



A Closer Look at the World of Hybrid Work*

by Jessica Mulholland, Managing Editor, CalChamber

With Governor Gavin Newsom setting a June 15 benchmark to fully reopen the state's economy — assuming there's enough vaccine supply for Californians 16 years and older who wish to be immunized and hospitalization rates are stable and low — Californians remain curious about what the post-pandemic life will truly look like.

“With more than 20 million vaccines administered across the state, it is time to turn the page on our tier system and begin looking to fully reopen California's economy,” Newsom said in a [press release](#). “We can now begin planning for our lives post-pandemic. We will need to remain vigilant and continue the practices that got us here — wearing masks and getting vaccinated — but the light at the end of this tunnel has never been brighter.”

In 2019, fewer than 6 percent of American employees primarily worked from home, according to the [American Community Survey](#). Since the pandemic began, however, at least 70 percent of employees have been doing all or more of their work from home, a Pew Research Center [study](#) reported. And many of these workers are struggling with the idea of going back to the office full time; in fact, a recent Robert Half [survey](#) found that 1-in-3 remote workers may quit their jobs if they're required to do so. And 49 percent of surveyed employees said they prefer a hybrid work arrangement, where they can divide time between the office and another location.

Over the last year, many companies realized just how productive and capable their employees can be while working from home, so 80 percent of company leaders plan to allow remote work to continue at least part time post-pandemic, according to a Gartner [survey](#). While certain details will vary based on an organization's needs and workforce dynamic, there are a few things about the hybrid work environment employers should keep in mind.

What Exactly is a ‘Hybrid Work Model’?

In a hybrid work model, most (or at least many) employees alternate in and out of the office environment, with many offices being configured for shared spaces. As accounting firm PwC notes in its recent remote work [survey](#), hybrid work embraces the flexibility that most employees (and some employers) desire after having worked from home for more than a year now.

In hybrid working models, “fully in-person and remote work will be two ends of a fluid spectrum of options,” Boston Consulting Group (BCG) [wrote](#). “The former is a necessity; the latter, an opportunity.”

As for the ideal balance of workdays at home versus in the office, the PwC survey found no consensus. Fifty-five percent of employees would prefer working remotely at least three days a week, while 68 percent of company executives say a typical employee should be in the office at least three days a week.

The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) recently [reported](#) that hybrid models range by company. At Adobe Inc., for instance, Chief People Officer Gloria Chen told the news outlet that the company plans to allow employees to telework up to two to three days a week, and staffers can make reservations for office desks. Meanwhile, other companies hesitate to specify a number on days allowed at home, as executive say certain factors — such as length of commute, job type and seniority — could determine how often an employee must visit an office.

“We won’t prescribe” from a company level, David Henshall, CEO at technology company Citrix Systems Inc., told the WSJ. “Based on the type of role you have, you’ll find that right balance.”

This hybrid workplace reality is expected to begin taking shape in the second quarter of 2021, according to the PwC survey, which also noted that the timing ultimately will depend on the rollout of vaccines.

Hybrid Work Benefits

According to BCG, when hybrid work models are done right, they’ll “allow organizations to better recruit talent, achieve innovation, and create value for all stakeholders. By acting boldly now, they can define a future of work that is more flexible, digital, and purposeful.”

Ultimately, as *Harvard Business Review* (HBR) [noted](#), transitioning to hybrid work offers the benefits of remote working, such as increased flexibility, reduced carbon footprint, labor-cost optimization and increased employee satisfaction.

Increased productivity also is linked to remote working. Even back in 2015, a Stanford [study](#) found that, on average, working from home increased productivity by 13 percent. And during the pandemic, 75 percent of remote workers were equally or more productive compared to when in the office, according to an Owl Labs [survey](#).

The hybrid model also offers “the critical strengths” of the traditional, in-office work environment, according to HBR, such as smoother coordination, informal networking, stronger cultural socialization, greater creativity and face-to-face collaboration.



Hybrid Work Complications Emerge

While the positives in implementing a hybrid work model are many, the PwC survey also acknowledges that it's "a complicated way to organize the work week, and is likely to transform a company's culture, employee engagement, the way the work gets done and how office space is used."

In fact, the WSJ article focused on the fact that companies "are grappling with what new schedules employees should follow, where people should sit in redesigned offices and how best to prevent employees at home from feeling left out of impromptu office discussions or being passed over for opportunities."

More specifically, according to the WSJ, Prudential Financial doesn't want all of its roughly 42,000 employees to stay home Mondays and Fridays and then work in the office midweek; executives at Expedia are working on how to have in-person meetings that aren't disadvantageous to those not in the room; and software company Twilio Inc., among other employers, predict that staffers may gravitate toward bosses "who embrace their preferred styles of working."

The WSJ also notes that training and onboarding in a hybrid work environment can be tricky, and managers must be mindful of keeping biased judgments "against those who may spend less time in the office" at bay.

Scheduling issues alone are a biggie. For Expedia CEO Peter Kern, if a team gathers in-person but not all can make it, those not in the room make have a subpar experience.

Managers may need to "set up group meetings according to some crazy algorithm of: Who's available when? Who's got a flexible day, when?" Kern told the WSJ. "There's a lot of friction in all of that. It's a lot easier to say, 'Everybody go to work.' Now someone calls a meeting, and you're all there."

Potential Hybrid Work Schedules

In a recent [blog post](#), workplace platform provider Envoy suggested four potential hybrid work schedule types that companies could implement: the cohort schedule, the staggered schedule and two custom schedules.



Hybrid Work and Gender Imbalance

One emerging concern as businesses begin transitioning to hybrid work models, according to [Diginomica](#), is how some complications may disproportionately affect women, since they still tend to be the primary caregivers and are more likely to opt for flexible/remote working opportunities.

Add to that the fact that many employers fail to recognize their own "complacency about gender equality," according to Perrine Farque, founder of D&I consultancy and training provider Inspired Human. She told the news outlet that failure is creating a disconnect between employer perceptions and those of affected employees. In fact, a pre-pandemic PayScale [survey](#) found that 74 percent of men believed at the time that both genders enjoy equal opportunities at work, while only 49 percent of women and only 42 percent of women of color held that same belief.

If this disconnect is left unchecked, Farque told [Diginomica](#) she fears that as the remote talent pipeline is increasingly overlooked in the next 12 to 24 months, much of women's progress moving into leadership positions will be reversed.

In the **cohort schedule** model, employees regularly work certain days or weeks. For instance, one cohort would work in the office on Monday, Wednesday and Friday while a second cohort would work on site Tuesday and Thursday (or one cohort works in the office Monday and Tuesday while a second works on site Thursday and Friday, and everyone is remote on Wednesday). Another option is to schedule one-half of employees to come into work the first and third week of the month, and the other half to work in person on the second and fourth weeks of the month.

In the **staggered schedules** model, employees must come in at their set time to prevent lines from forming at the elevator or security desk. For companies working in a multi-tenant building, this model prevents a flood of people from arriving at once.

Then there are two **custom schedule** models, which are more flexible — but less predictable — than the cohort and staggered schedules, as they may change week to week depending on the employee's or team's need for on-site collaboration.

- When **managers set their team's schedules**, they coordinate with project teams to set the schedule each week (or month, or interval that is appropriate for the team).
- When **employees set their own schedule** without any oversight from their managers or a workplace team, they have the utmost flexibility. This is considered the best option for companies whose employees must collaborate in person across numerous departments.

Ultimately, in crafting a hybrid work model and determining when this model will begin, it's important to remember that because workers may not be ready to return to the office, employers may want to consider what could help ease the transition back.

In the Robert Half survey, responding professionals said the top ways their company can support them include:

- Freedom to set preferred office hours.
- A personal, distraction-free workspace.
- Employer-paid commuting costs.
- Relaxed dress code.

"After a year of drastic change, many business leaders are eager to restore a sense of normalcy and welcome staff back to the office," said Paul McDonald, senior executive director at Robert Half. "But reopening doors will bring new obstacles for companies to navigate. Not all employees will be ready — or willing — to return to the workplace, so staying flexible and responsive to their needs will be critical." **CEU**

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