficult with a fully remote model. Bizjournals<sup>20</sup> found that, in general, men also seem to benefit more from “workplace schmoozing and social interactions.”

While events of all kinds pivoted to fully virtual models, it was still--different. This difference was not always a bad thing. For people of color, Harvard Business Review<sup>21</sup> (HBR) found that professional networking was a challenge even in pre-pandemic times. With biases, misconceptions, and overarching ignorance of their colleagues, professionals of color had a greater risk of being isolated, particularly at networking events. (image source: HBR)

HBR<sup>22</sup> research found that remote work opened up new opportunities for networking such as engagement in employee resource groups, community service, participation in learning communities and their channels, and investing in relationships that had to get sidelined with the rush of commuting, work projects, and in-person events.

## Onboarding

Likely, anyone reading this knows the struggles of onboarding others, or being onboarded, in a fully remote environment, first-hand. It likely induces some groans, rolling eyes, and the anticipation of returning to in-person onboarding again.

First days of work are a big deal for HR leaders and new employees. It is their chance to meet their teams, make good impressions, learn about office culture, and get excited about the benefits your organization has to offer. However, with the sudden switch to everything being remote, HR had to suddenly pivot to providing technology, paperwork, and more to new employees who were.

**“All of our companies are facing challenges on the talent side, because today you can work for anybody, anywhere.”**

- Karimah Es Sabar, CEO, Quark Venture

## Stewarding Culture

With a fully remote model in 2020 for much of the knowledge economy, there was a palpable struggle to carry culture into the new environment. Without the visual cues of cultural signposts throughout the office, it is much harder to recall what the pillars of team culture even were. It also revealed that many companies relied on what MIT professor Edgar Schein<sup>23</sup> calls “artifacts” or visible symbols of culture rather than the root of what they mean for corporate culture.

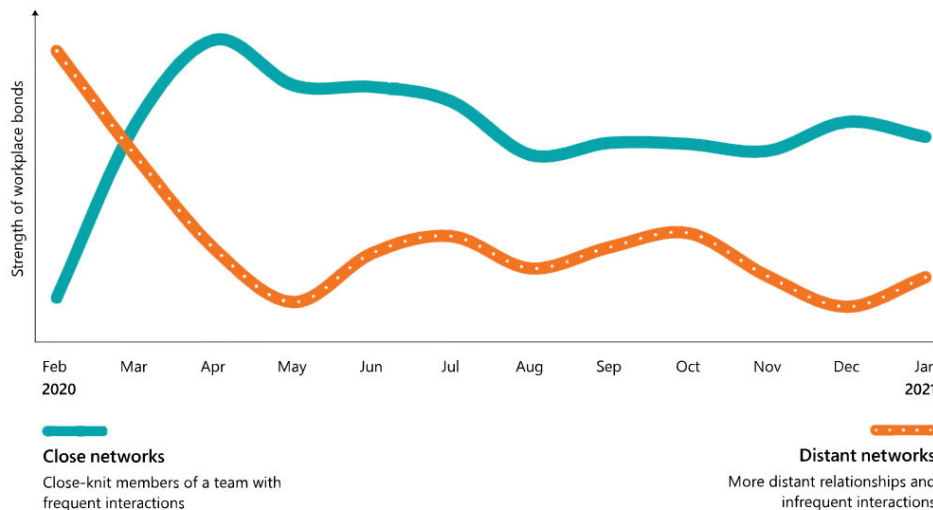
Without ping pong tables in the break room [signaling playful creativity], unlimited snacks in the kitchen [signaling a commitment to fuel innovation], or sponsored happy hours or team lunches [signaling a push to foster relationships and healthy work/life balance], the remote environment challenged business leaders to get creative in how they stewarded culture.

Translating the core elements of your corporate culture into a remote, or hybrid, environment is important in the coming months. Even if the expression of those cultural “artifacts” varies based on where the employee is located, it is important that all the core tenets are supported in your workflows, activities, interactions, and deliverables.

## Collaboration

Without having office mates to sidle up next to and ask a quick question, or the ability to jump into a brainstorming session you overhear, collaboration changed with fully remote work.

Aggregated email and meeting data,<sup>24</sup> through Outlook and Microsoft Teams from February 2020-January 2021 showed that teams became more siloed during the pandemic. There was an increase in working with direct teams but there was a notable decrease in the interactions with outside teams and networks, as shown in the image below.<sup>25</sup>



Analysis of an aggregated 122 billion email interactions and 2.3 billion meeting interactions in Microsoft Teams and Outlook across industries and countries around the world. This visualization is based on aggregated data, without personal or organization-identifying information.

Capgemini data<sup>26</sup> supports this finding with 58% of respondents stating that remote work hindered tasks that require collaboration and 57% sharing they thrive in an interpersonal setting--clearly something remote work and the pandemic made challenging.

# ENABLING THE SUCCESS OF HYBRID WORK

Hybrid work, simply put, allows for employees to work both in-person and remotely. This flexibility meets the demands of both employers and employees but it is important to approach the future of work with the lessons of fully remote working at the forefront.

In order to ensure maximum productivity, regardless of where your employees are working from, there are a few key items to consider.

## Create a Safe Office Environment

The approach to a safe and accessible workplace has shifted with the pandemic. Where the emphasis was previously on open-concept workspaces, connected conference rooms, and the like, there is a need to focus now on air quality and flow to limit the transmission of airborne illnesses.

*“Every CEO has to think about making their organization a place where people feel safe coming and talking about what they need now. We can be more flexible. It's a different kind of resource management. We need to challenge ourselves to make new deals.”*

*—Heather Kernahan, CEO, North America, Hotwire*

However, according to Arizent,<sup>27</sup> only 17% of employers indicated that employee safety was a top concern with rethinking office space. They also found that most surveyed employers did not plan on offering vaccinations through work nor require vaccination records to return to the office.

The Cleveland Clinic<sup>28</sup> recommends enforcing social distancing when possible with the additional suggestions of:

- **Limiting the number of employees** who can be in the building at a given time (flexible or staggered schedules help)
- **Increase physical space** between employees with reducing the use of elevators and creating one-flow traffic through hallways (you get the added bonus of some extra steps with these suggestions too)
- **Staggering break times** and limiting the number of in-person meetings

Everyone will have a different definition of safety and level of comfort as you start transitioning into using physical office space again. For the knowledge economy, with the overwhelming opportunity to adapt, consider what accommodations can be made to ensure the safety of your workforce and, at the very least, maintain open communication with teams so they are aware of what is, or isn't, being provided.

## Ensure Strong Team Culture

*If you don't have employees who are engaged and connected, as you all I'm sure know better than I do, there's no chance you'll have customers who are happy with the interaction."*

*—Alan Colberg, CEO, Assurant*

One of the best ways to create a resilient workforce is to invest in a strong corporate, or team, culture. MIT Sloan<sup>29</sup> recommends that you spotlight your team culture by making it visible, talked about, and a cornerstone for all your activities. Ann Swidler,<sup>30</sup> a sociologist, says that a “tool kit” of cultural habits and practices means that your employees know how and when to apply your cultural tenets in everyday life.

To have a healthy and impactful culture, it is important that your cultural values translate from rote memory to showing up in common practices and workflows. This also means that your culture cannot remain static and through healthy conflict resolution and internal discussion, your teams can adapt and grow whether in-person or fully remote. To thrive in this new environment, it is important that you reinvent rituals to build trust with your workforce, wherever they are working from.

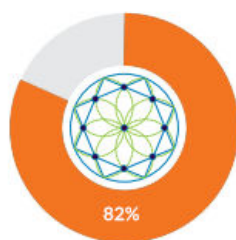
Additionally, leadership can curate moments of connection across the organization to bolster teams, foster relationships, and nurture team culture. Key methods include:

### 1: Recreating “casual collisions:”

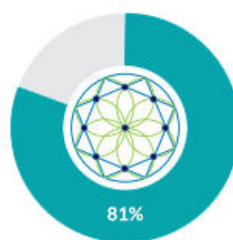
With a hybrid workforce, it is challenging to recreate those watercooler moments, or the quick chats in hallways, or the random brainstorming that happens when colleagues get sidetracked during . These casual collisions are both the result, and the catalyst, of shared space, a common interest, or a recurring pain point.

The data shows that people who are part of a close-knit team tend to feel more motivated, happier, and connected to the company’s mission. It isn’t a far leap to imagine the quality of work produced by such teams also trends to be higher caliber, too.

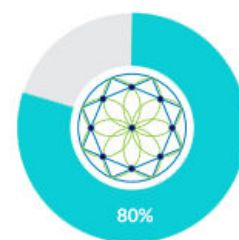
Of the employees who felt part of close-knit team...



Feel more motivated to work in the current work environment



Feel happier in their work in the current organization



Feel more connected with organization's purpose

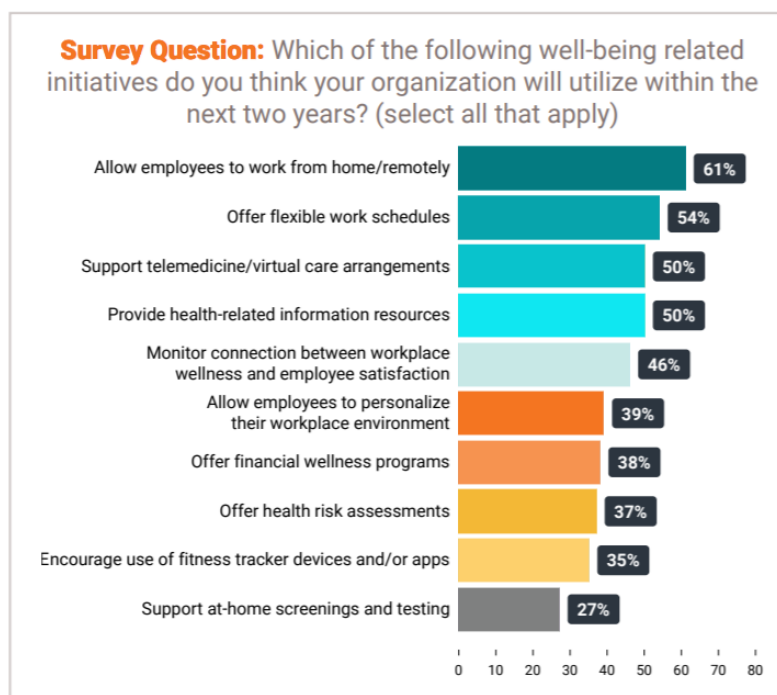
Source: Caggeini Research Institute, Remote workforce survey, September–October 2020, N=3,289 employees who agree to the statement “I felt part of a close-knit team at my organization while working remotely during the COVID 19 lockdown.”

There are numerous ways to recreate these moments with virtual coffees, dedicated Slack channels, and planned events (both virtual or in-person). At BurnAlong, we've found team challenges, particularly those that include the family's, roommates, or social circles of your employees, can help reconnect colleagues without relying on things like virtual happy hours. Virtual summer camps for kids and adults, inclusive corporate challenges that focus on holistic wellness (meaning a challenge based on more than steps or fitness-related activities), and the ability to do live classes or activities together, even when remote, are key to recreating those "casual collisions" both on and off-line.

## 2: Build wellness habits into everyday activities:

For most organizations, your most important asset is your people. Investing in them, in their skillset, in their wellness, and in their communities fosters loyalty to your organization, improves productivity, and leads to more connected teams.

As not everyone is at the same point in their wellness journeys, not everyone will jump at wellness initiatives or corporate challenges without a little nudge. Modeling wellness is vital to building a healthy, and strong, team culture. Try scheduling in **stretch breaks**, blocking off time for wellness blocks where team members can **meditate**, or start meetings with a brief **mindfulness moment** so everyone can focus better.



Source: HR.com

### 3: Find preferred communication methods:

Encourage your managers and employees to explore preferred methods of communication that work best for where, and when, they are working. Even in pre-pandemic times, effective communication was a struggle for many teams. Now add in the complications of childcare, time zones, and fully remote workers with mounting “Zoom fatigue,”<sup>31</sup> a constant barrage of notifications from virtual tools, and the fact that many coworkers have never even met in-person and you have the perfect storm.

Encourage autonomy within teams so that managers and employees can figure out what platforms they use for quick questions, to track projects, to hold meetings, to gather for a brainstorm, and even what times they meet versus work without interruptions. Encourage transparency and two-way communication;<sup>32</sup> model availability and flexibility. This will build trust amongst teams and do wonders for your corporate culture.

### 4: Mitigate burnout:

Mozilla,<sup>33</sup> PepsiCo, Bumble, Verizon, and many other employers are shutting down their entire companies for a “Wellness Week” or at the very least, a “Wellness Day.” At BurnAlong, we’ve rebranded sick days to encourage employees to consider their overall wellness so they don’t have to wait until they are sick, or burned out, to take a day off. Fidelity and Marriott International are taking a similar approach with “relief days” or “TakeCare Days” to protect their workforces (and retain them).

Business leaders should also take care to watch for telltale signs of burnout<sup>34</sup> with their employees which can include inability to make decisions, decreased productivity, and loss of motivation. As we enter the new future of work, it is important to create a solid mental health strategy for your workforce and normalize discussions around mental health so your employees feel empowered to take advantage of the benefits you offer.

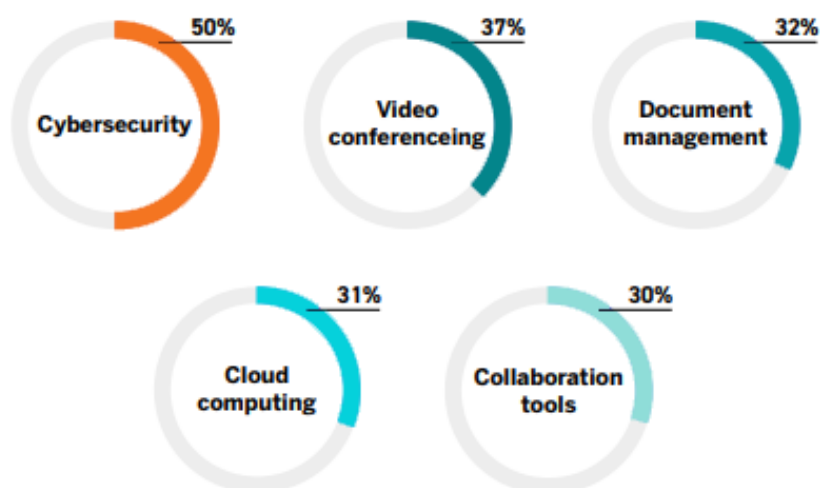
It is also important that you don’t wait until they are at the point of burnout to offer relief but that you proactively highlight mental wellness with meditation challenges, mindfulness moments, and encourage employees to take wellness days whenever they need them.

## Focus on Technology

Arizent's 2021 Future of Work<sup>35</sup> survey examined the upcoming investments in technology to support the shifting models and workforces. While tools are clearly included, nearly 50% plan to accelerate investments in cybersecurity in the coming year to two years.

### Anticipated technological investments for the hybrid workforce

(% accelerating investment over next 12-24 months)



**Q: In which technology areas is your company likely to accelerate investment over the next 12-24 months to support employee needs going forward?**

Source: Arizent Future of Work Survey, 2021

Harkening back to the days when employers would bring their own technology (e.g. laptops, phones, etc.) into the office with them, Accenture predicts<sup>36</sup> that companies will soon move into the realm of “bring your own environment” as we move into the future of work.

Technology will be needed to support work from anywhere in the world, at any time. This is reflected in Deloitte's<sup>37</sup> CEO poll that indicated 82% expect to increase spending on technology innovation in the coming months. Work from specific sites can be determined based on business needs and what works best for the employees. Policies and tech need to catch up though to carry the evolving workforce.

## Create Equitable and Inclusive Working Experiences

The experience of employees who remain working remotely, or those who are on a hybrid schedule and thus not all in the office at once, need to feel included, valued, and equal to their colleagues who are in-person.

Some offices are having employees, who are the office, still take calls from their desks so it mimics the remote environment. This means that the remote employee is not put at a disadvantage or missing out on the experience (you also don't have to deal with those pesky conference phones and audio issues).

Capgemini<sup>38</sup> found 60% of respondents indicated they expected the same non-monetary benefits as pre-pandemic times. Thus, it is that employers offer equal or comparable non-monetary benefits with a hybrid employee base. This extends to work-provided meals, access to tools and resources, comparable hours, inclusion in high-visibility projects, and benefits provided to employees and their families.

A key way to create an inclusive environment, equitable for all work models, is to provide wellness solutions and benefits that anyone can use. Regardless of ability, family status, geographical location, age, or gender, focus on supporting the whole individual and their families to create equitable work experiences.

## Embrace Flexibility

Forbes found that 92% of survey respondents<sup>39</sup> in a Fall 2020 study said that a flexible job makes/would make them happier. This might be related to the fact that 80% of the same respondents indicated that more flexible work options will help them take care of their mental health; 83% said that more work flexibility would allow them to decrease stress levels.

*“The companies that are more flexible and more clear with their expectation are going to be the ones that win the talent battle.”*

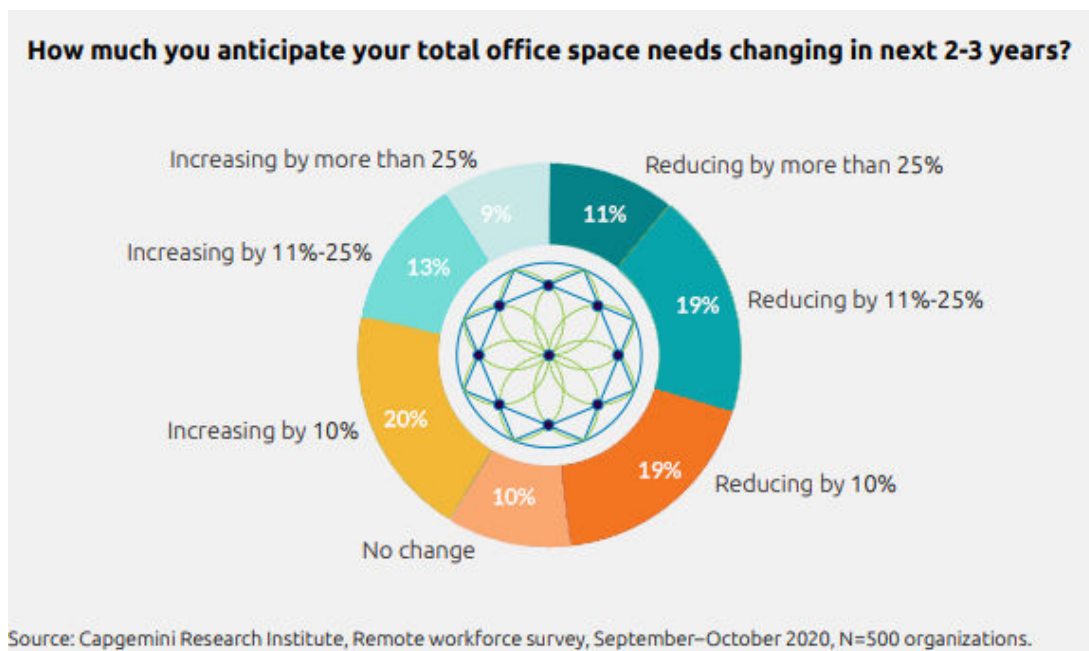
*—Cara Silletto, MBA, CSP, president and chief retention officer at Magnet Culture*

Given the overall push for more flexible work options, surprisingly, Arizent<sup>40</sup> found in their recent survey that not many organizations are extending additional benefits or flexibility to working parents. 44% are not changing their policies at all for working parents, 16% plan to provide additional PTO for those with dependents, and only 8% are offering backup childcare options.

The inflexibility of employers is already costly. There has been a notable influx of resignations in recent months and that is only expected to increase, according to Forbes.<sup>41</sup>

*“At this point, it doesn’t look like people who want to leave their jobs are waiting.” says Eliza Forsythe, a professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, who has studied the pandemic labor market told Forbes.*

Embracing flexible office space and work schedules can benefit both employers and employees. Imagine being able to save on office space with a staggered schedule<sup>42</sup> of employees that are in the office at any one time! If this sounds like it translates to smaller office spaces being required, you aren’t the only one. According to Capgemini, nearly half (49%) indicated they plan to reduce office space in the coming years.



When all is said and done, focusing on ways to adapt to the needs of your business and demands of your employees will set you apart, retain talent, attract new hires looking for outstanding offerings, and keep you all plugged in throughout the coming months.

## Support Productivity at Home

With hybrid work, those who are not well equipped in their home office will be at a disadvantage. While it might have worked in 2020, it might not be something they can maintain for the long run nor be able to compete with co-workers<sup>43</sup> who return to brick and mortar offices (or at least access to them).

While high-speed internet, monitors, and reliable headphones are important, it is just as vital to consider ergonomics like you would for an in-office setting. Studies<sup>44</sup> have shown musculoskeletal disorders account for almost 70 million hospital visits in the US each year. Beyond that, Liberty Mutual shared that annually, musculoskeletal disorders cost employers \$13.4 billion.

Capgemini did a study for what employees expect their workplaces to provide them with remote work. They found:

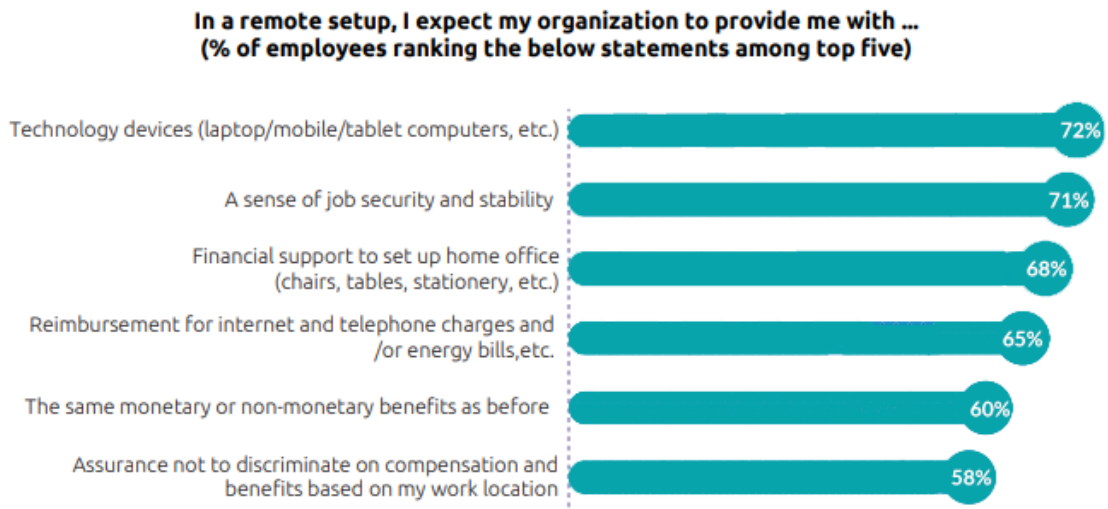
- 72% of employees expect technology to be provided (unsurprisingly)
- 68% expect financial support for their work from home (WFH) set-up

What stands out though are the more intangible expectations of employees that will go a long way to enabling productivity:

- 71% expect a sense of job security and stability
- 58% indicated they don't want to be discriminated against through compensation and benefits based on their work location


Bottom line, employees aren't just looking for tech and desk set-up, they are looking for assurance from their organizations which will in turn, free them up to do their best work.

Employee's expectations on financial aspects in a hybrid work scenario



Source: Capgemini Research Institute, Remote workforce survey, September–October 2020, N=5,016 employees.

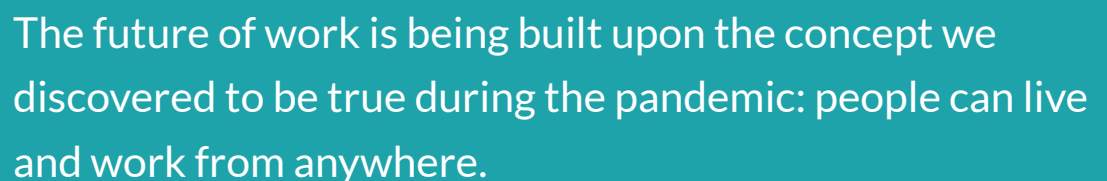
It is in your best interest, as an employer, to think through what will allow your employees to produce their best work whether at home or in the office. Further, aside from ergonomic technology and desks, focusing on an expanded definition of benefits to **support overall wellness of your workforce** and their families will help ensure long-term hybrid success.



This fundamental shift has also revealed or exacerbated existing differences and challenges within your different employee segments. Remote and/or hybrid set-ups show different impacts across generational, gender, race, and socioeconomic lines. Cutting edge companies are seeking to capture the advantages of the new normal while also rolling out changes in a more inclusive and equitable way by including generational differences, gender inequality, race and socioeconomic differences, and family (or single) dynamics. However, emboldened by the lessons learned in the past 18 months and armed with this insight, your organization can boldly approach a hybrid workforce with updated strategies and a refreshed outlook.

While there will be unique challenges faced by employers and employees with any work model, the productivity, flexibility, and efficiency offered in a hybrid workforce shouldn't be ignored. By focusing on creating a safe office environment, investing in a strong team culture, dialing in to innovative technology, creating an equitable and inclusive workplace, remaining flexible, and supporting productivity in any location, organizations can be ready to navigate, and define, the new normal.

BurnAlong is here to help you weather this transition to hybrid work with inclusive programming that will help you build a resilient corporate culture and keep employees engaged - no matter where their location. Let us know how we can **partner with you** to keep your workforce motivated and connected.



The future of work is being built upon the concept we discovered to be true during the pandemic: people can live and work from anywhere.

## Why BurnAlong?

People who feel good, do better work. You know that. But what does it mean to feel good? And how can you facilitate that as a company? Chances are you've tried a lot of things to answer those questions. You may even have robust layers of programs in place today. But they're probably not working quite as well as you'd hoped, right? Don't feel bad.

**Almost all wellness programs fail.** It's not from a lack of effort, or caring, or passion. The reason most wellness initiatives fizzle is simply that it's HARD. It's hard to build a robust wellness program with choice and diversity. It's hard to get the word out to everyone consistently. And even if you build and broadcast what you have, it's even harder to get those most in need to participate. Oh, and reporting your results? Forget about it. Data is hard to come by if it exists at all.

So what can you do about it? Over the last five years BurnAlong has replaced or supplemented hundreds of existing wellness programs at companies across the world. In nearly every deployment we've increased engagement over 5x anything that existed before. Five times more people, doing five times more activity is a powerful energy catalyst.

## How do we do it?

There's a lot of reasons why we get people engaged. It's partly due to the thousands of classes across dozens of categories (including programming for chronic conditions), not to mention the hundreds of world-class instructors. It's also because of the sneaky smart but easy-to-use technology. The dedicated human who works with your team to launch, market, and customize your programming also helps.

Ultimately, BurnAlong is about substance over style, longevity over splash, support over six-packs. We think about wellness as a community effort (which is why family access is always free). If you explore deeper you'll see how we've layered our people, tools, content, and entire approach into creating a place where people can thrive together. **If you want to learn more and explore whether we're a good fit for your people, reach out today.**

TELL ME MORE

