

Tips for tailoring hybrid work solutions to avoid employee backlash

By [Tom Marsicano](#)

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It's been in the back of every working person's mind for more than a year now. Should we be returning to the office? Full-time or part-time? How will this affect productivity? Do I even need to be there to do this work?



Tom Marsicano, CEO of 'and Change'

Unfortunately, there are no cut-and-dry answers to these questions. Every organisation requires a unique solution. The current trend appears to be the promotion of hybrid working environments as a solid compromise to improve efficiency and offer flexibility to workers. However, we've seen the kind of change resistance that can send employers reeling when a return-to-office strategy is mishandled.

Google was [criticised for a "hypocritical" plan](#) that seemed to favour senior executives. [Dissent among employees](#) had to be handled with great care by Apple to avoid a major backlash.

When these two giants of the tech industry were originally struggling to get their hybrid work environments up and running, the change management sector took notice. Ultimately, we have learned to treat this hybridisation like any other major organisational change. Even though at first glance it seems like a return to pre-pandemic work processes, this is most definitely not the case.

Some of the first return-to-office strategies were launched mid-pandemic in the United States, with many people simply being told to return to work – business as usual. However, after months – sometimes more than a year – of remote working, habits had set in, new behaviours had been learnt, and for some, their at-home efficiency had skyrocketed.

When employees were not consulted about returning to the office, analysts were able to (accurately) predict that [talent retention and employee dissatisfaction would become a problem](#).

As early as April 2021, Harvard Business School professor and remote work expert Raj Choudhury said that employees and teams should be empowered to make decisions on office schedules and other WFH (working from home) strategies – not just the leadership.

ProSci, the inventors of the ProSci change management methodology, recently conducted research that revealed that on average, [43.8% less work](#) was being conducted on premises (previously 87.8%) in a post-pandemic world. So, the shift appears to already be happening.

However, every industry is different, and depending on the kind of work being done, it may be impossible to work from home. Retail, construction, healthcare are all obvious sectors where people have to work on-site, but when remote working is possible, strategic thinking to manage employee expectations is mandatory.

As much as leadership wishes there was a one-size-fits-all solution, the hybrid work environment must be tailored to the industry, the unit within an organisation and even down to the individual in some cases. This is why effective change management is so important. Change managers in an organisation can be the leads on employee engagement and help leadership properly construct strategies [that address top concerns](#).

From the physical requirements (such as how much space one needs for a potentially smaller in-office team) to the less tangible considerations (like managing employee expectations), organisations are realising they require agile people trained in effectively implementing such a significant change. My advice?

1. Communication will be central to hybridisation. Create a platform for people to air concerns before they start resisting the change.
2. Make the change gradual so that people can slowly become used to these new ways of working.
3. Be flexible. Negotiate what works – not only for your most valued team members – to still allow for maximum efficiency and personal work/life balance.
4. Invest in improving onboarding processes. It's tougher than before for new recruits to get a sense of a company's processes and culture in a digital/hybrid working world. So use the time and resources to help prepare them. It'll save you headaches in the future.
5. Incentivise the return to work: give legitimate reasons as to why the office environment is positive, such as easier collaboration and preserving workplace culture.

Organisations, businesses and the change management sector are still trying to navigate this new form of change, one that affects so many people across the globe. However, finding new, malleable ways of working is never a bad thing, so regardless of how you feel about hybridisation, try and keep an open mind.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Marsicano is the CEO of 'and Change' a global advisory and change management consultancy

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