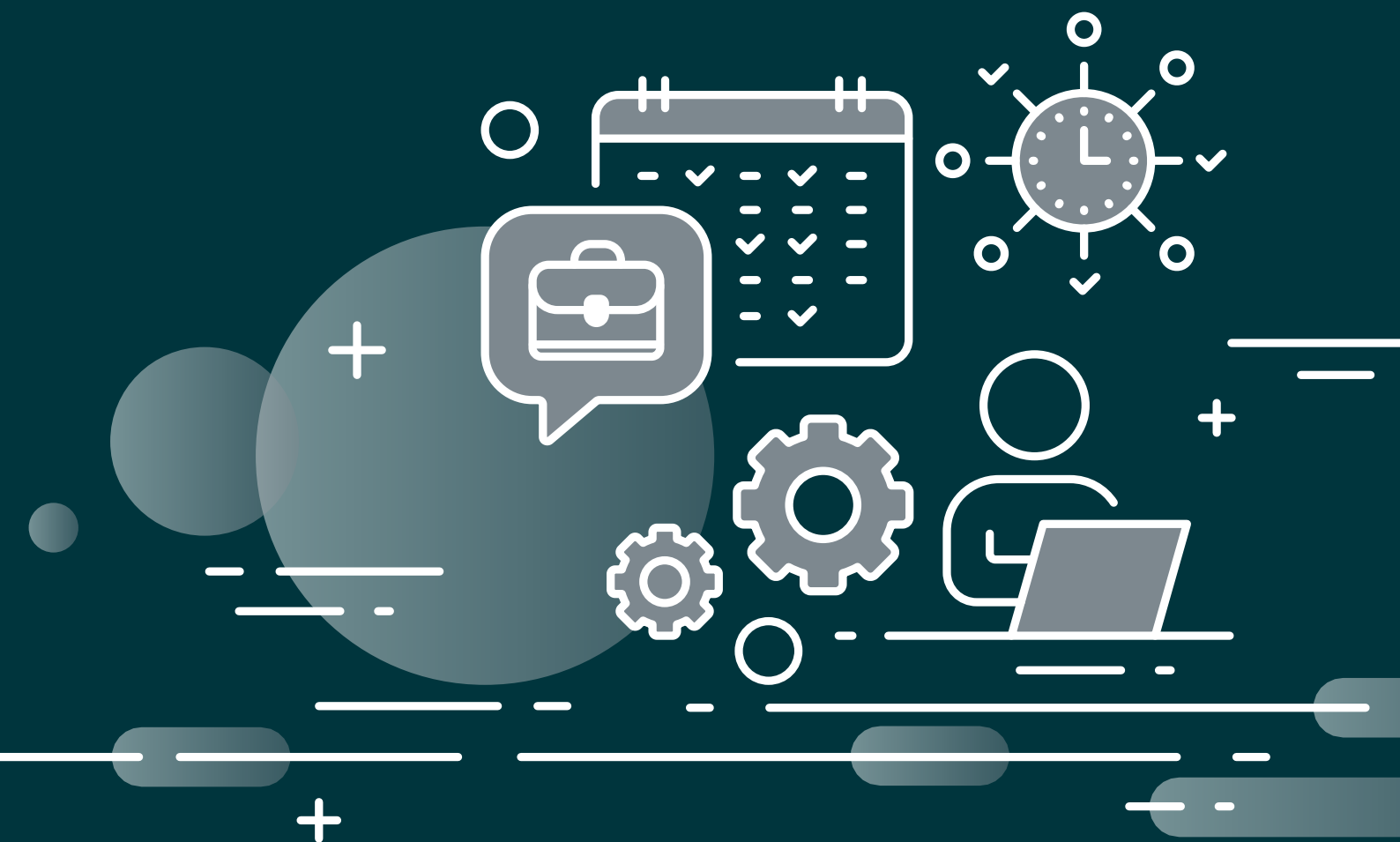


# Innovating for the hybrid future of work



## Preface

“Innovating for the hybrid future of work” is an MIT Technology Review Insights report, sponsored by EPOS. The report is based on in-depth interviews with subject matter experts from global organizations and universities, conducted in August 2021. The report explores how organizations are using technology to empower and enable employees as they shift to a hybrid work model.

Sharon Goldman was the writer, Francesca Fanshawe was the editor, and Nicola Crepaldi was the publisher. The research is editorially independent, and the views expressed are those of MIT Technology Review Insights.

We would like to thank the following subject matter experts for their time and insight:

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**Jeppie Dalberg-Larsen**, President, EPOS

**Paige Francis**, Chief Information Officer, University of Tulsa

**Olivier Jouve**, Executive Vice President and General Manager, Genesys Cloud CX

**Jeff McCarter**, Chief Information Officer, Asset Servicing, Northern Trust

**Tracy Platt**, Executive Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer, Cerner

**Jeff Wong**, Global Chief Innovation Officer, EY

## Foreword from EPOS

EPOS is an audio and video solutions company developing and selling devices for business professionals and the gaming community. Based on leading and advanced technologies, the Danish-founded company delivers high-end audio and video solutions with design, technology, and performance as paramount parameters. EPOS is built on the former joint venture Sennheiser Communications.

EPOS recently commissioned a comprehensive research piece from Ipsos, where we heard from decision-makers and end users on their attitudes toward and usage of audio in the workplace. We conducted a similar piece in 2019, just before the pandemic hit. We thought it would be important to investigate what the impact of hybrid working has been on both end users and decision-makers across the globe, particularly when it comes to their experiences using collaboration solutions, including audio.

Last year we found the average audio solution end user loses 29 minutes a week due to poor sound quality on voice calls and time spent double-checking information via follow-up emails or calls. Flash forward to this year and you'd expect that there would have been improvements when it comes to collaboration tools and audio calls, however, this is not the case – things have worsened. Today the average solution end user is losing 31 minutes per week due to poor sound – more than three full workdays each year.

Our 2021 study found that 63% of global end users experience issues during business conversations regularly because of poor sound quality. The most common problems include background noise (32%), interferences on the line (26%), and asking for information to be repeated (23%). The link between bad audio experiences and the impact on business is clear; in simple terms – bad audio is bad for business.

Audio quality is becoming a true business differentiator and it can mean the difference between success and failure in virtual communications and the far-reaching consequences of this can affect the long-term health of an organization. While they determine the specifics of hybrid working, employers must acknowledge the powerful role of audio and visual technology in bolstering employee confidence, elevating the client experience, and maintaining high standards of professionalism.

Whether employees return to the office full-time or part-time, there will be an ongoing need to dial in remote-working colleagues. If businesses can use the right technology to support them, there's an opportunity to overcome the barriers posed by poor audio and create truly borderless teams. Good audio quality underpins all aspects of the "hybrid" experience, from ensuring that everyone's voice is heard to professional standards are upheld – business leaders today need to ensure they're empowering their employees with the tools they need to succeed.

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# 01

## Executive summary

In March 2020, companies large and small, across industries, and around the world, had to pivot nearly overnight to remote work because of pandemic-related shutdowns. In fact, over a third of US workers reported working remotely during that time, including nearly three-quarters of the highest-income workers.<sup>1</sup> Digital meeting and collaboration tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Slack became commonplace. Organizations figured out how to hire workers without ever seeing them in person. Many employees cheered the end of long commutes and more time with family, while others lamented the lack of boundaries between work and home.

Skepticism about how productive employees could be if they worked from home also eroded. An April 2021 study from the Becker Friedman Institute at the University of Chicago examined companies' post-covid remote work plans and found a predicted productivity boost of 5% for the US economy.<sup>2</sup> And a December 2020 survey by PwC found that 34% of employees said they were more productive than before the pandemic, while over half of executives said average employee productivity had improved.<sup>3</sup>

Now, an equally widespread disruption is underway in the form of hybrid work: while some organizations are insisting workers return to the office full-time, many are prepping for a new normal where employees spend some days in the office and some days working remotely, with a

combination of virtual and in-person meetings and collaboration. A CNBC survey of executives in human resources, finance, and technology found that just under half of companies will use a hybrid work model in the second half of 2021.<sup>4</sup>

All of this is taking place in a business landscape where more and more employees are demanding continued flexibility post-pandemic. According to Accenture's Future of Work Study 2021, for example, 83% of employees prefer a hybrid work model.<sup>5</sup> And companies are listening: they know the choices organizations make now will be crucial, especially as they race to attract and retain talent in a competitive marketplace.

We spoke to workplace experts, as well as technology and human resources leaders at several companies in sectors such as health care, higher education, and financial services, about the shifting focus toward hybrid work models. They all agreed that organizations will need the right processes, innovative technologies, and leadership support to help them meet this powerful moment. Here are the key findings:

**Workers want a hybrid workplace.** After over a year of working at home during the pandemic, millions of employees have experienced both the challenges and benefits of remote work. They are loath to entirely give it up: instead, most would prefer a hybrid workplace where

flexibility to sometimes work at home, while sometimes meeting in-person, are both long-term options.

**The hybrid workplace will look different.** The new hybrid workplace will likely look different than the cubicle farm or open office plan of the past: there may be “hot desks,” more team-working spaces, and rooms may soon be equipped with new technology for seamless video conferencing with remote-working colleagues. A hybrid workplace might be mostly remote, mostly in-person, or anywhere in between.

**In many ways, hybrid will be more disruptive than remote work.** While the move to remote work was a huge upheaval, workplace experts say hybrid models may be even more disruptive. Organizations will have to

grapple with a variety of challenges: Will those working remotely feel they are on a level playing field with those in the office? Will productivity, innovation, and creativity suffer? And what does a hybrid model look like for each company culture?

**Innovative technologies are crucial.** Technology is crucial to the success of hybrid work efforts post-pandemic. Besides video conferencing tools like Zoom and collaboration applications such as Slack, organizations need to consider cloud-based applications for everything from file sharing and document management to scheduling, training, and hiring. While tools and processes to boost cybersecurity are key, emerging technologies using AI/machine learning as well as augmented/virtual reality should also be examined.

A widespread disruption is underway in the form of hybrid work. While some organizations are insisting workers return to the office full-time, many are prepping for a new normal where employees spend some days in the office and some days working remotely.



# 02 A new work era for the enterprise

The massive global shift to remote work in 2020 was an unprecedented disruption that left companies facing a stark choice: sink or swim. It highlighted a need for organizational resiliency, agility, and flexibility, not just in how businesses operate but how their employees do their work.

The current upheaval from an all-remote environment, where all workers interact virtually, to hybrid possibilities is a similarly disruptive moment, says Jeff Wong, global chief innovation officer at EY. This new work era requires technology innovation to equalize the work environment for all — those that work from home or another remote location, as well as those physically in the office.

“As offices get ready to start welcoming people back to the office, they must recognize employee needs and motivations around work and how they have changed and evolved,” he explains. “Companies want to attract and retain the best people, but nearly everybody is saying they want something different than existed pre-covid.”

In fact, more than half (54%) of 16,000 employees surveyed in EY’s 2021 Work Reimagined Employee Survey from around the world would consider leaving their job post-covid-19 pandemic if they are not afforded some form of flexibility in where and when they work.<sup>6</sup> That means no organization can ignore this new work era if they want to stay competitive for employees and customers.

“I see hybrid work as one of those things companies have to get right,” says Deniz Caglar, a principal in PwC’s US organization strategy practice. “We have to reinvent how we’re going to work together and if we don’t get the hybrid



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Jeff Wong,  
Global Chief Innovation Officer, EY

model right, the company is not going to be as productive. And in some industries, even a one to two percent productivity change can make a pretty big difference.”

The key question, he says, will be “What does this hybrid model look like?” That is, how can employees work effectively whether they are in or out of the office?

“Companies will have to think about how employees communicate, collaborate, create community, and coach each other,” he says. They will have to figure out how to build long-term bonds between the company and the employee, in a hybrid environment where workers are in the office less frequently.

“While organizations have been working remotely and it’s been quite successful and effective, hybrid is the hardest model to pull off,” he explains. “But it will also be exciting to see how it evolves.”

For many companies, implementing a hybrid work model has become a great experiment. Tracy Platt, executive

vice president and chief human resources officer (CHRO) at Cerner, a US-based health care technology firm, says all employers are trying to figure out the right way to work. While increased work flexibility was already trending before the pandemic, the company transitioned nearly 26,000 employees to remote work in a couple of days in March 2020. But now, she says, it’s clear that a successful hybrid work model is crucial for the organization, which as a health care technology company is in one of the most competitive markets for talent in the United States. In a recent survey, nearly 70% of Cerner associates indicated they desire a mix of in-office and work from home flexibility.<sup>7</sup>

“It’s a large change effort and it takes everybody rowing in the same direction,” she says. “I think we will learn and iterate forward, but the notion of a hybrid model, of flexibility, is table stakes now.”

**Figure 1: Company workforce location plans for fall 2021**

**Mix of in-person, hybrid, and fully remote**

33%

**All in-person**

19%

**Mix of in-person, hybrid (no fully remote)**

18%

**All hybrid**

18%

**Teams self-organize**

4%

**All fully remote**

4%

**Delaying implementation**

3%

Source: PWC, 2021<sup>9</sup>

## Hybrid challenges and opportunities

At first glance, a hybrid work model appears to offer the best of both worlds: the flexibility of being able to work remotely part of the time, along with the occasional collaboration and camaraderie of working in the office.

But hybrid models have unique challenges, say workplace experts. According to PwC’s recent US Pulse Survey: Next In Work, the biggest challenge for leaders will be to bring out the best aspects of face-to-face teaming for all employees, whether they are in the office or not.<sup>8</sup> A third of executives (33%) reported that they will have a mixed hybrid model, with some employees in-person full time, some hybrid, and some fully remote (see Figure 1).

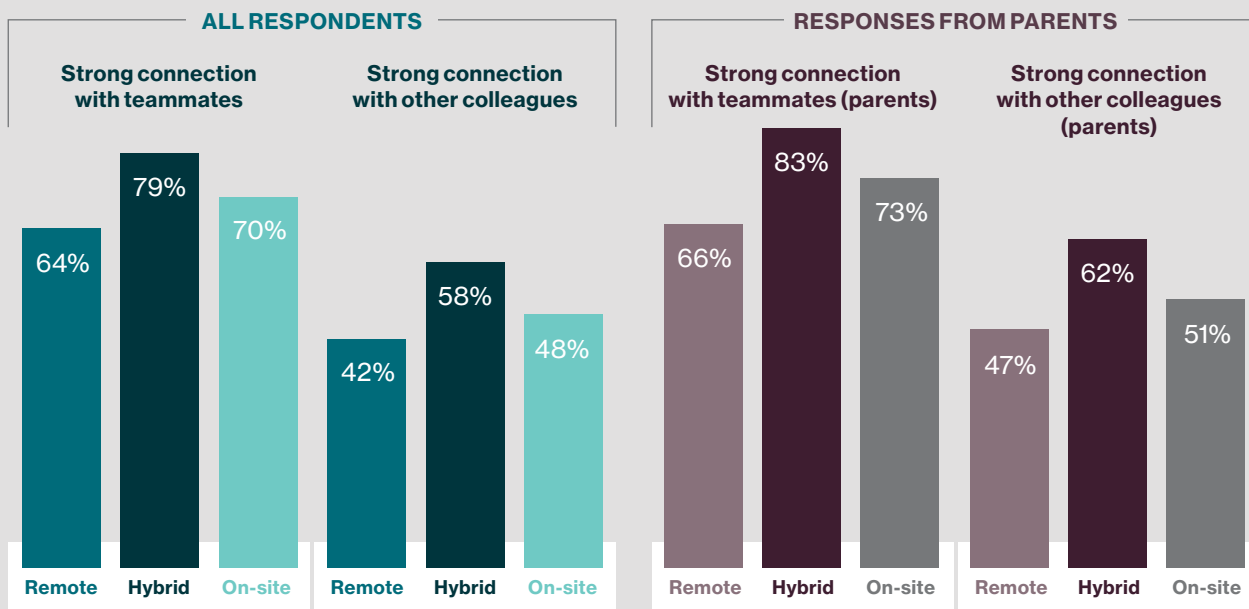
Respondents cited maintaining corporate culture as the biggest challenge to making hybrid work successful. But in the hybrid era, companies must reset expectations and redefine standards of success, says Caglar.

“What I hear frequently is that the challenges boil down to two big things: employers worry that productivity, innovation, and creativity will suffer if people are not in the office, and employees worry about staying connected,” he says. Hybrid models should focus on creating a culture of inclusion and belonging to mitigate the risk of remote work inequity, he explains. They should also be deliberate about how teams collaborate and how they replicate in-office culture for remote workers through new technology tools such as virtual reality headsets or new meeting etiquette.



**Figure 2: Hybrid workers report stronger connections with their teammates and colleagues**

Strength of perceived connections, among all respondents and parents of children aged under 18  
(% selected very/somewhat strong)



Source: ADP Research, 2021<sup>11</sup>

There are also opportunities in the hybrid model that should not be overlooked. According to an August 2021 study by ADP Research Institute, hybrid workers report stronger connections with their teammates and colleagues (79%) – even more than on-site workers (70%).<sup>10</sup> The connections are the strongest among parents of children under 18-years-old who are working in a hybrid arrangement (83%) (see Figure 2).

Platt says that a hybrid model opens the door to positive change. Flexibility and inclusion foster innovation, she explains, and innovation drives change. Platt says the company has taken a proactive, data-driven approach to build its hybrid work model. Cerner was already using technology to collaborate, she explains, but now the organization is thinking about how to bring that experience to full maturity in a hybrid way.

“We have an active, cross-functional hybrid workforce task force, with work streams across every dimension, from facilities and leadership development to policies,” she says. “I think we’ve got a great framework that will keep us going for the foreseeable future.”

“The challenges boil down to two big things: employers worry that productivity, innovation, and creativity will suffer if people are not in the office, and employees worry about staying connected.”

Deniz Caglar, Organizational Transformation Consultant Principal, Strategy & US, PwC



# 03 Emerging with new priorities



As companies begin to transition to hybrid models, they have emerged from the remote work era with new priorities. Accenture's Future of Work Study 2021 found that in general, organizations are focused on developing a productive and healthy workforce, wherever they are working on a given day.<sup>12</sup> The study found that 40% of workers felt they could be healthy and effective whether they were onsite or remote, and high-growth companies have already enabled productivity-anywhere workforce models.

It's clear that two big pieces of the puzzle in developing a successful hybrid model are implementing innovative technology that supports an equitable, inclusive work-from-anywhere option; and attracting and maintaining talent with hybrid work policies that balance the needs of employees, clients, and the business.

## The role of innovative technology

Zoom's new Smart Gallery uses artificial intelligence to detect individual faces in an in-person meeting and pull them into screen panes so remote participants can see them in the now-familiar gallery view. Microsoft recently launched an augmented and virtual reality-driven tool called Microsoft Mesh, an early attempt to offer holographic virtual collaboration. And in August, Facebook announced its Horizon Workrooms, in which employees appear as avatars in a digital meeting room, using virtual reality headsets.<sup>13</sup>

Whether or not organizations are ready to experiment with these cutting-edge technologies, it is becoming crystal-clear that the traditional conference room with a table, chairs, and speakerphone will no longer cut it as people return to a new,

Whether or not organizations are ready to experiment with cutting-edge technologies, it is clear the traditional conference room will no longer cut it as people return to a new, hybrid workplace.

hybrid workplace. Instead, as offices become hybrid hubs for in-person collaboration as well as virtual work, companies need to address a variety of challenges, from mixed in-person/remote meetings and Zoom fatigue to remote training. In response, companies are investing in team collaboration tools that include file-sharing tools, instant messaging, and online whiteboards. They are abandoning paper filing systems and exploring the latest document management online tools. Cloud-based HR systems are becoming more essential than ever. There are onboarding applications, performance management systems, and video conferencing tools to consider. And every aspect of technology, from audio and video quality to speed, security, and ease of collaboration, is at play.

No matter what investments an organization chooses, there are some fundamental challenges they must overcome. According to Gartner, top technical challenges during meetings include a lack of consistent, standardized solutions; poor audio, video, or physical workspaces; ease-of-technology issues; and difficulty finding and sharing materials.<sup>14</sup>

## Audio/visual technology can boost hybrid collaboration

We now spend over seven hours a week in virtual meetings, according to recent research by Ipsos and Danish audio solutions company EPOS – that's an increase of two hours per week in the last year.<sup>18</sup>

But as the world of hybrid work continues to take shape, with professionals pivoting to meetings where some colleagues are face-to-face and some on a screen, the right integrated high-fidelity audio and visual/video conferencing solutions are becoming even more important. They can improve the ability to read facial expressions and body language in group discussions; allow participants to easily see details of shared content on-screen; and reduce issues of frustration, stress and annoyance.

In their joint study, EPOS and Ipsos discovered that 88% of decision-makers believe that audio issues have caused their companies problems in the past year and have created an estimated 31 extra minutes of work per week for the average end user (which equals \$70k per year in lost revenue).

Meanwhile, 63% of global end users claim to have experienced sound-related issues during a business conversation, ranging from background noise to interference to lost segments of conversations. The impact is significant: 15% reported the loss of a key piece of work and 17% believed they appear less professional because of audio issues.

Clearly, the business community realizes they have to upgrade: the global audio and video equipment market is expected to grow from \$115.2 billion in 2020 to \$138.34 billion in 2021, according to ResearchandMarkets.com. The market is expected to reach \$154.07 billion in 2025.

"Many companies experienced bad audio and poor connections as a pain point over the past year," says Jeppe Dalberg-Larsen, president of EPOS. "Most are willing to invest in high-quality audio and senior managers especially feel the pain because they are the ones who have the most meetings

every day." The investment, relative to the struggle of poor audio/video performance over time, is well worth it, he says. "In our office, we immediately found that the right audio equipment meant a lot to the quality of the meetings, both in terms of the ability to endure a whole day of work and also the quality of conversations you had with people.

Another important reason to upgrade to the latest audio and video technology is to make sure that all aspects are plug-and-play, working seamlessly within applications. "There are a lot of hidden areas that have to work together technically," says Dalberg-Larsen. "IT managers are testing this a lot, including



the security aspects of putting various devices on the network. Companies are strongly focusing on quality because they know the hassle they will have from users as well as IT infrastructure if it doesn't work."

Overall, quality audio and video technology have a clear role to play in bridging the hybrid gap. For example, employers may be more confident with teams working remotely if they know virtual meetings will be high-quality. And employees who have prized working remotely may be tempted to come into the office on some days if they know collaboration tools meet their needs.

"Hybrid meetings are a new challenge for equity and equality," says Dalberg-Larsen. "Upgrading your audio and video equipment helps you make it as close to a natural setting for everyone as you can. Quality setups and premium infrastructure really matter."

The good news is that most companies are taking action to make sure workplace technology meets their future hybrid needs. Gartner recently reported that worldwide IT spending is projected to total \$4.1 trillion in 2021, an increase of 8.4% from 2020 (see Figure 3).<sup>15</sup> One reason, they cited, is that the “increased focus on the employee experience and well-being are propelling technology investments forward in areas such as social software and collaboration platforms and human capital management software.”

And organizations are clearly willing to invest in a hybrid future: EY’s CEO Imperative Study finds that CEOs plan to spend more prioritizing their digital transformation investments: 61% plan to undertake a major new transformation initiative; 68% plan a major investment in data and technology; and 65% expect to spend more on transformation over the next three years as compared to the last three years.<sup>17</sup>

“In our organization, we’re looking to provide whatever employees need to maintain the environment they had at home, including a good camera, speaker systems, and headsets as well as bringing many of those technologies back into the office,” says Wong. “I want everyone to be able to walk both into their office and home and have equal effectiveness and feel included so that the virtual and audio quality is as close to having other people in the room with them as possible.”

While EY has made big investments, including a conference room that offers an immersive meeting

experience with life-sized touch screens and integrated cameras and speakers, Wong points out that the technology is still emerging to help employees create a fluid and seamless environment where they can work asynchronously as well as together. “There are a lot of opportunities for the enterprise, but it’s not fully pervasive and the technology is not quite there yet,” he says.

## Talent in a hybrid work world

The “Great Attrition” of workers is real: according to McKinsey, more than 15 million US workers – and counting – have quit their jobs since April 2021 and a whopping 40% of employees “are at least somewhat likely to quit” their jobs in the next three to six months (see Figure 4).<sup>19</sup> To attract and retain talent, experts say organizations need to think carefully about their hybrid work approach.

For example, CEOs recognize the need to accelerate their digital transformation because they recognize the potential disruption of their business, Wong says. “If you want to hire and retain the best employees in the world, you need to meet their expectations and changing needs or they will go elsewhere,” he explains.

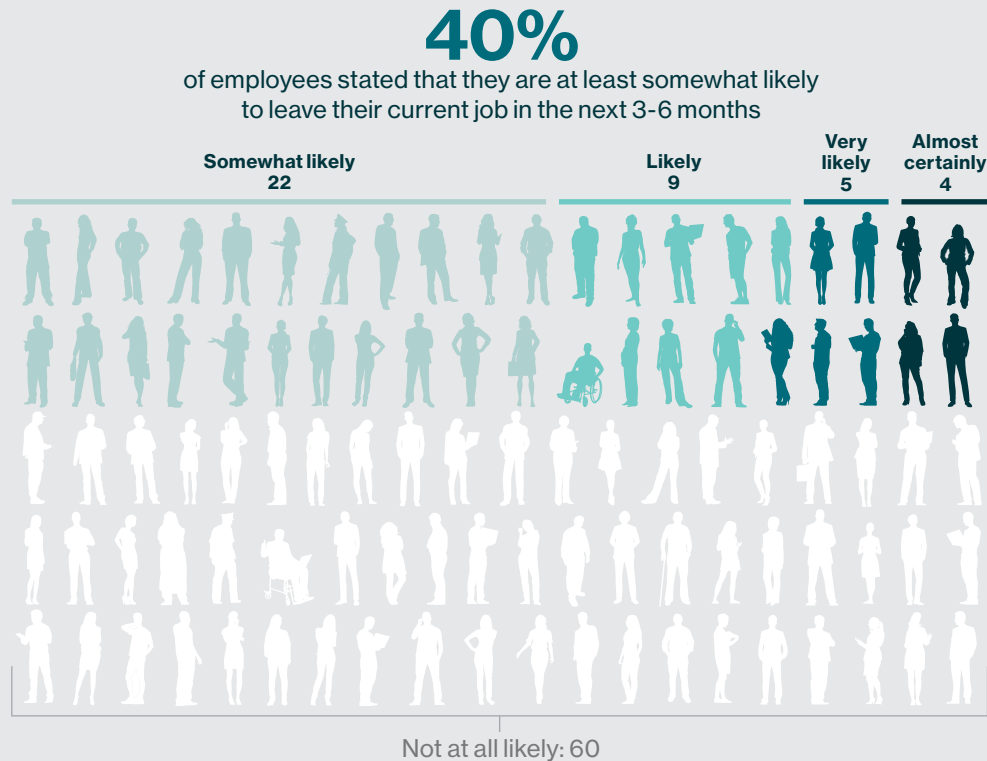
Investing in technology innovation for an effective hybrid work environment, where workers feel like they are part of the company’s culture and mission in a meaningful way no matter where they are located, can also expand opportunities to attract talent from around the globe.

**Figure 3: Gartner forecasts global IT spending to grow to \$4 trillion in 2021**

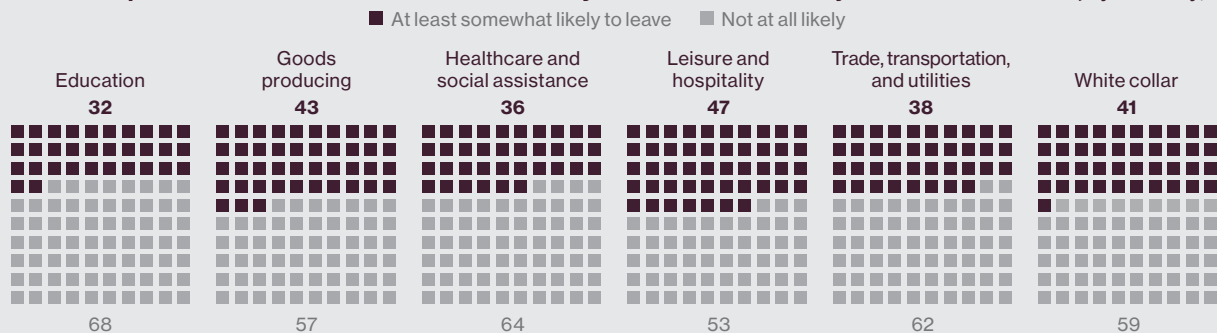
	2020 Spending	2020 Growth (%)	2021 Spending	2021 Growth (%)	2022 Spending	2022 Growth (%)
Data center systems	219,940	2.3	236,806	7.7	247,513	4.5
Enterprise software	466,647	-2.1	516,872	10.8	571,725	10.6
Devices	663,223	-6.9	755,798	14.0	778,949	3.1
IT services	1,021,187	-1.8	1,112,626	9.0	1,193,461	7.3
Communications services	1,386,471	-0.7	1,450,444	4.6	1,504,743	3.7
<b>Overall IT</b>	<b>3,757,468</b>	<b>-2.2</b>	<b>4,072,547</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>4,296,391</b>	<b>5.5</b>

Source: Gartner, 2021<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 4: Likelihood that employees will leave their current job in the next three to six months**  
(% of respondents)



**Share of respondents who are at least "somewhat likely" to leave their current job in next 3-6 months, by industry, %**



Source: McKinsey & Company, 2021<sup>20</sup>

"We already have a global team at EY, but it's concentrated in different areas," says Wong. "But these days, talent is everywhere, and a successful hybrid or remote model will make it easier for them to say yes."

Jeff McCarter, chief information officer (CIO) of Chicago-based Northern Trust's asset servicing business, says the war for talent out there is an important consideration when it comes to implementing a hybrid work model. "There are certain people that are going to be looking for

those options for flexibility and we'd be at a disadvantage if we did not offer that to our employees."

Cerner's Platt agrees, pointing out that certain job categories are extremely competitive in the health care technology market, making it a challenge to attract talent to the company's Kansas City, Missouri headquarters. "So, other than perhaps 10% of our employees that need to be on-site, such as in facilities or data centers, we want to offer a hybrid framework."

# 04 Tackling the challenges

## Rethinking whole systems

Financial services company Northern Trust, which specializes in asset servicing, asset management, and wealth management, employs over 20,000 people across the globe. Jeff McCarter, CIO of the bank's asset servicing division, says the company's success with remote work, which saw productivity gains from many groups, made it clear that a hybrid model was in its future. "We don't see ourselves in the same work model as the past," he says.

However, the prospect of moving toward a hybrid work model has forced the organization to change everything – how the company encourages employee collaboration and productivity; how the company builds relationships with clients and prospects; how IT makes sure there are backup plans in case of a power outage; and even how the company invests in real estate.

"For example, we are investing in things like scheduling software because we reduced our real estate and actually don't have a seat for everyone in certain regions," he says. "So, if the pandemic went away and we said, everyone can come back, the truth is that everyone can't come back."

In July, the organization began its return to the hybrid office, as 50 people came together, some in person and some virtual, to collaborate on a new product. "It was great, even if it wasn't the smoothest thing," he says. "We definitely have made a lot of progress but there is a lot more to do."

For example, Northern Trust is looking closely at the latest digital tools that will help with hybrid work collaboration, including self-service, automated platforms to help serve clients, and meeting rooms that offer hybrid HD video



collaboration, enabling in-person and remote participants to interact in real-time and easily book rooms, start meetings, and share content. And resilience is a key factor in the financial services space, so IT teams are doing scenario planning in case there is a power outage or other issues.

"Digital transformation is a huge priority for us across all our functions, so we want to be on the cutting edge of solving these challenges," he says. "Because we need to bring people together."

## Filling the gaps to stay competitive

For the University of Tulsa, the shutdowns and move to remote work were "absolutely shocking," says Paige Francis, CIO at the University of Tulsa, who joined the organization just a few months before the pandemic. "We are a very traditional, private, liberal arts institution, and were not necessarily set up for success to be able to make a quick pivot."

But the organization did pivot, by focusing on being "ruthlessly supportive" and doing whatever needed to be done to make sure that the university could continue to function, including working with Zoom and Microsoft Teams. "It was all about embracing the abnormal and being more open to different kinds of requests than we had received before," she says.

However, there were plenty of challenges to overcome in the race to bring students and instructors online. While the school had already started on the journey toward digital transformation, with an enterprise resource planning (ERP) modernization plan, a renewed learning management system contract, and a commitment to Office 365, Francis

realized they needed to invest in simple hardware like webcams and laptops. “We needed to fill gaps for students who might have equity issues, who needed things like wi-fi hotspots.” There were also software issues: “We needed proctoring software for testing, while we also needed to negotiate with Zoom to get some more variety in their offerings that we didn’t have.”

Going forward, the university must “empower and embolden” a hybrid work environment, says Francis, in order to stay competitive in the higher education space. “If we don’t, we’re not going to be able to keep our staff or serve our users,” she says.

Most importantly, the University of Tulsa needs to keep investing in hybrid success as if the pandemic will always be an issue. “A lot of stuff we put up over the last year, while it has been built to be sustainable, still requires investment for it to be successful moving forward,” she says. “From a technology perspective, we have to support teachers and learners on-site, as well as students who don’t want to come to campus but want to feel part of our community.”

### Increased demand for remote services

Genesys, a California-based company that sells customer experience and contact center technology to mid-sized and large businesses, had already helped many of its contact center industry clients move to the cloud before the pandemic, allowing more flexibility for agents to work at home.

For those organizations, the move to remote work in the early days of covid-19 shutdowns was very smooth, says Olivier Jouve, executive vice president and general manager of Genesys Cloud CX. “We had some

customers go from 2% remote to 85% remote in a matter of hours or days,” he says. However, companies with legacy, on-premise software had a more difficult time getting up to speed.

Now, however, every organization is looking for the right way to manage its contact center workforce. Flexibility, Jouve says, is here to stay, with companies placing a high priority on mobile, voice, video, and other digital technologies that allow for hiring talent anywhere in the world.

At the same time as navigating the best way to manage their workforce, contact centers are also dealing with an increased number of customer interactions, according to a recent poll of Genesys Customer Advisory Board members. The volume of customer interactions agents handle has increased by nearly 20% on average, and spiked 35-40% in some cases during the pandemic.<sup>21</sup>

That means those organizations that provide agents with the environment and tools that enable them to do their best work will be a differentiator. Genesys’ solutions, for instance, offer cloud-based integrations and apps that connect to Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or other collaboration tools and business intelligence (BI) solutions; AI-driven capabilities that include workforce engagement tools, chatbots, and predictive tools; and mobile/digital options that allow agents to communicate with customers using text, SMS, email, social media, and screen sharing.

“We have the ability now to provide agents with the right tools and coaching, as well as to make the environment more flexible,” he says. “This is an industry that by nature has a lot of churn, but these workers are becoming a critical resource.”



“We needed to fill the gaps for students who might have equity issues, who needed things like wi-fi hotspots.”

Paige Francis, Chief Information Officer, University of Tulsa



# 05 Conclusion: Hybrid is here to stay

Working remotely was a non-negotiable reality for many companies during the first waves of the covid-19 pandemic in 2020. But the unprecedented, sudden shift led to a global conversation about the future of work. Much of that discussion has coalesced around a hybrid work future.

That conversation cannot be ignored: Gartner research found that 75% of hybrid or remote knowledge workers say their expectations for working flexibly have increased and that a whopping 39% of knowledge workers could leave if companies insist on a “hard return” to fully on-site work.

Hybrid work models are here to stay, say workplace experts. “I don’t see that we’re going back to pre-pandemic ways of working,” says Caglar. “Those are relics at this point.”

However, as more organizations move toward developing a hybrid work model, leaders need to prioritize several areas:

## **Strike the right balance that works for company culture.**

Whatever the future of the workplace looks like, it should be aligned with the company’s culture as well as its efforts to recruit and retain top talent. “It has to work for the organization culturally and competitively, so we see a lot of varied ‘experiments’ among our clients,” says Wong.

Decisions around work also depend on the demographics of the employee base. “Some firms are skewed younger, with employees who want to be in the office as much as possible, while others with older employees want to hold onto a flexible environment that allows them to pick up or

drop off children from school,” he says. “Every company needs to make the choice that is right for them.”

**Meet employees’ varied wants/needs.** The powerful potential of a hybrid work model is in finding solutions that maximize employee success based on employees’ varied styles, preferences, and ways of working, says Caglar. “Some love to be in person and see their colleagues, while others are distracted and want to work in a quiet space,” he explains. “So, in this new model, can we allow people to find where they are most effective, except for those clear instances where there is a purpose to being in-person together?”

That will mean gathering and analyzing the right data, says Cerner’s Platt. “We were very conscious of using a data-driven approach to build our hybrid work model and find out what our associates were really looking for,” she says. Ultimately, most employees said they wanted a mix of in-person and remote. “They’d like access to a campus for group strategy sessions or scrum events, but they also want the opportunity to do individual work outside of an office setting.”

**Take advantage of the right technology.** For a hybrid work model to succeed, the bottom line is that employees need to be able to work productively and efficiently no matter where they are logging in. That means technology needs to support the overall model design, whether it is better audio and video options, cloud-based digital tools, or improving back-end foundational technologies.

“There is certainly going to be more evolution in technologies that make virtual connectivity as effective as possible, and mimic being in person,” says Caglar. Leadership needs to work together to fill their technology gaps, he adds. “To make this hybrid model work, various leaders, including the CHRO and CIO, have to come together.”

Overall, EY’s Wong says he feels confident about the future of work and how technology can support whatever decisions organizations make about hybrid and remote work models.

“What was really the silver lining around the cloud of the pandemic was that a lot of companies were able to find their spirit of creativity and innovation,” he says. “I’m really optimistic that companies will be able to maintain that spirit and experiment with how they’re going to reopen.”



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