

**SMARTWAY** 

# Getting the balance back: The return to office playbook

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The workplace *works* differently now



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## Getting the balance back:

# The return to office playbook

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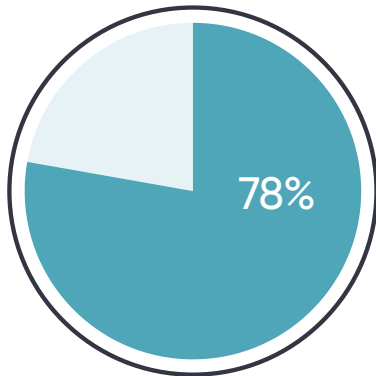
### The workplace *works* differently now

We're all off balance after the last few years, and the world of work looks nothing like it did pre-pandemic. Employees have enjoyed the benefits of working from home, but many managers say it's time to head back to the office.

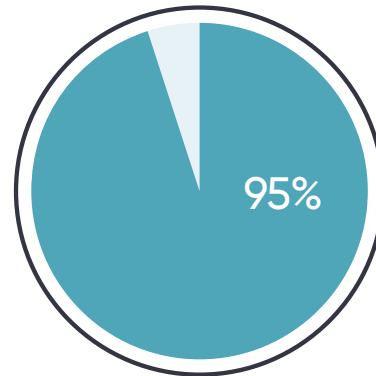
Working in-person brings back the more social elements of work and collaboration that many have missed. But before you rush to bring everyone back in straight away, remember that the world isn't the same as it was when everyone started working from home. People have enjoyed spending less time in the car or on the train commuting and more time with their families. And it's hard to tempt people back into their suits after two years of wearing athleisure to work. While some younger workers struggling to stay productive in their shared apartment kitchens or bedrooms might be eager to return to work in-person, for others it will be a harder sell.

The world of work has changed from top to bottom, and if you don't keep up with those changes and offer **flexibility**, your employees may start looking for work elsewhere. [A Future Forum survey](#) found that **78% of workers** wanted flexibility when it came to where they worked, and **95% wanted flexibility** in their schedules.

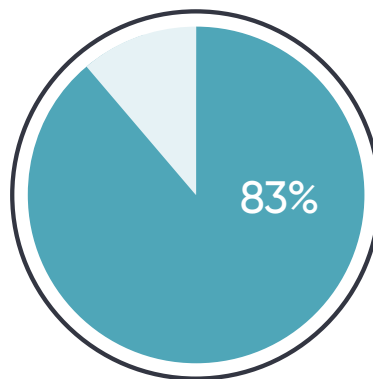
Meanwhile, that same survey found that **68% of executives** wanted to work in the office for most or all of the work week. As you plan your return to office (RTO), you need to look for opportunities to keep employees happy that still make sense for your bottom line.



Workers want flexible work



Workers want flexible schedules



Workers prefer a hybrid model

Hybrid working is one of the best ways to offer choice and flexibility to your employees. Hybrid work schedules allow everyone the choice of where and when they do their best work. Which was echoed in an [Accenture survey](#) of 9,000 workers worldwide, which found that **83% preferred a hybrid work model**.

Everybody wants RTO to be a success. If you plan your RTO well, you'll give employees a great experience when they return, which will make them more likely to pro-actively plan to come in again. It's about finding the right balance, providing the best experience, and encouraging the right behaviour for a better workplace.

**Here are some simple steps to get your return to the office plan right, first time.**

# 5 steps to make return to work a success

## 1 Think “people first”

Remember, RTO requires understanding and alignment to find a compromise that works for everyone. The key to striking the right balance is trust, choice, and flexibility.

But with flexibility comes complexity. Offering flexible working means you need to juggle more supply and demand processes as an employer. That means managing more variables like who, where, when, and how for employees to make a decision on how best to work.

And the more flexibility you offer your employees, the harder it is to know who is in or out of the office and when. This can make scheduling a struggle. Plus, if you don't have a robust booking system in place for keeping track of where people are choosing to work, you won't have the data you need to refine your return to office plan.

With that in mind, the first steps to developing your hybrid work model is knowing how your employees work best. Team managers and workplace leaders should ask for feedback from their teams covering how, where, and when they feel they do their best work. Here are some questions to include in this type of return to work survey:

- ? What is your ideal balance between in-office and remote working?
- ? Do you feel disconnected when working from home?
- ? What are your concerns about hybrid working?
- ? How can we improve current hybrid working arrangements?

Answers to these questions will help you better understand the spread of working preferences across your organization. From there, it's time to develop your working personas and ask for feedback on any plans you put in place.

Creating distinct working personas has become a common way to approach hybrid working. Companies like [IBM](#), [Starbucks](#), and [Deutsche Telekom](#) have all used employee personas to help refine their employee experience. For example, IBM developed [three main personas](#): The Manager, The IBMer, and the Upline leader/executive. They then tailored how managers supported different personas based on each type's distinct needs.

"For us, the process is about placing a persona at the center of the frame and then understanding the essence of value for that persona at key moments of truth. The process helps break down organizational or functional barriers and focus the effort on speed and value."

### Tom Stachura

Vice President of Talent Solutions & People Analytics, IBM



While the results of this type of return to office survey will be different for every organization, here are some worker persona outlines you can use to guide your employee experience design.

## The Lone Wolf



This persona thrives on remote work. They feel they get their best work done outside of the office and appreciate the flexibility and independence remote work offers. They may have a very long commute or demanding family commitments that make regularly working in the office difficult.

The Lone Wolf runs the risk of feeling disconnected from the rest of their team and general workplace culture, so it's important to find new ways to keep them engaged. For these independent workers, regular communication is key. Just don't smother them.



## The Wave Rider

This persona goes with the flow! They're highly adaptable and can do valuable work pretty much anywhere. They might be the digital nomad type, always on the road. Or they may get bored working in the same place every day. The thing they're looking for most is flexibility.

To help the Wave Rider keep their momentum, make sure they have various types of workspaces available to them when they're in the office and put technology in place that lets them smoothly transition back and forth between remote and in-person working.

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## The Coffee Breaker

This persona loves the office's social elements. When working in the office, they can often be found chatting with others and enjoying in-person connection and collaboration. Since they're socially motivated, the Coffee Breaker will want to work in the office most days but will still want the option to occasionally work remotely.

This persona values feeling connected to their remote peers. It's essential to give them plenty of chances for collaboration and engaging hybrid meeting options, so they don't feel like they're missing something when working remotely.

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## The Tried and True

This persona prefers to work in the office. They've missed the routine of going to work, getting settled at their desk, and digging into the day's tasks. If it were up to them, you wouldn't be hybrid working at all! But they also realize things have changed.

Hot-desking might be the last thing this persona wants to try, so if your organization has lots of Tried and Trues, consider a booking system that lets them book a desk for longer periods of time.



## 2 Support hybrid working

We're in the midst of the [Great Resignation](#), and workers are willing to walk away from companies who don't consider their needs or share their values. Workers are looking to maintain the autonomy they've had during the pandemic and if they're not sure how their working preferences mesh with your company culture, they may start looking for employment elsewhere.

You don't want to risk losing their commitment to your company. **Understanding existing workers' needs and showing them that you trust them is essential to retain your talent and attract new candidates.**

The best hybrid workplace strategies and return to office plans will take employee experience, satisfaction, and overall productivity into consideration. Once you've profiled the distribution of working personas in your company, it's time to make sure you cater to people's needs.

## Choose your hybrid work model

Picking the right hybrid work model is highly dependent on your company's needs and the size of your organization. Here are a few basic hybrid models to get you started.

### ✔ Office-centric

This model will cater to your Tried and Trues who love in-person working. Coffee Breakers will also value the chance to see everyone for most of the week. The key to this model is to offer some flexibility, so employees still feel in control. Most office centric organizations still allow workers a couple of days each week for remote work but believe that working in-person is the most productive and practical approach.

Take a look at [Capital One's](#) RTO guide. They're designating Mondays and Fridays as company-wide remote working days and will bring employees into the office to collaborate for the rest of the week.

"Flexibility is a hallmark of Capital One, and we know that flexibility can help unleash the potential of our associates. A flexible hybrid model can allow associates to match the work they do to the environment that best supports that work."

**Rich Fairbank**

CEO, Capital One





### ✓ Fully flexible hybrid

This model will suit your Wave Riders particularly well. They'll love being able to decide where they want to work on a day-to-day basis. Fully flexible hybrid organizations let workers have complete control over where and when they work.

While this sounds great on paper, it can quickly turn into a tangled mess. Workers who work in-office more often will be more visible than remote workers. And getting everyone together for meetings and important events will be more complicated than it would be for organizations with set hybrid schedules.

[Deloitte](#) is an excellent example of a company opting for a fully flexible hybrid approach. The accounting firm allows all of their UK employees to work remotely, whenever they want. And their 20,000 people strong workforce has the option to choose when, where, and how they want to work.

### ✓ Remote-friendly hybrid

If you want to offer people more flexibility, we suggest trying a remote-friendly hybrid model.

**This approach is similar to fully flexible hybrid working, but with a bit more structure.**

Remote-friendly models still let employees work at home some of the time. This could be a set number of days per month or a rotating schedule where specific teams are in-office on certain days of the week.

Companies like [Google](#) are taking this approach by planning to have all employees back in the office three times each week.

### ✓ Remote-centric hybrid

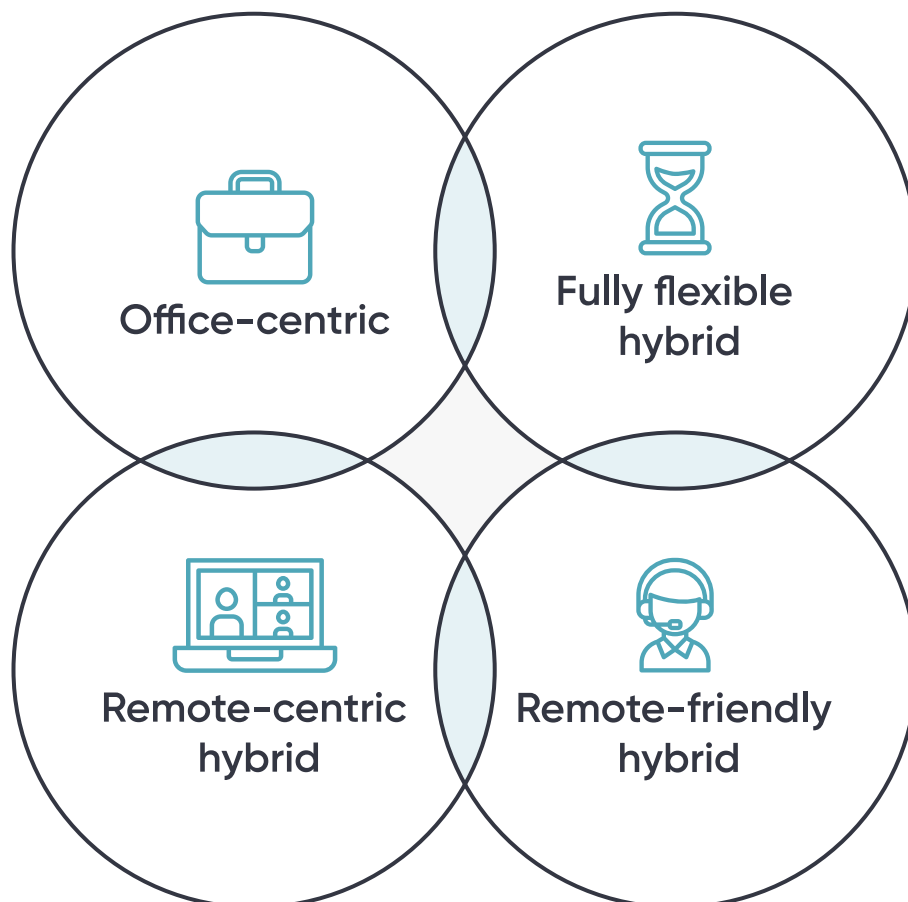
The remote-centric model could also be called “virtual-first.” This model differs from the rest we’ve discussed because it defaults to remote working for most employees.

Software giant [Adobe](#) now lets their employees work remotely while gathering people together for “moments that matter.” As part of their approach to the new way of working, they plan to expand the number of employees working fully remotely over time.

This model can be a great choice for organizations looking to drastically cut real estate costs. Just be wary that some employees who prefer in-person interaction could start to feel isolated.

**Diagram? A venn diagram always works weel when describing how things work together?**

example:





### 3 Focus on collaboration

You may have noticed a theme when it comes to these employee personas and hybrid work models. **Collaboration and making sure employees feel included for each of these approaches to hybrid work is crucial.**

Before implementing your chosen hybrid working plan, facilities and workplace experience managers need to spend time reconfiguring physical office spaces. The best way to do this is to focus on [activity-based working](#) (ABW). This type of design shifts away from one area full of desks and closed offices to a facility with different zones for specific tasks.

In ABW, you might find a smart meeting room filled with all the latest audio-visual equipment to make hybrid meetings a breeze, a restaurant or cafe space for informal gatherings, and an area with comfortable seating and whiteboards to facilitate brainstorming. Be sure to devote some space to quiet working and private rooms for important calls. For businesses with large physical footprints, you might find committing one floor or half of your office space to ABW is a good way to get started.



ABW can help bring employees together and break down barriers between teams, fostering collaboration and communication. And [research shows](#) that ABW can increase workplace satisfaction by **17%** and individual and team productivity by **13%** and **8%** respectively.

While shifting to ABW is excellent for those workers who regularly come into the office, those shifts won't help your remote workers. **Look for ways to make remote workers feel included.**

You can do this by giving everyone a chance to catch up and chat at the beginning of a meeting. Or have leadership occasionally dial in remotely to get a feel for how remote workers experience meetings. This can also help reduce the potential for meeting leaders to only engage with people attending in-office.

## Learn more about hybrid working:

- [How to succeed in the new hybrid workplace model](#)
- [Hybrid ways of working in post-pandemic times](#)
- [3 Hybrid workforce strategies your company needs to succeed](#)

## Make the office a worthwhile choice

We've all gotten used to working from home. And the prospect of going back to the same office experience sounds unappealing and potentially unproductive for many people. Hands down the most important part of returning to the office is [the employee experience](#). **Don't let a bad experience keep your employees from ever crossing the threshold again.**

You need to make in-person working exciting again. Plus, the easier you make working together in the same physical space, the more people will want to collaborate in-office. Studies show that remote working [doesn't always increase productivity](#) and quickly leads to [burnout](#). Going into the office gives everyone a break from home, a change in scenery, and a clear defining line for when work starts and ends for the day.

We can take inspiration from brick-and-mortar retail stores that have successfully pivoted in the face of eCommerce competition. Consider a store like IKEA. Visiting IKEA is an experience. You get to walk around fully designed rooms and test out all the furniture they offer. Sure, you could buy your new couch online, but you can't tell how springy the cushions are through your computer screen.

So you make the drive and walk around the winding path in the store to see everything IKEA has to offer. While you're there, you'll probably pick up a bag full of things you didn't even realize you needed! That's because IKEA has made the generally dull prospect of shopping for new furniture exciting.

You can apply the same principles to your workplace. Yes, workers can do quality work remotely. **But when they're in the office, they're likely to develop related ideas that can strengthen their overall work quality.** Just like picking up that blanket helps tie together your living room decor. This is especially true when working on complicated projects with many moving parts.

Making your office a destination again will help remind employees of all the best parts of in-person working they've been missing over the last few years.

## Learn what your employees want, and they'll stick around.

→ [The best strategies to improve employee retention](#)



## 4 Data is key

It's clear that knowing what your workers want is invaluable, but it's even more important to understand what they actually do. After all, actions speak louder than words! Implementing a return-to-office plan can't be the end of the story. **You need to track how well your plan works over time by looking at real-time behavior patterns and then making changes as needed.**

Data is your friend when it comes to RTO. You should source technology that helps you understand how your portfolio is being used at the building and floor level, right down to the details of space types like meeting rooms, desks, phone booths, et cetera.

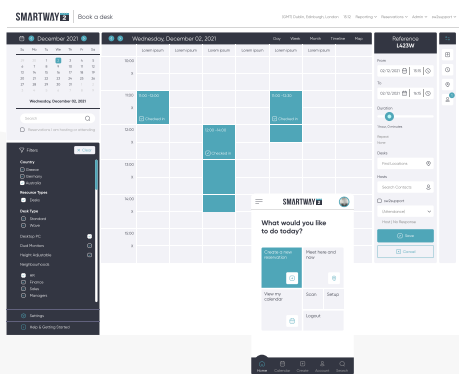
This enables you to make informed decisions on the right size & right purpose for your portfolio of meeting spaces, desks and different zones in your ABW layout. This means you can get reports and insights about how often employees actually come into the office versus how often they said they would prefer to, based on behavior data.

As you gather this data, you can incrementally optimize your newly designed spaces to best serve how your people work. Keep refining your RTO playbook until you find the right balance.

## SMARTWAY 2

One of the best tried and tested ways to track this usage data is through a workplace scheduling solution. The solution you choose should make things like booking resources easy, and help you make returning to office as simple and frictionless as possible. The best workplace scheduling software will do the following.

- Let workers book desks and meeting rooms at the press of a button
- Track occupancy data via check-ins
- Allow for localised rules and policies to suit hyperlocal styles of working
- Push through specific safety guidelines and policies to protect everyone's health
- Offer a single-sign-on for ease of use
- Learn from preferences and behavior and suggest who, what, where, and how employees will do their most productive work
- Allow for easy contact tracing
- Let you change employee permission levels quickly and easily
- Provide simple to understand analytics that show you what's working and what needs to change
- Automatically make suggestions about what to change based on your utilization data



## Want to see a great workplace scheduling software in action?

→ [Request a Smartway2 demo today!](#)

## 5 Keep on communicating

It's probably clear by now that RTO requires juggling a lot of changes and different elements. If understanding your RTO plan proves complicated for your facilities managers, line managers, and workplace experience managers, imagine how confusing it will be for employees who don't get to see the whole picture.

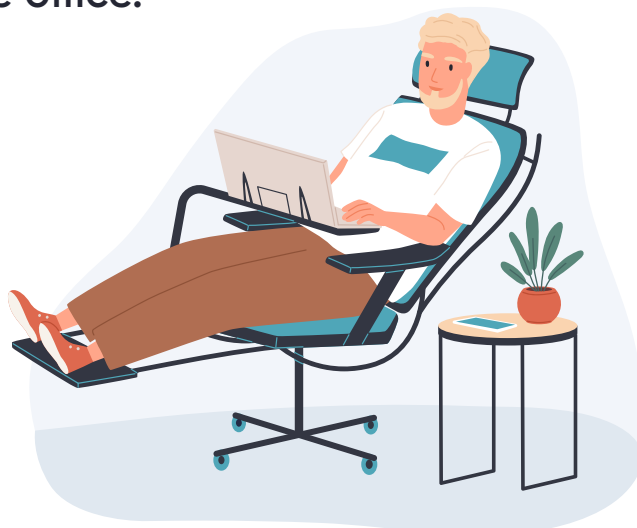
Be sure you're communicating new hybrid working models, expectations, and regulations. Let your employees know about any RTO plans before implementing them, including any stages or phases leading up to your final return plan. Remember that people may still be worried about the safety of going back to the office, so keep an open ear and make it easy for workers to communicate their concerns to managers.

Since you'll also be reorganizing your physical space, consider circulating a new office map before people come in. That way, everyone can get to know your new activity-based working zones without getting thrown in the deep end. Choosing a workplace scheduling solution that can give people directions to different areas once they're in office is also a great way to ease everyone into any changes.

And don't forget to listen to what everyone thinks of the new changes. Make sure managers listen to concerns with compassion and consider that some people will be hesitant to return to office. Giving employees the space to get used to any new plans and voice their concerns is essential to your plan's success.

**As your RTO gets underway, remember to use a combination of the data points you're collecting and staff feedback to perfect your approach to returning to the office.**

[LEARN MORE](#)



# Return to office checklist

## Think “people first”

Get to know your people. What percentage of your workers falls into each persona?

\_\_\_ % Lone Wolves

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\_\_\_ % Coffee Breakers

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\_\_\_ % Wave Riders

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\_\_\_ % Tried and Trues



## Make hybrid working easy

Which hybrid work model will work best for you?

Office-centric (best for more Coffee Breakers and Tried and Trues)

Fully flexible hybrid (best for your Wave Riders)

Remote-friendly (best for a mix of Coffee Breakers, Wave Riders, and Lone Wolves)

Remote-centric hybrid (best for more Wave Riders and Lone Wolves)

## Make the office a destination

### Shift to activity-based working to make collaboration the norm

New spaces should include:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brainstorming areas          | <input type="checkbox"/> AV equipped meeting rooms |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Informal gathering spaces    | <input type="checkbox"/> Private areas for calls   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet zones for focused work |  |

## Bring people together

Your RTO plan should stress:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> In-person collaboration and problem solving | <input type="checkbox"/> Social elements of the office   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Efforts to reduce remote working burnout    | <input type="checkbox"/> Knowing that work starts when you get to the office and ends when you leave |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A thriving company culture                  |  |



## Book desks and rooms with a single tap

Remove all the barriers to office reentry with streamlined tech that meets all your needs including:

Seamless email and calendar integration

Visitor management

Desk and meeting room booking

Digital signage

Contact tracing

Leverage the data you gather to create the office you need

Track utilization

Match real estate to actual usage

Make adjustments to your RTO plan as needed based on what your company actually needs

## Looking for even more detail?

→ **Watch our webinar:**  
5 critical success factors for successful Return to Office"



# Return To The Office The Smart Way

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Smartway2 is a workplace scheduling solution that can help you make the most of your RTO. We can help you change the way people engage with technology, space, and each other, to create a flexible, collaborative workplace.

Here's what we can offer:

- ✓ A simple, reliable Outlook integration
- ✓ Save money on your workspace with the help of detailed analytics and insights
- ✓ Get up and running in **days**, not weeks or months, even with custom requirements

**Manage your workplace the smart way with Smartway2.**

[REQUEST A DEMO TODAY](#)