Rebuilding ourselves for the hybrid era

Jabra research reveals new insights into how to facilitate happiness, belonging, and well-being in hybrid work.

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Mapping hybrid's uncharted territory

We're two years into the greatest work experiment of all time. What began as a necessary shift to remote work has evolved into a long-term exploration of hybrid ways of working.

Around the world, organizations have been implementing emerging technologies, innovative leadership strategies, and new workspaces, all with the goal of finding a better way of working fit for a highly digital, globalized world. Together, we've had the opportunity to completely reinvent how, when, and where we work.

The March 2020 shift to remote working supercharged the digital transition already underway in many organizations. Because of this, most of the work we do has moved almost entirely onto virtual platforms, allowing us to collaborate with one another no matter where we are. It's also enabled colleagues to remain connected to one another even through the toughest of times.

Now, we're entering the next stage in this hybrid working journey. Employees around the world are experiencing a wholesale evolution in their work identities and the emotional connections they have to colleagues, workspaces, and to work itself. They're beginning to embark on new journeys – many exploring new jobs and industries altogether – and they're finding novel ways to organize work around their life.

But with these major changes come new challenges for organizations, leaders, and employees. With two years of constant adaptation to extraordinary societal circumstances, employees are still experiencing a great deal of uncertainty when it comes to their work arrangement; just as they return to the office, they're sent back to work from home. For some, a return to the home office comes as a welcome relief, while to others it's a major disappointment. But for the vast majority, the constant uncertainty is beginning to take its toll.

As we enter the third year of this new era of work, we must begin to think about hybrid work differently. We need to start thinking about how to create emotional stability in an otherwise consistently unstable reality.

To better understand how to move forward with hybrid work, we surveyed 2,800 knowledge workers in six key countries to answer three critical questions: How much autonomy should employees have to determine where and when they work? What characterizes our emotional connection to our workspaces? And how can we use technology to rewire our relationships with colleagues for a virtual-first era?

The state of hybrid in Spring 2022
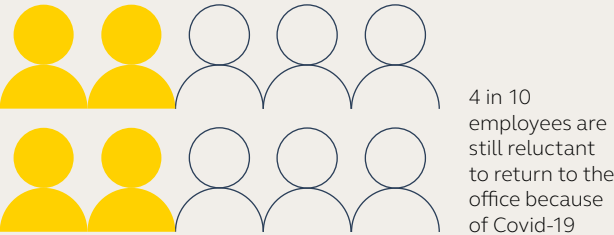
Hybrid is the preferred work model, but there's still a way to go

63% say that hybrid is their preferred work model...

...compared to 15% fully remote...

15%

...and 23% fully in-office.

23%

But only 45% are currently working a hybrid work arrangement...

45%

...while 19% are fully remote...

19%

...and 37% are fully in-office.

37%
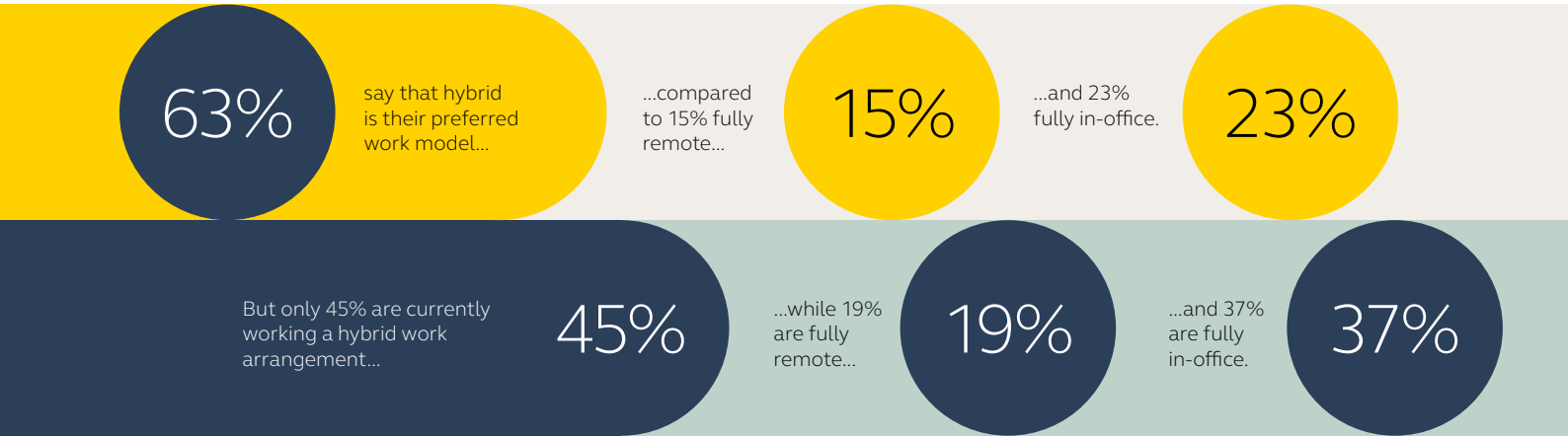
Some key challenges to overcome

4 in 10 employees are still reluctant to return to the office because of Covid-19

55% are concerned their career would suffer if they didn't come into the office regularly

Only **20%** have full autonomy to choose where and when they work

Where and how we meet is still trending towards virtual environments

80%

20%

80% of all meetings are either fully virtual or hybrid, with only 20% happening fully in-person

49% of organizations have reconfigured their office spaces since the start of the pandemic

42% of employees have reconfigured their home office space since the start of the pandemic
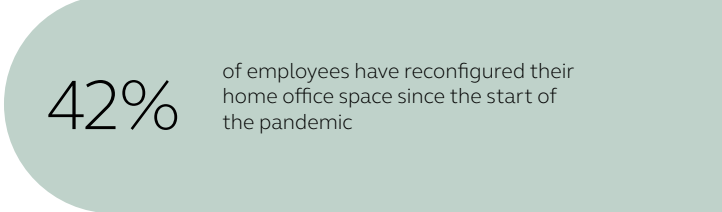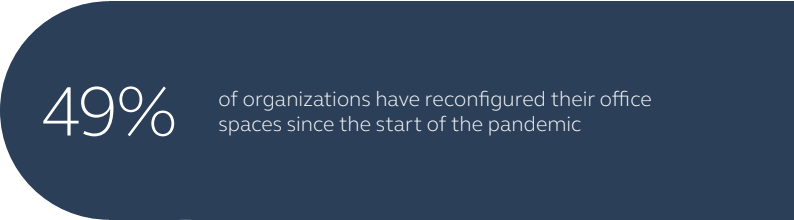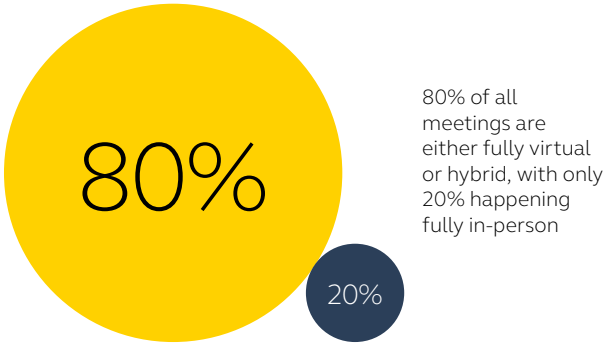
Maximizing autonomy for a better hybrid work experience

Employee autonomy has long been of interest to management and HR professionals. At its core, the goal of promoting autonomy is to empower employees to truly take ownership of the work they do and to work in a way that allows them to do their job most effectively.

After all, it's employees who are most familiar with their work and how they can do it best, whether that means deciding which tasks to prioritize or in which order to complete them. And with hybrid work becoming more common, employees are increasingly calling for the power to decide for themselves where and when they should do their work.

Only
20%
have full autonomy to choose where and when they work

As the vast majority of employees have seen that they still excel at their jobs regardless of where they are, many are calling for the power to determine their own work arrangement. However, only 20% say they have full autonomy to decide where and when they work, with the ability to come into the office if they'd like.

In this section, we explore how autonomy impacts employees' work experiences, as well as how leaders can most effectively implement a hybrid work model that empowers employees with more freedom to determine their own work arrangement.

1. Employees with full autonomy to choose where they work are happier with their jobs.

In our survey, we asked all employees to choose one of five possible options that best described their current work arrangement. Then, we asked them to rate how that work arrangement impacted various aspects of their job. The goal was to create a direct link between the amount of autonomy an employee is given and their overall experience at work. To convert these into a simpler framework, we've classified these work arrangements according to the degree of autonomy they give the worker to determine how their own work week is arranged. These groups can be seen on the next page.

Employees want flexibility by way of autonomy and are willing to seek employment elsewhere if they're not given it. As such, maximizing employee autonomy is becoming less of a workplace benefit and more a necessary element to remaining competitive and relevant as an organization.

Holger Reisinger,
SVP, Jabra

We found that as autonomy increased, so too did the likelihood that an employee would feel their work arrangement had a positive impact on their overall work experience. Workers with full control over their work arrangement reported a better work experience – sometimes with notable differences – than those with limited or no say in where and when they worked. These differences are most apparent when it comes to feeling a sense of belonging, motivation, productivity, trust in leaders, work-life balance, and mental well-being.

Interestingly, there was almost no difference across all three groups when asked whether their work arrangement had a positive effect on the impact they felt they had in their organization. Impact is a matter of receiving recognition for a job well done and understanding how those results affect the wider goals of the organization. As such, where and when we work may not have as direct an effect on our sense of impact as do other practical considerations such as reward and praise.

Employee experience is directly impacted by autonomy
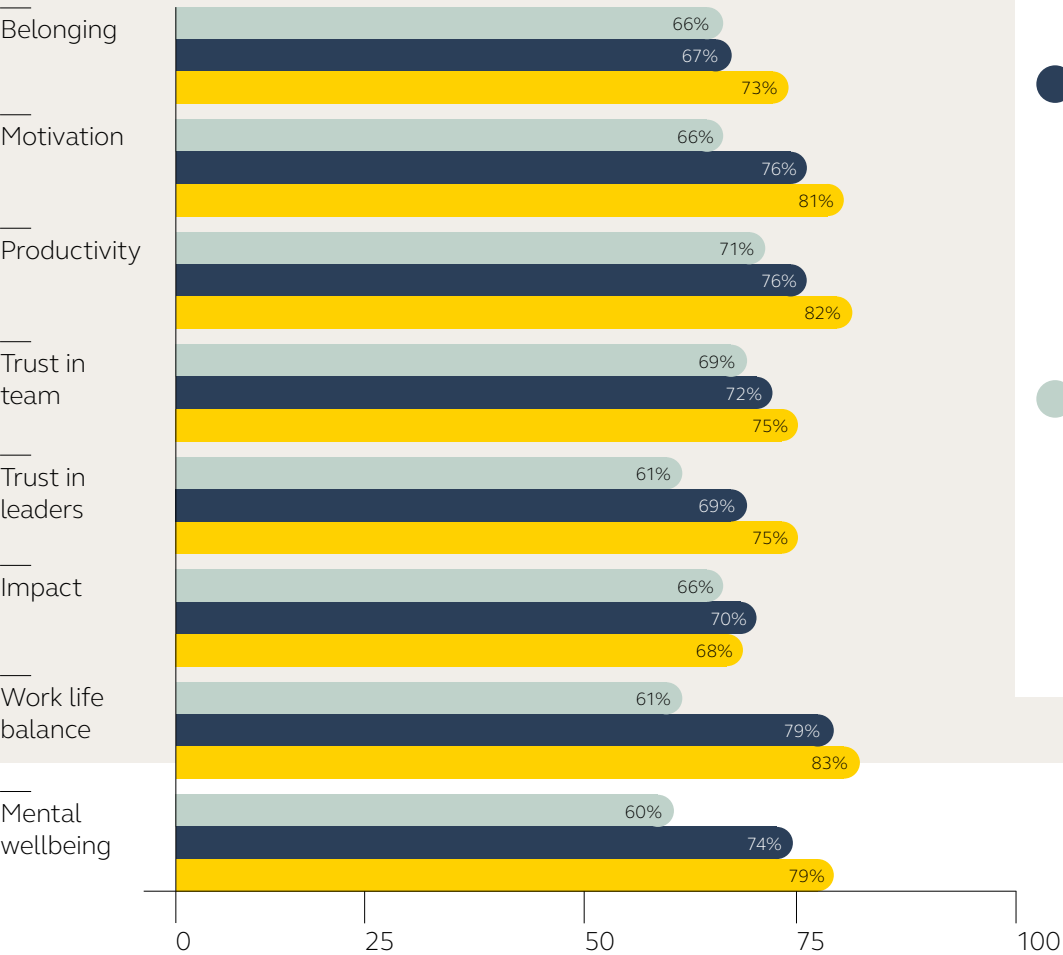
High autonomy
"I have full autonomy to choose where and when I work, with the ability to come into the office if I want."

Medium autonomy
"I'm required to work remotely full time and can choose to work anywhere but the office."

"There is a minimum number of days required in the office, but I can choose which days to come in."

Low autonomy
"I'm required to work in-office full time."

"I work from home and the office, but the days are chosen for me (e.g., required in office on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and from home on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays)."

Belonging: 66% / 67% / 73%
Motivation: 66% / 76% / 81%
Productivity: 71% / 76% / 82%
Trust in team: 69% / 72% / 75%
Trust in leaders: 61% / 69% / 75%
Impact: 66% / 70% / 68%
Work life balance: 61% / 79% / 83%
Mental wellbeing: 60% / 74% / 79%

(0 25 50 75 100)

Key Takeaways

The trust experiment of the century is playing out before our eyes and autonomy is going to play a key role; it'll be an essential part of improving employees' satisfaction and engagement at work. Increased, autonomy will positively impact their sense of belonging, motivation, productivity, trust, work-life balance, and mental well-being. Decreased, it'll begin to erode these foundational pillars of organizational culture and success.

When weighing the viability of various work arrangements moving forward, autonomy should be the first variable leaders consider. By giving employees the ability to choose where they work, then planning space and technology needs accordingly, leaders can create a world-class work experience that will translate to broader organizational success.

2. Autonomy doesn't mean unpredictability.
Leaders can still plan for real estate and tech needs.

If there's been one benefit from the constant location changes of the past two years, it's that employees have been able to experience the advantages of having access to multiple kinds of workspaces. And because of this, employees with full autonomy are very likely to choose to work in a hybrid working model as their normal working arrangement. With a hybrid model, they know they'll be able to access spaces that are conducive to socialization, collaboration, and focus, while also having the ability to balance work and life in a way that makes most sense to them.

Empowering people with the autonomy to optimize their time and tasks as they see fit is absolutely essential to building an equitable company culture. As such, forcing everyone to work in the same way – that is, to work in the same place from 9 to 5 – will inherently alienate any employees who can't balance their lives with that outdated and narrow conception of work.

Kelly Nagel, President of North America, Jabra

When we looked at the current work week of fully autonomous employees, we found that 57% of them choose to work a hybrid week. This is more than double those who choose to work fully remote and almost quadruple those who choose to work fully in-office. Hybrid is the clear front-runner for employees when they aren't mandated to work in any specific way.

How are employees with full autonomy choosing to work?

57%
Hybrid

28%
Remote

15%
In-office
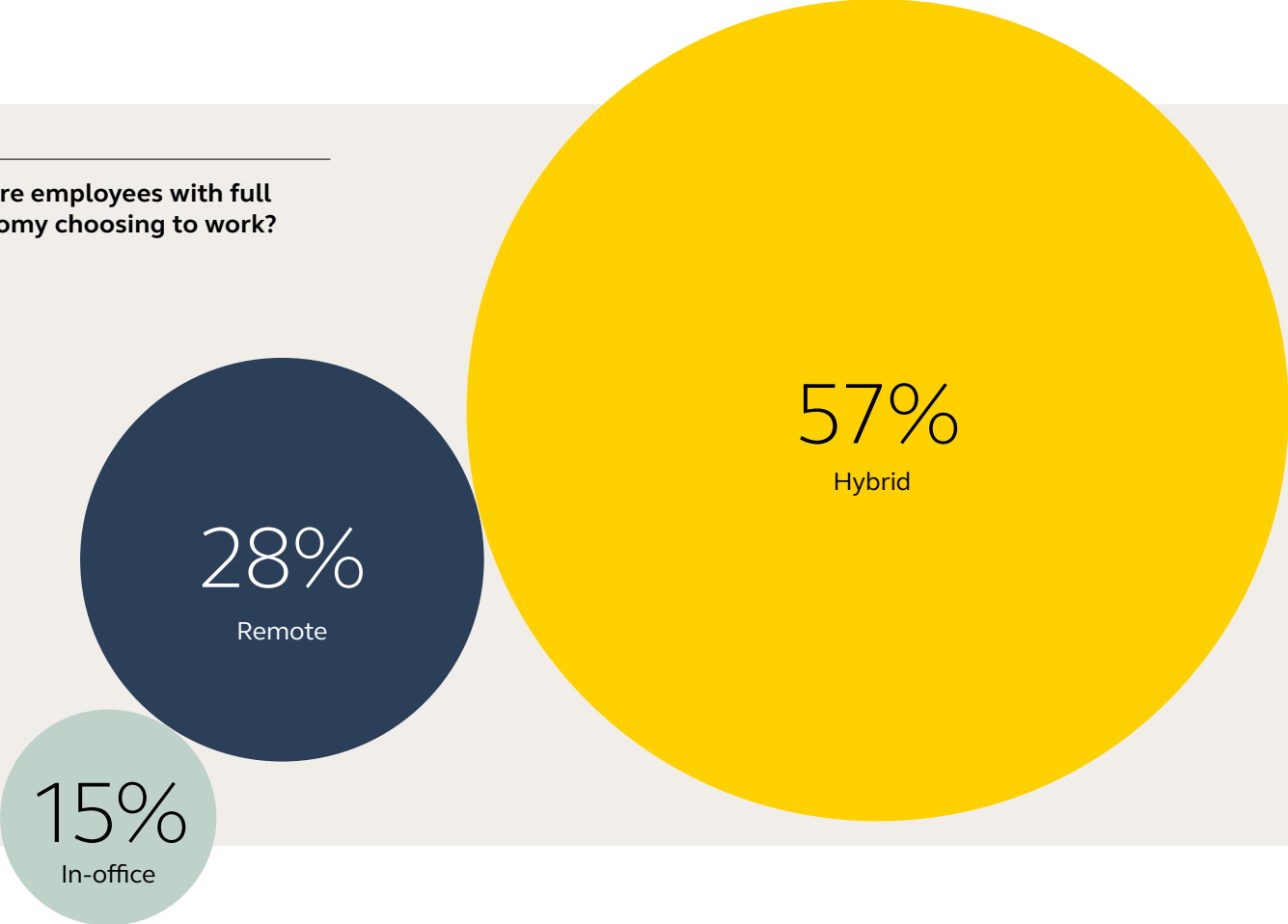
Key Takeaways

When it comes to settling on a work arrangement for your organization, handing the decision making over to employees doesn't automatically mean that leaders won't be able to predict their behavior to plan space and technology needs accordingly. For months, leaders have been concerned with social aspects of hybrid work, such as how to maintain company culture and maximize informal interactions between colleagues.

However, the data shows that if you let people decide, they generally opt in favor of a balance that services these needs automatically. In other words, they generally opt for hybrid work.

In addition to this, by creating a virtual-first work culture in which the work we do is independent of location, organizations open up the possibility of hiring fully remote talent. Around the world, the so-called "Great Resignation" has been a rude awakening to many organizations. By expanding the pool of eligible candidates beyond a commute radius of a physical location, organizations create major opportunities to hire the best of the best.

When organizations give employees the ability to choose how to organize their work week, they benefit from increased employee well-being, productivity, and the ability to secure a wider talent pool.

3. The role of the manager is evolving.
Hybrid will self-pilot if leaders address social, health, and tech concerns.

When given the ability to choose on their own, employees have chosen hybrid as their ideal way of working going forward. But that doesn't mean that leaders won't still have a crucial role to play. Indeed, the role of leaders becomes even more vital in an organization with high employee autonomy.

In our survey, 66% of workers with full autonomy chose a hybrid model as their ideal work week. However, as we saw above, only 57% were actually currently working a hybrid model. Of that 9% gap, 2% are working from the office more than they would like and 7% are working from home more than they would like.

66%
of workers with full autonomy choose a hybrid model as their ideal work week

Two important questions for leaders:

If these workers have full autonomy, why aren't they working their ideal work week? Why are they either working full-time at home or full-time in the office when they could be choosing otherwise? Our data provides a few possible explanations.

Explanation 1: Social Pressure

Problem

One reason that employees may be working full-time in the office more than they wish is social pressure, which can be a very powerful force in the workplace. Despite an organization purportedly giving employees complete freedom to work wherever they would like, a culture that says, "you need to be in the office to move up," whether explicitly or implicitly, effectively reverses any degree of autonomy given to employees. And we found this to be relatively common for employees around the world: 55% said they were concerned their career would suffer if they didn't come into the office on a regular basis. And of that 55%, almost half (49%) cited a lack of transparency in how performance is evaluated as the main source of their concern.

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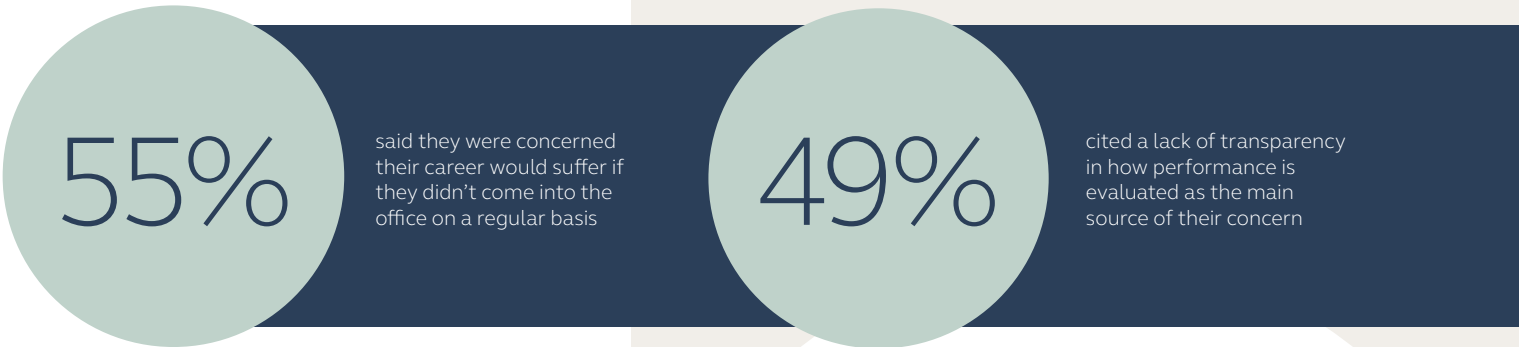
Solution

As a leader, if you're going to enable more employee freedom, where employees have the decision to both come into the office or work anywhere else, it needs to be made abundantly clear through both communication and action that employees won't be at a disadvantage if they choose to not work in the office.

One place to start is with output-based performance evaluation. This has been discussed for a long time, but with the way we work rapidly changing, employee performance evaluation programs must be revisited and brought up to date. Another key step is to train managers in location bias, or the unconscious bias that leads to preferential treatment of those with whom they have the most face time.

Employees often reflect the behavior of their leaders, so one of the best ways to show that it's okay to work from home or the office is for leaders and managers to do it themselves.

Explanation 2: Health concerns

Problem

One reason that employees may be working full-time from home more than they wish is because, even two years into the pandemic, the virus is still a major health concern for many workers. 40% of all employees say they're reluctant to return to the office because of Covid-19. Similarly, 55% are reluctant to enter a small conference room because of the virus. Workers know that a return to the office means increased exposure to the virus, and that's a risk that many of them aren't willing to take.

4 in 10 employees are still reluctant to return to the office because of Covid-19
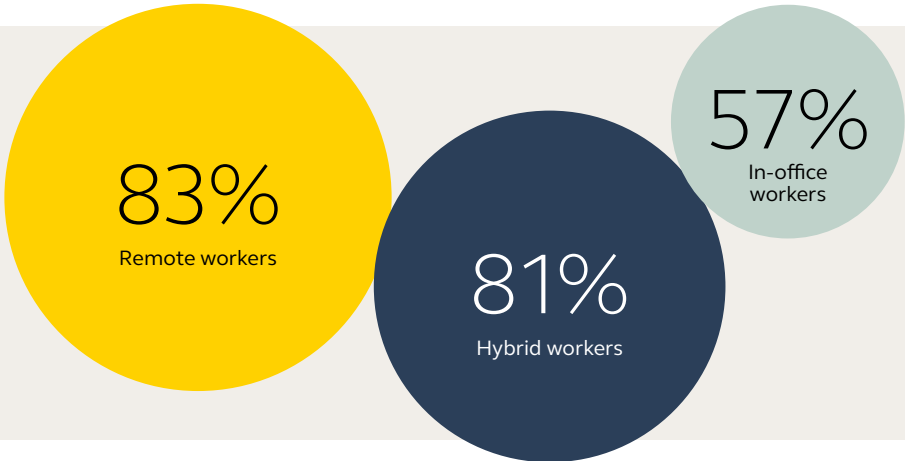

Solution

It's difficult for employees to exercise their ideal work arrangement if it's hampered by fears regarding health and well-being. To ensure that employees feel safe working in the office, leaders will need to continually update health guidelines in the office to reflect local realities, as well as create spaces where employees can choose to work alone with limited contact to others.

Explanation 3: Unequal Access to Tech

Problem

Over the past two years, many workers have optimized their home office spaces with technology that enables them to thrive in virtual environments. Along the way, they've gotten a lot of help from their employers. However, the data shows that full-time office workers are lagging behind in tech availability for equitable and inclusive collaboration. This can serve as a final explanation for why workers may be working full time from home more than they feel is ideal: they're simply better equipped there than they are at the office.

My organization provides me with the necessary technology (i.e., laptop, headset, video camera, video meeting platform, etc.) to collaborate equally and inclusively no matter where I am.

83%
Remote workers

81%
Hybrid workers

57%
In-office workers

Solution

Most offices were built for in-person work. If leaders want to enable employees to work their ideal working arrangement, they need to look at how to optimize their office spaces for employees who are working primarily in virtual environments. This includes identifying technologies that will enable both in-office and remote employees to collaborate on an equal playing field, and which will allow employees to seamlessly move between these places without feeling left out. Only then will employees truly be able to work a flexible arrangement on their own terms.

Key Takeaways

In a high-autonomy work environment, leaders must take a proactive role in making sure that the organizational culture is conducive to high employee autonomy.

In the current state of the world, the three key factors to look out for are social pressure, health concerns, and unequal access to technology across employees' various workspaces.

Identifying the emotional significance of our workspaces

Places have meaning and symbolism. Up until the pandemic, the emotional connection we had with our workspace may not have been something we gave much thought; it was simply somewhere we sat while getting our work done. But when employees were sent to work from home, many were cut off from the feeling of belonging that their in-office workspace provided. They were separated from that sense of regularity and predictability that a specific place offered them.

In response, employees all over the world were inspired to create that connection for themselves by setting up a more dedicated home workspace. In fact, since the pandemic, 42% of employees have reconfigured their home working space. These reconfigurations allowed workers to recreate that connection to a dedicated workspace that so many of them had in the office prior to the pandemic.

While employees were busy setting up a dedicated workspace at home, 49% of organizations have reconfigured their office space.

They've also been considering the best way to implement hot-desking arrangements in order to optimize space and give employees a dynamic workspace to return to. These changes were in many cases meant to reflect the new realities of the hybrid world we live in: lower daily headcount, more diverse space needs, and concerns over health and safety in the office.

It turns out, however, that the return to the office was not as smooth and clearly defined as many had anticipated. We tried returning to the office on set days, only to find out that people want to manage their own schedule. We tried hot desking, only to see employees sit at the same desk every day anyway. In many places around the world, workers have been floating between these multiple workspaces not out of choice, but out of necessity. Right as they begin to re-establish that connection to their workspace, they're cut off from it by a change in guidelines regarding where to work. For a large portion of workers, this constant back and forth has left them without a sense of "place" in their work.

So, what do we need to do to restore – or rather, recreate – a more permanent sense of connection with our workspaces? How do we once again feel that we belong somewhere?

1. Understand the hidden attachment your employees have to the office before reconfiguring it

Your employees might not be returning to the office anytime soon, but they've still created a strong association between the office and their sense of belonging in the organization. Across all types of workers, there's still a desire to have a dedicated personal space in the office.

In fact, almost 7 in 10 workers agree that if they didn't have a regular, permanent workspace in the office, they'd still try to sit and work in the same spot every day. As humans, we're drawn to consistent and predictable routines, and workers really want to know what their day is going to look like should they choose to go into the office.

We need to find a way to create a sense of belonging to a workplace that is virtual first. Give employees the power to choose their desired working space and offer them the technology, tools, and support to be productive no matter their environment.

Holger Reisinger,
SVP, Jabra

The data also shows that not having a regular, permanent working space could be detrimental to employee engagement, motivation, and even retention. With almost 4 in 10 workers saying that they'd feel less loyalty and commitment to their company if they didn't have a regular, permanent workspace, this brings into the spotlight the possible unintended consequences of hot desking arrangements in the office.

Much of the guidance around hot-desking addresses practical considerations, such as the number of desks necessary or whether employees should have individual lockers where they can leave their belongings. But as we see here, the emotional reaction to losing your dedicated space could outweigh many or all of these logistical concerns.

"If I didn't have a regular, permanent workspace, I would still try to sit and work in the same spot every day."

- 🟡 Agree
- 🟢 Disagree
- 🔵 No opinion

11%

20%

69%

32%

38%

30%
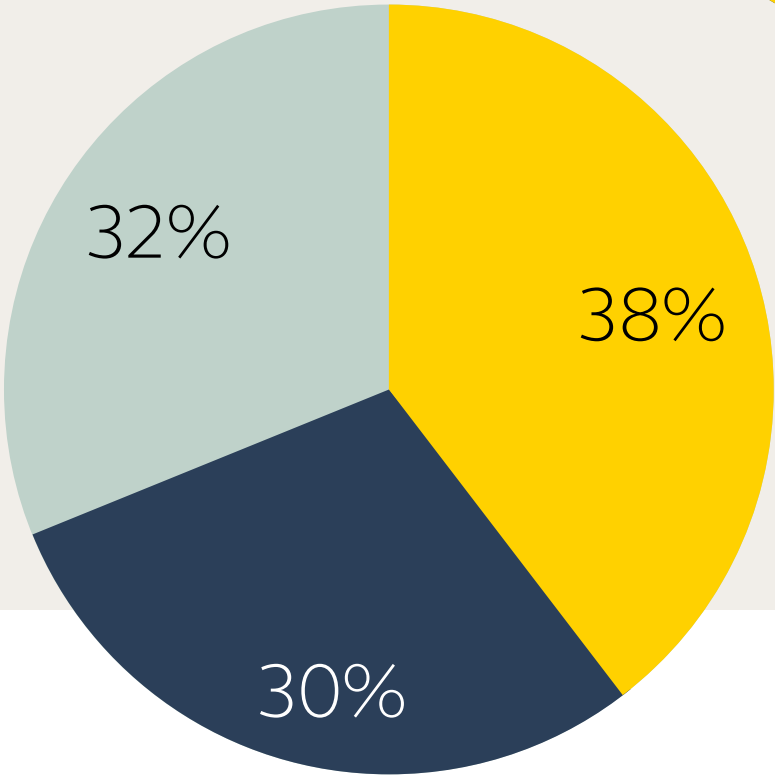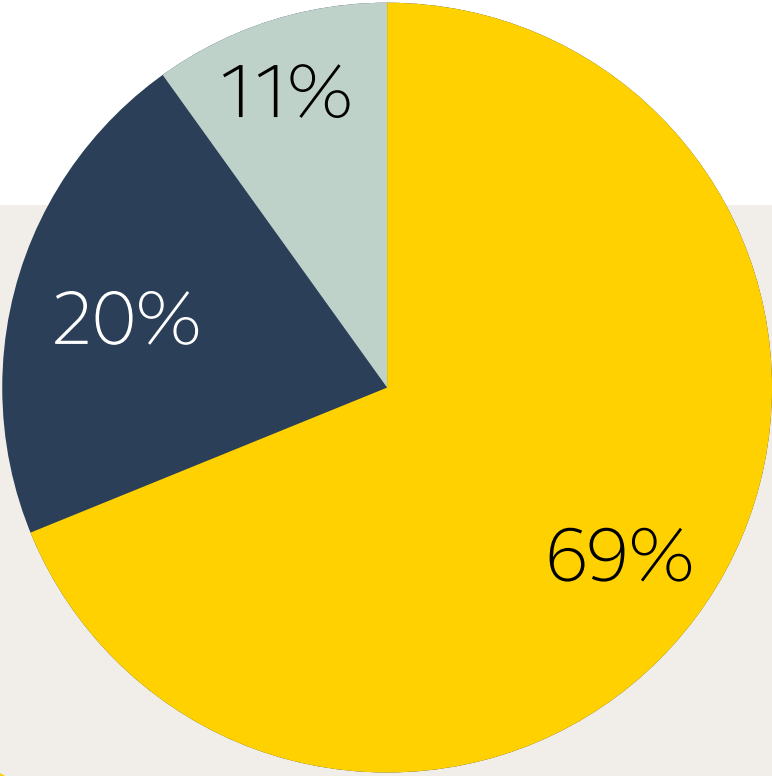
"If I didn't have a regular, permanent workspace, I would feel less loyalty and commitment to my company."

- 🟡 Agree
- 🟢 Disagree
- 🔵 No opinion

Key Takeaways

Leaders who wish to implement a hot-desking setup will need to think carefully about how to replace this sense of belonging with one that is more location-agnostic.

A first step in this direction is to build a "virtual-first" approach to work and culture, wherein physical locations have a role but are secondary to effective virtual connection.
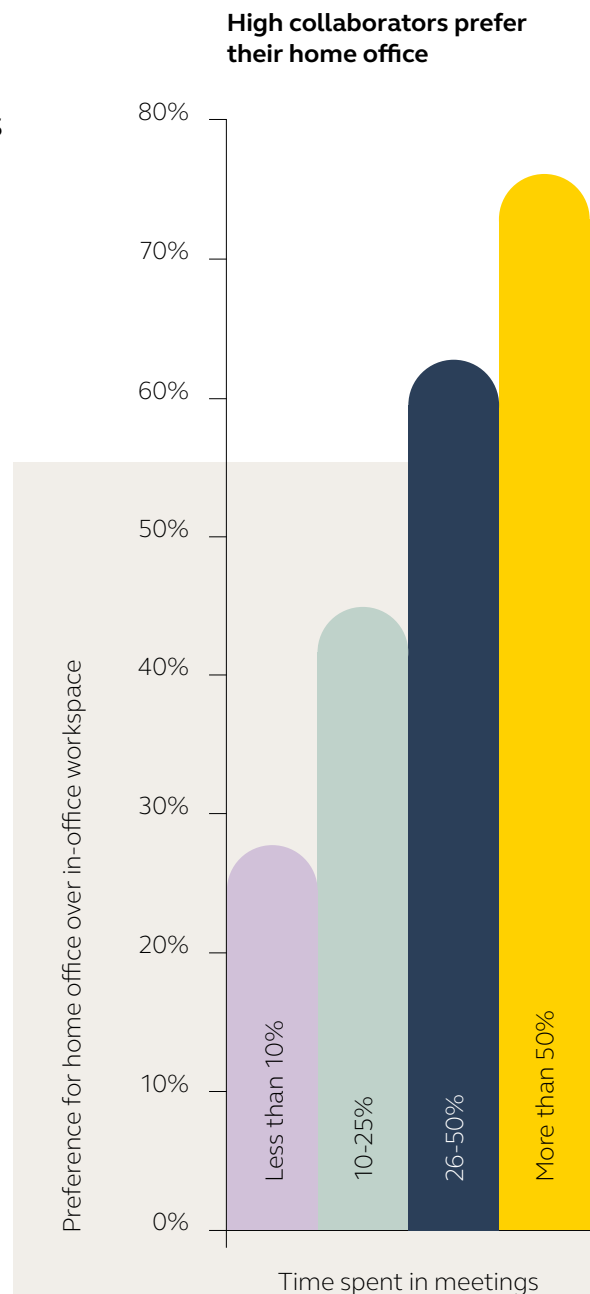
If everyone knows that they can contribute on an equal playing field regardless of where they are, they'll be able to be able to work in a space that responds to their needs while still feeling a sense of belonging within the team and the organization.

2. Organizations are designing offices for collaboration, but that's not where employees prefer to take their meetings

For the better part of two years, organizations have operated on the assumption that the traditional office space would be a place teams would gather for collaboration, while focus work would happen primarily at home. But as our hybrid work routines have evolved, it's become clear to both employees and leaders that their space needs are more complex than that. In fact, our data shows that employees' two strongest desires for coming into the office are for collaboration and focus, truly highlighting the diverse range of tasks that employees plan to get done in the office.

However, there's one group that definitively sees the home office as a better place for meetings, and that's high collaborators – people who spend more than 50% of their time in meetings.

Indeed, as the amount of time a given employee spends in meetings increases, the likelihood that that employee prioritizes their home office space increases. This runs counter to the long-held belief that the office is more conducive to collaboration.

High collaborators prefer their home office

Preference for home office over in-office workspace

- Less than 10%
- 10-25%
- 26-50%
- More than 50%

Time spent in meetings

**8 in 10 meetings are either
fully remote or hybrid**

One explanation could be that 80% of allmeetings are now either fully remote or hybrid. This means that instead of rushing from one meeting room to another, high collaborators can simply enter the next Teams or Zoom meeting at the click of a button. There are also major productivity benefits to a virtual-first approach to collaboration, such as the ability to record and transcribe meetings.

80%

20%
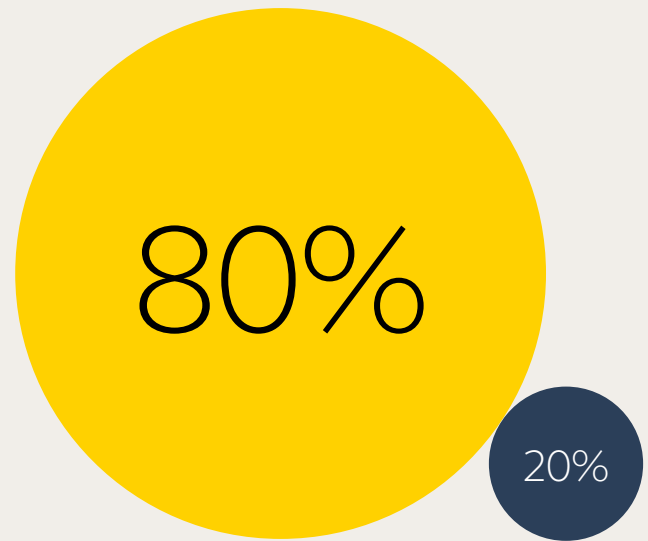
Key Takeaways

The office will never have a singular purpose; its purpose is defined by each individual employee's personal needs. As meetings continue to trend towards fully virtual and hybrid, high collaborators will feel more comfortable in whatever location is best suited for high virtual collaboration. Currently, that location seems to be the home office.

So, what does this mean for how organizations should approach their office redesigns? High collaborators must know that when they come into the office, they're going to be able to easily access the right spaces and technology for both fully virtual and hybrid meetings. To create a space where people feel they belong, they need to feel that the space was purpose-built for their workstyle.

If rushing from one meeting room to the next serves as a disincentive from coming into the office, organizations should explore how personal collaboration technology can enable high collaborators to continue living their seamless virtual meeting experiences, while also being able to enjoy some of the other benefits of working in the office, such as socialization or focus.

3. The office you haven't considered is becoming increasingly popular for hybrid natives

Gen Z represents a generation not only of digital natives, but also of hybrid natives. To a large extent, these young employees were only beginning their careers as the pandemic struck. Because of this, almost the entirety of their professional experience so far has been characterized by constant movement from one workspace to another. In short, the "anywhere office" is all they've ever known.

As leaders, we can't expect that our Gen X and Gen Z employees will have the same motivations for coming to work – or any two generations, for that matter. To create a work culture that reflects, respects, and embodies the wide range of values in a five-generation workforce, it's up to leaders to identify the shared values that bridge these groups and use those as common ground on which to collaborate and cooperate.

Holger Reisinger,
SVP, Jabra

Entering a workforce where remote and hybrid work are commonplace has had a major impact on how these hybrid natives perceive the importance of location in work. So much so, in fact, that 10% of Gen Z report that their usual workspace is a third space (e.g. co-working space, café, library, etc.) rather than their home or traditional office. That's twice as much as Millennials and roughly three times as much as Gen X and Boomers. In addition to this, 64% of Gen Z says that they consider their "office" to be their laptop, headset, and wherever they can get a strong internet connection.

"A third place (e.g. co-working space, cafe, library, etc.) is my usual workspace."

	Gen-Z	Millenials	Gen-X	Boomers
	10%	5%	4%	3%
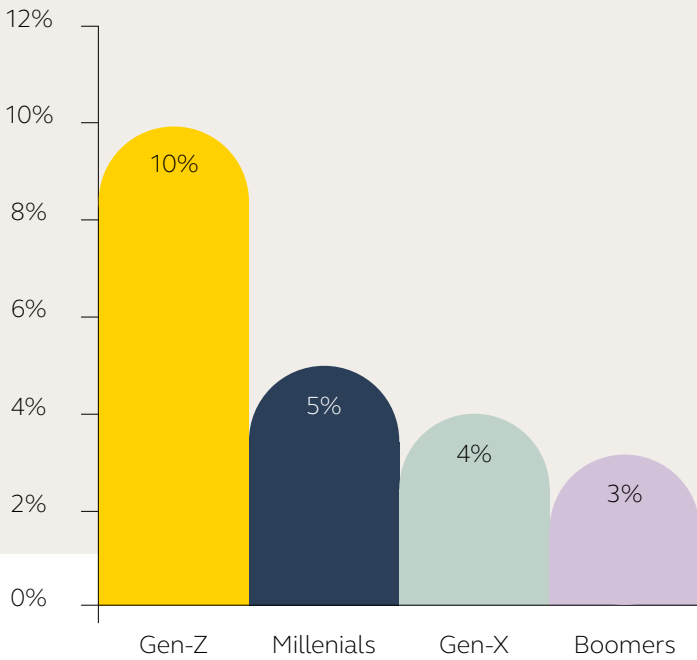
"I consider my 'office' to be my laptop, my headset, and wherever I can get a strong internet connection."

	Gen-Z	Millenials	Gen-X	Boomers
	64%	63%	48%	43%
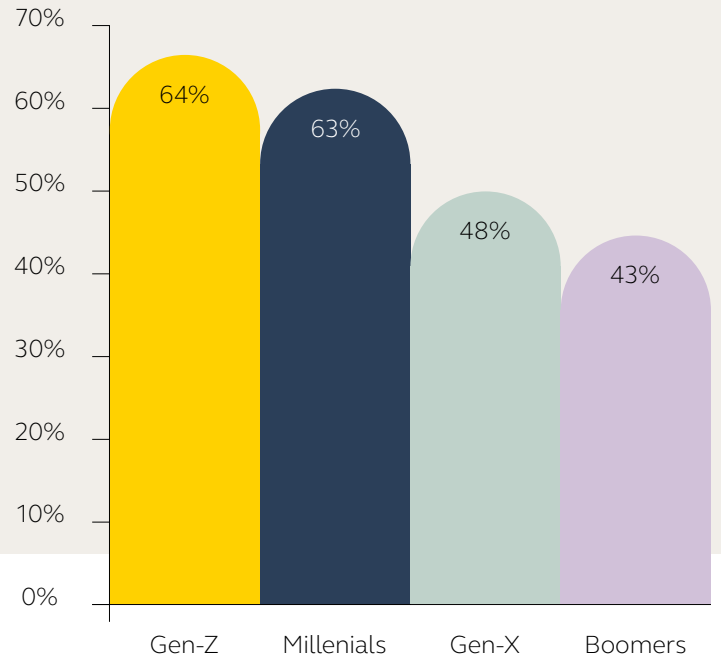
Key Takeaways

As we've already seen, the connection to regular, permanent in-office workspaces is strong across the workforce as a whole. But as Gen Z continues to take up a larger proportion of the workforce, this connection will fade away. Unlike their more experienced counterparts – particularly Gen X and Boomers – these hybrid natives don't have as strong of an association between work and place.

For them, what's more important is that they can get their work done from wherever they happen to be, rather than have to be wherever their work is.

Because these employees have a less established connection to the office, leaders need to be more mindful of bringing teams together more often to create stronger ties and relationships. It also has strong implications for IT strategies and flexible working policies.

In order to prepare for the shift to a predominantly Millennial and Gen Z labor market, equipping teams with the right tools to work from the "anywhere office" will be crucial. It will also be an important part of attracting and retaining young talent in a future increasingly dominated by hybrid natives.

Enabling genuine human connection with hybrid technology

The future of work will be virtual-first. With hundreds of millions of people collaborating on Teams, Zoom, and other unified communications (UC) platforms every day, these virtual environments are the new standard for how we connect to one another.

In fact, many employees have only ever met some of their colleagues on these platforms. Because of this, it's critical that leaders do all they can to get the most out of our virtual environments, so employees can create closer, more human relationships with their colleagues.

The best collaboration technology now allows us to have the same real estate on a screen; we are all equally present in a meeting. We have our voice, we have our appearance, and everyone has a seat at the virtual table. If you have technology to support this, people will feel included, regardless of whether they're physically in the room or not.

Holger Reisinger,
SVP, Jabra

However, not all employees have the same experience in virtual meetings. In fact, 37% of employees globally say they often feel left out of the conversation in hybrid meetings. Virtual meeting platforms will not only be where hybrid and remote workers meet to get work done; they'll also be central to fully in-office teams, as meetings with clients, customers, and other partners will often take place in a virtual or hybrid setting.

As such, inclusivity in the physical office or meeting room isn't sufficient for the future. Organizations will need to find ways to make sure that all their employees can connect inclusively and equitably in fully virtual and hybrid environments. Being able to easily operate in a virtual setting will be essential in making sure employees can maintain a sense of confidence and purpose in the hybrid working future.

1. Organizations that prioritize meeting equity have higher hybrid meeting engagement

Since the start of the pandemic and alongside the rise of hybrid work, the term "meeting equity" has entered the discussion on how to create equitable and inclusive virtual environments. It's based on the assumption that in a traditional meeting room, every meeting participant has a place at the table and therefore has an equal opportunity to contribute to the meeting. But because hybrid meetings consist of both physical and virtual meeting participants, true meeting equity becomes more difficult to achieve. With only 30% of employees being familiar with the concept of meeting equity, this puts the emphasis on leaders to reconsider – or consider for the first time – how to make sure everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute and make an impact in meetings regardless of where they are.

Only
30%
are familiar with the concept of meeting equity

Compared to in-office workers (35%) and remote workers (48%), 56% of hybrid workers said that their organization prioritized achieving greater meeting equity. We can also see that employees who report high levels of engagement in hybrid meetings are more likely to work for an organization that explicitly addresses meeting equity. This showcases just how important it is for all organizations to take a more purposeful approach to addressing meeting equity.
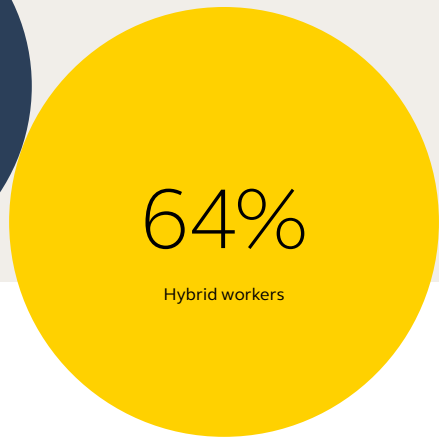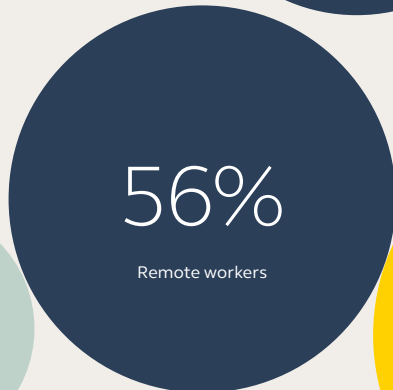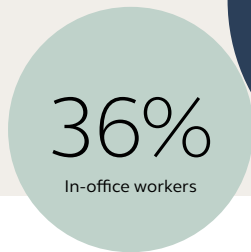
Jabra GN

"My company prioritizes meeting equity."

35%
In-office workers

48%
Remote workers

56%
Hybrid workers
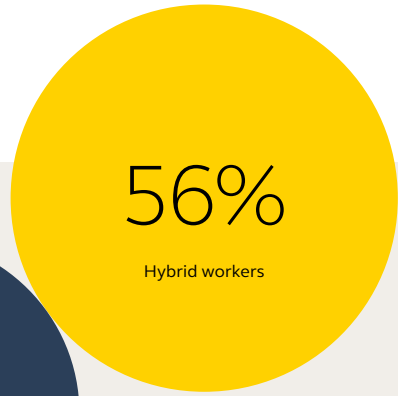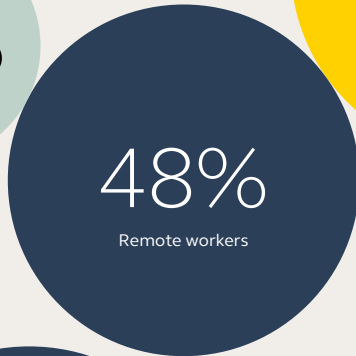
"My personal level of engagement in a hybrid meeting is as good as my level of engagement in a face-to-face meeting."

36%
In-office workers

56%
Remote workers

64%
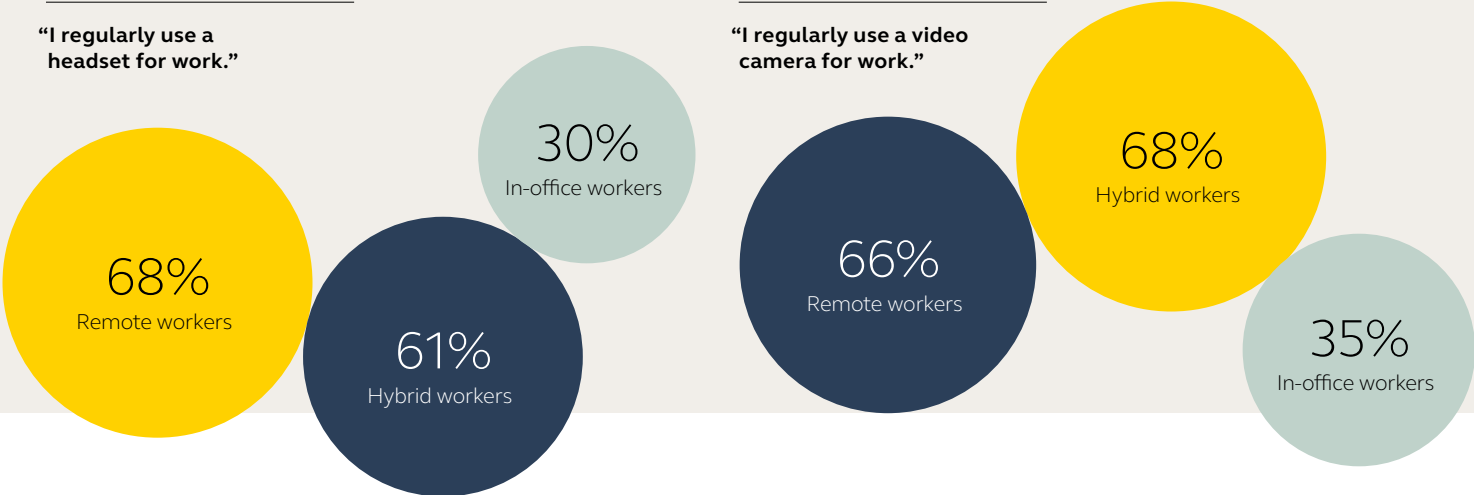Hybrid workers

Key Takeaways

Collaboration is on the increase and getting meetings right will be one of the key issues to solve in hybrid work. It will impact everything from meeting and business productivity to culture and inclusion. Moving forward, leaders need to take decisive steps to address meeting equity, regardless of the primary type of work model their organization practices. Without it, they risk lower levels of engagement in meetings, which can lead to missed opportunities for innovation and relationship-building.

In this virtual era, technology truly defines the employee experience. As such, apart from explicitly discussing meeting equity with employees, leaders will also need to consider the benefits of inclusive collaboration technologies, which ensure that even physical meeting participants are represented equitably in virtual environments.

By combining these technologies with inclusive meeting practices, employees can truly be able to feel that they belong in the meeting, team, and organization from wherever they're working.

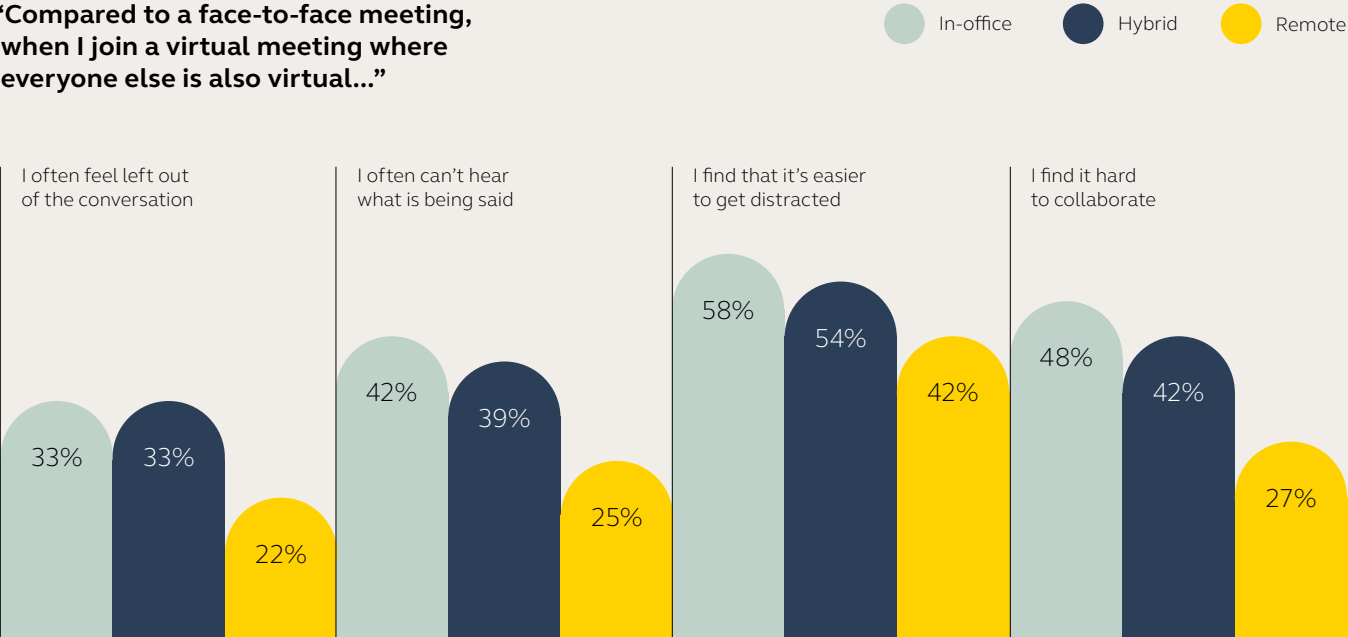# 2. In-office workers are underequipped for the virtual era

As we saw earlier, office workers are roughly 25% less likely than hybrid or remote workers to report being provided with the necessary technology to collaborate equitably and inclusively. More specifically, only 3 in 10 regularly use external audio and video devices for work. These differences in access to technology make operating in virtual environments difficult for in-office workers. Below, we can see exactly how the consequences of the lack of technology play out in virtual meetings. Specifically, in-office employees are 17% more likely than remote workers – the most well-equipped group – to report difficulties with hearing what's being said. Similarly, in-office employees are 21% more likely to struggle with collaboration in virtual environments. This shows that having the right technology in place truly does make the experience.

"I regularly use a headset for work."

30% In-office workers

68% Remote workers

61% Hybrid workers

"I regularly use a video camera for work."

68% Hybrid workers

66% Remote workers

35% In-office workers

While in-office employees may be collaborating in-person with their colleagues more regularly, there's still going to be a strong need to collaborate virtually with external partners; strong relationship-building with clients and customers is essential to business success.

We know from our previous research that a fancy headquarters is no longer going to do the trick. Instead, the technology you use to connect with others is going to be your first impression, an indication of professionalism and a willingness to meet others where they're at. A lack of proper technology may make relationship-building in these virtual environments more tenuous and difficult than it needs to be.

"Compared to a face-to-face meeting, when I join a virtual meeting where everyone else is also virtual..."

● In-office   ● Hybrid   ● Remote

I often feel left out of the conversation
- 33%
- 33%
- 22%

I often can't hear what is being said
- 42%
- 39%
- 25%

I find that it's easier to get distracted
- 58%
- 54%
- 42%

I find it hard to collaborate
- 48%
- 42%
- 27%

Key Takeaways

In the future, while some teams will collaborate in person more often than others, business more broadly will take place in virtual environments. Because of this, it'll be essential for employees to be able to thrive in virtual meetings regardless of whether they're fully in-office, remote, or hybrid.

To make this happen, IT decision-makers need to not only equip meeting rooms with video conferencing technology that connect in-office workers to remote and hybrid workers elsewhere, but also to provide individuals with the necessary personal collaboration technology to be able to connect virtually with business partners.

3. Professional technology directly impacts meeting inclusivity for employees

As we've seen above, not everyone feels included in virtual meetings to the same degree; in-office workers are experiencing more difficulties than hybrid and remote workers.

In response, and since the start of the pandemic, there's been a large focus on virtual meeting training to ensure that everyone can participate: leaving time at the end of the meeting for discussion, using "hand raise" functions built into UC platforms, or encouraging participants to use the meeting chat to pose questions. And while these are all effective methods to more equally include everyone in the conversation, what if people simply can't hear what's being said in the first place?

"

Leaders need to prioritize the employee experience and ensure that they can thrive in virtual meetings regardless of location. It starts with identifying technologies that will enable both in-office and remote employees to collaborate on an equal playing field, so employees can seamlessly move between these places without feeling left out, unheard, or distracted.
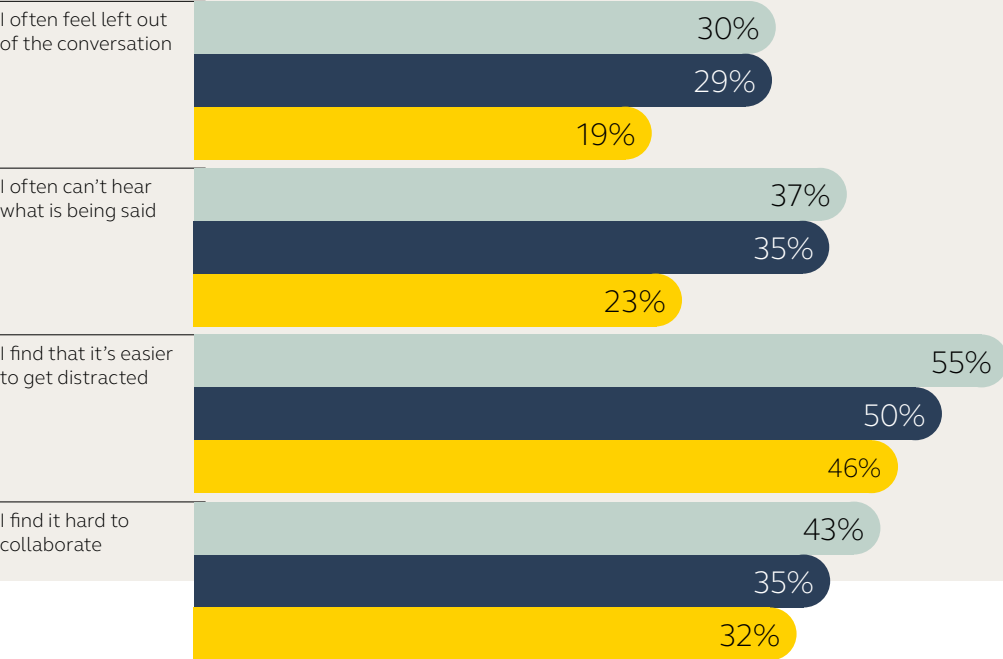
Holger Reisinger,
SVP, Jabra

In our survey, we discovered clear links between the kind of audio technology used and employees' meeting experiences. There are many different kinds of audio devices, and they're not all created with the same purpose in mind. The built-in microphone in laptops, tablets, and mobile devices are there to serve our base audio needs. Similarly, consumer audio devices, such as those that come with your mobile phone, are designed first and foremost for music and streaming purposes.

However, professional audio devices are designed specifically to be used in professional virtual environments, such as on platforms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

We found that those using only professional devices for work reported the least amount of issues in virtual meetings on video meeting platforms. Most notably, they had less trouble hearing what's being said than those using only consumer devices, where almost 4 in 10 reported audio issues. Additionally, professional device users were 10% less likely than consumer device users to report feeling left out of the conversation.

"Compared to a face-to-face meeting, when I join a virtual meeting where everyone else is also virtual..."

I often feel left out of the conversation
- 30%
- 29%
- 19%

I often can't hear what is being said
- 37%
- 35%
- 23%

I find that it's easier to get distracted
- 55%
- 50%
- 46%

I find it hard to collaborate
- 43%
- 35%
- 32%

No external device
Those using only the built-in microphone and speakers on their computer, tablet, or mobile device

Consumer device
Those using an audio device designed primarily for music and streaming

Professional device
Those using an audio device designed specifically for use on UC platforms, such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom

Key Takeaways

Virtual meeting inclusivity is difficult to achieve, and devices make or break the meeting experience. As such, for IT decision-makers, professional audio should be seen as a major enabler of a more seamless and inclusive virtual meeting experience.

As the way we work continues to trend towards virtual environments, there's an immediate need to equip all employees, regardless of location, with standardized professional audio technology. Without the right tools, employees risk feeling left out, unheard, distracted, and unable to collaborate effectively.

Rebuilding ourselves for the hybrid era - the next steps

We're all human. And in order to successfully rebuild ourselves and our organizations for the hybrid era, we need to make sure that work first and foremost fulfills our fundamental human needs: to have control over our own lives, to feel that we belong somewhere, and to create genuine human connection with those around us.

Belonging, motivation, productivity, trust, work-life balance, and mental well-being: these are all positively impacted by increasing employees' ability to control where and when they do their work. Moving forward, leaders must find ways to maximize employee autonomy while addressing the social, health, and technological barriers to successfully navigating a hybrid working model based on increased employee freedom.

Our workspaces are more than just productivity-maximizers; we choose to work where we work because we feel we belong in those places. It's important that the workspaces of the future – whether the office, the home, or anywhere else – be designed and equipped to include a wide range of work styles, and account for growing generational differences in work location preferences.

Finally, technology will be the defining factor in allowing employees to maintain and build relationships with their colleagues and business partners. Regardless of where any given employee works, the future of work will be virtual, and all employees need tools that are purpose-built for professional virtual environments.

Hybrid work holds major opportunities to improve our work and our lives. But in order to capture these opportunities and be successful in the future of work, leaders must find ways to incorporate these key findings into the fabric of their organizations and the lives of their employees.

Methodology