

The unexpected future - hybrid working

By [Colin Thornton](#)

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It was the year that finally changed global business gear - 2020. The year when companies were forced into digital workspaces and employees were figuring out how to optimise their productivity from home. It was a time when most companies adopted remote working because they had to. It was only for now, wasn't it? Everybody would soon be back in the office, right. Right?



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Wrong. [Forrester's](#) recently revealed that only 30% of companies are likely to return to the full office model once the pandemic has eased. That's 70% of organisations recognising the value of the work-from-anywhere employee – people empowered by technology to deliver on productivity without needing an office, or a manager looming over their shoulder. The same research found that companies that adopt a more flexible, hybrid model to work will very likely see measurable business benefits that include employee engagement, retention and recruitment.

Get real about hybrid

This is a view shared by [McKinsey](#) which tell it like it is – leaders need to get real about hybrid. It's not a fad, a trend, a buzzword or a flash in the pan. It's the next evolution of the workplace, one that lets the business realise the true value of its technology investment. It turned out that paying attention to all that hype about digital transformation was the right thing to do. Cloud, digital, data, connectivity and collaboration solutions really were the next big thing.

The problem is that, a year later, many companies still view remote working as a short to medium-term solution that will go away. But the pandemic waves aren't stopping and the situation isn't changing, so why are companies still waiting for things to go back to normal when they won't?

The truth is that it's time to make long-term operational changes that allow for employees to work from any location with solutions that are optimised to meet their needs. Cybersecurity must be analysed from multiple angles that now include the remote or hybrid worker, angles that look for the unexpected vulnerabilities that crop up when employees log on from remote locations. Data security must be examined for any gaps in PoPIA compliance to ensure that information is as secured and restricted as it would be within office walls. And there need to be serious questions asked about what the business should pay for when it comes to connectivity and IT equipment at home.



Hybrid work - how to include your remote colleagues

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Fundamental shifts in thinking

These are fundamental shifts in thinking that can transform how the business operates, and it can save significant sums of money. If fewer people are in the office, the business can downsize and invest in a space that's not as expensive yet still lets people connect and have essential face-to-face meetings. This is an immediate cost saving. The same can be said for international travel and conferences. With most people online, these can be done virtually and there's the added value for

companies that invest into sustainability reporting too – with fewer people flying, the climate benefits are extensive and measurable.

In addition to the technology and the more obvious areas of the business that can be managed in the move to hybrid, it's also important to implement amended HR policies that reflect the challenges and complexities that sit within this new environment. IT policies should follow suit – they need an overhaul that can adapt to the differences between the different models of working, from an office, from home, or hybrid.

Today, every business on the planet is learning how to thrive within the new workplace ideology. There's no best practice, yet. But there will be. And people will vote with their feet. Companies that don't invest into a future that allows for employees to work in ways that best suit their needs will lose those employees. Top talent will move on over to companies that don't expect them to sit in traffic. So, this is the perfect time for organisations to rise to the top, to be the ones who set the standards, and reap the rewards as a result.

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