

of Work

Changing Places: How hybrid working is rewriting the rule book





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The world of work has changed forever. So, now what?

If we asked organisations to drive a fully remote operation before the COVID-19 pandemic many would have said it couldn't be done. But looking back, we've learned organisations can take significant risks. We've learned we can radically rethink the way we do work, try new things and adapt at pace.

While some organisations might want to revert to the old way of doing things, it would be a wasted opportunity. We have a oncein-a-generation opportunity to fix what needs fixing, redefine the social contract, rethink work and explore new and better ways of creating value.

It's not about going back to the way things were. It's about defining a new world of work that works better. And that world is hybrid.

So, how can businesses go beyond simply acknowledging that there's no going back and instead fully realise the enormous opportunities hybrid work presents?

This report offers insights into how organisations can successfully realise the benefits of hybrid ways of working. It suggests strategies to optimise work according to where and how employees work best and boost employee experience and wellbeing, while meeting organisational obligations and setting a foundation for future growth.

While the report focuses primarily on knowledge workers, organisations must understand and acknowledge that non-office workers are having a different experience. Managing both frontline and remote employees requires empathy and collaboration to understand the impact of change on each – and empower all staff with a sense of fairness and vision.

45%

of Australian workers say changing attitudes to remote working and benefits will transform the way people work over the next three to five years.



It's time to define the future of work for your organisation

A lot of the change we're seeing in the world of work isn't new. People were already working remotely and meeting over video. But the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified and accelerated things. Today, almost three quarters of Australian workers actively want to work across multiple places and spaces.

While many employees have embraced working from home, leaders are anxious about productivity and the ability to sustain innovation and workplace culture across multiple places and spaces. For many leaders, addressing the challenge and getting clear on what to do next can be overwhelming. So how do we take meaningful steps forward that best balance the interests of employees, employers and our economy? PwC has identified four key focus areas for making hybrid work, work.

- Where we work. Your workplace is both as unique and as dispersed as your workforce. Traditional offices designed to enable what work used to be are increasingly unfit for purpose.
- Our wellbeing at work. We've been talking about wellbeing for some time, but now it's time to take action. Maintaining the status quo won't improve mental health and wellbeing enough to realise the opportunity to boost productivity, engagement and connection.
- How we make it work. Empowering future ways of working has to evolve in parallel with consideration of regulatory and compliance obligations.
- Our experience of work. Leadership has never been more important. But the old ways of leadership do not translate into new hybrid ways of working and have to be updated to drive organisational success.

16% A wholly virtual place

where employees can contribute from any location **10%** A traditional work environment

> 14% Mostly face-to-face with some remote working

35%

A mix of face-to-face and remote working

4370 Mostly virtual working with some face-to-face A lot of organisations are understandably still focused on the short-term. But driving growth and evolving a compelling employee value proposition takes considered planning. And it takes time. To help organisations plan their future of work, we've defined actionable considerations and recommendations across **three horizons**.





COVID-19 is still active, but the level of disruption in Australia is starting to stabilise. While change will still be frequent and significant, there are some short-term actions that organisations can take to optimise workers' return to workplaces across Australia.



We can expect business confidence to grow, public safety concerns to shrink and people to travel more as the majority of the population is vaccinated. With this comes a need to experiment as we redefine and redesign the future of work as borders, businesses and people settle into a new normal.



It may seem far off today but there will come a time where international travel will drive more mobile and accessible talent, bringing with it new growth across the public and private sector. Don't wait to seize the opportunity to reimagine where, when and how we work.



Where we work

Reports of the demise of the CBD are greatly exaggerated

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on where we work.

It has created a deep, but short-term, economic dip in our CBDs due to falling occupancy levels. However, the value of the CBD as a base for organisations will continue given its role as the most central and accessible place to bring talent together.

While we will see many organisations reduce their central property footprint, lower rents could make it more accessible for smaller organisations previously priced out of the CBD to take tenancy, sparking a new wave of innovation. We estimated there is enough sublease availability in Sydney's CBD for 14,000 new workers, or around 430 dynamic start-ups, who could take advantage of lower rents, replace departing workers and reinvigorate the city.¹

Employees won't come to the office until organisations make property decisions based on their needs.

Organisations now need to redesign their workplace strategy to be ready for a reality where people work across a remodelled office, home and third space.

Organisations already rooted in the CBD need to clearly understand the tradeoff in maintaining office space versus shrinking their footprint. For example, a study by PwC Germany found that a reduction in floor space of 20% would accrue approximately 8% cost savings over the first 10 years for businesses renting their real estate.² On the other hand, the opportunity to save money may be outweighed by the costs of breaking leases early, whether through penalties or your employees' experience.



Occupancy in Melbourne's CBD was as low as 4% of pre-COVID-19 levels in October, and 40% in Sydney's CBD.

Source: 'Changing Places: How hybrid working is reinventing the Australian CBD', PwC Australia



So many leaders are looking for certainty, so they won't experiment, explore, find new business models or hire new people. You'll be okay for a while doing that, but you won't thrive you won't embrace new markets and opportunities."

Dominic Price, Work Futurist, Atlassian. Member PwC Future of Work Advisory Group

 'Changing Places: How hybrid working is reinventing the Australian CBD', PwC Australia, accessed 9th March 2021, https://www.pwc.com.au/important-problems/future-of-work-design-for-the-future/changing-places-australian-cbd.html

Global Consumer Insights Survey 2020 - Europe Edition', PwC Germany, accessed 15th March 2021

https://www.pwc.de/en/retail-and-consumer/urban-disturbance-how-the-covid-19-pandemic-is-transforming-city-life.html

While many conversations about property start with a question of how much space will be needed, they must also consider how employees use the office space, the impact of local employee demographics and geography, or even the nature of transport links and urban planning.

While the death of the CBD has been greatly exaggerated, companies can't expect workers to flock back to central workplaces. Organisations must purposefully plan for a more flexible future that takes into account local CBD conditions and helps employees justify the cost of the commute.

Recommendations for business



Empty space offers enormous opportunities to explore new ways of creating value

Many businesses think about their real estate footprint exclusively in terms of financial overhead, but its value is so much more. Savvy companies are starting to explore how to repurpose their real estate to incubate start-ups and not-for-profits aligned to their mission.



Get clear on your plan for the end of your real estate lease

Whether you choose to re-lease, sublease or simply repurpose your space, it's important that you have both a short- and a long-term plan in place for the end of your lease.



Embed flexibility into your property portfolio, both in terms of leasing arrangements and workspace design

Ensure leasing provisions are set up to allow for more rapid decisions in response to changing market conditions going forward and workspaces are designed so they can be more easily adapted to meet contemporary needs.



Natalie Slessor, General Manager, Workplace and Change, Lendlease. Member PwC Future of Work Advisory Group

The changing face of the office

Australian workers have spoken and told us that the future of work is hybrid. Companies who ignore employee expectations of flexibility stand to go backwards, losing out in the war for talent at a time when the majority of Australia's CEOs (60%) want to increase headcount in the next 12 months.³

But what does this mean for the spaces we work in? Ultimately, the office must be a place your employees actively want to be at. Since no technology can fully replace face-to-face communication as a way to connect and collaborate with teams, organisations need to think carefully about how their workspace can support these needs.

Despite these realities, the trade-offs leaders will need to make about their workplace will differ across organisations.



Workplace strategy is important because it's not simply about remodelling an office. How will people connect and belong? What type of culture do you want to build? What will work look like? The best workplaces are the ones that express and enable every part of an organisation, from its purpose and culture to the detailed requirements of its people."

Evodia Alaterou, Principal, Hassell



Research released by PwC collaborator and international design firm Hassell about future workplace models found that offices are still important. Having no office at all and being fully and permanently remote was workers' least preferred option. They also saw significant differences between generations, levels of job seniority, and gender - 47% of men would prefer to work primarily in the office compared to 36% of women.⁴

Rather than try and come up with a one-size-fits-all middle ground, organisations need to respect and cater to these employee preferences by embedding flexibility while supporting and empowering teams. Plans must also factor in the role technology can and will play, both in enabling their hybrid future and in shaping strategic priorities.



^a 'Building resilience: from reactive to proactive', PwC Australia's 24th CEO Survey, accessed 16th March 2021, <u>https://www.pwc.com.au/ceo-agenda/ceo-survey.html</u>

⁴ 'The workplace beyond 2020', Hassell Studio, accessed 13th November 2020, <u>https://www.hassellstudio.com/conversation/the-workplace-beyond-2020</u>



Horizon 1

Rebuild: The return to the office

Take stock and take action

Workplace strategy requires consideration of business strategy, people and culture, compliance and risk, and technology and learning – in addition to the physical environment. Understand employee sentiment, discuss current challenges and future goals, and gather data and insights to co-create the best workplace going forward.

Don't let perfect be the enemy of progress

While immediate COVID-19 safety precautions must be non-negotiable, getting workspaces right means being comfortable with experimentation and a test-and-learn approach. Because if you're not iterating and improving, your competitors may be. And your workplace will increasingly become a key factor in attraction and retention.



Horizon 2

Redefine: Work after the vaccine

Reimagine your workplace with collaboration at the centre and in a way that supports different types of work preferences

Once you've understood how your people want to use different workplaces and spaces, hit go and redesign accordingly. Think less cubicles and more hubs for collaboration, with enough variability to meet different needs and expectations. And continually evolve these spaces as use cases change.

Strategically marry physical and non-physical elements to make your workplace one where employees actively want to be

Whether it's war-rooms for team strategy sessions or nature spaces for mental refreshment, hosts that welcome and connect staff, or technology that lets you coordinate calendars simply, workspace design should incorporate both physical and non-spatial elements to create a seamless, supportive and healthy office experience.

Horizon 3

Reimagine: Empowering future growth

Acknowledge that COVID-19 wasn't the first pandemic the world has experienced – and it won't be the last

Organisations have to future-proof their offices, from ensuring adequate spacing between staff to mitigating bottlenecks in areas of high footfall, reviewing air conditioning infrastructure and implementing zero touch technologies. Identify what is a permanent fixture of the new normal and undertake scenario planning so you're equipped with contingency plans and responses to future disruption.

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Evodia Alaterou Principal and Design Strategy Leader, Hassell



Our wellbeing at work

Realising the organisational wellbeing opportunity

Employees haven't only grappled with COVID-19, they've also faced the challenges of lockdown and reduced social interaction. For some, this has meant experiencing loneliness, isolation and burnout. And as the lines between work and home have become increasingly blurred, it has brought about a lot of complexity for organisations and their leaders.

While many people are working longer hours, their productivity has slipped. Harvard Business Review found that 85% of workers felt their wellbeing had declined and 55% were not able to effectively balance their work and home lives.⁵ Hybrid working doesn't only challenge where we work, but when and how much we work too. It has seen workloads increase as people attend more meetings and work longer hours, and it's created new and different challenges to mental health and wellbeing.

Without intentional action to improve mental health and wellbeing, organisations may miss out on the significant opportunity presented by hybrid work to boost engagement, connection and productivity.



When will office workers return?', The Economist, 20th February 2021, <u>https://www.economist.com/business/2021/02/20/when-will-office-workers-return</u>



Organisations must ensure they have the appropriate policies, programs, and safety nets in place to manage and mitigate the risks associated with employee wellbeing. But there is also a significant opportunity to take a proactive approach. For every dollar spent by businesses on successful mental health programs, organisations can expect a return on investment of between \$1 and \$4 for an average return of \$2.30.⁶

This means creating a wellbeing strategy that reflects an in-depth understanding of the nuances of your workforce, and the environmental impacts of working across multiple places and spaces.

Mental health and wellbeing is driven by a range of critical factors, but it is leaders who design and steward workplace culture, who define policies and who empower connectivity. Their success is directly linked to organisational wellbeing.

Organisations need to invest in skills both at the formal, executive level, and with informal leaders like project managers and supervisors who are more attuned to workplace sentiment. This includes providing the tools to promote and support mental health and wellbeing in the workplace, as well as the training to build skills like empathy, emotional intelligence, and diversity and inclusion. It requires organisations to embed mental health awareness and first aid as ongoing training requirements. This needs to be supported by visible role modelling and a culture of accountability.

These programs don't have to be built from scratch. With a wealth of information available, the key is to tailor and curate the right resources and platforms for your organisation's unique needs. Throughout the pandemic, we saw leaders get to know their people a lot better. They were more concerned about their mental health and the wellbeing of the team. We saw daily check-ins and very human conversations. It's important that we don't lose sight of that and just think of it as a 'COVID thing'. We need to maintain that focus on wellbeing into the future."

Dr Ben Hamer, Lead, Future of Work, PwC Australia



^{6.} 'Productivity Commission Inquiry Report Volume 1', Australian Government, Productivity Commission, 2020



Horizon 1

Rebuild: The return to the office

Mental health and wellbeing has to be integrated through every operational activity

Every aspect of activity should be considered through a wellbeing lens. But that doesn't necessarily demand wholesale change – practical steps businesses can take include encouraging rest and recovery, role modelling, monitoring attrition, managing return to work and driving clear communications.

Tighten up risk controls and legislative obligations in the immediate future

First and foremost, businesses have to understand their obligations and risks under workplace legislation to design and implement fit-for-purpose policies to control and mitigate key risks. Then, begin the work of understanding the nuances of your team and the challenges and needs that drive them.



Horizon 2

Redefine: Work after the vaccine

Review and reprioritise wellbeing investments, from Employee Assistance Programs to upskilling

Review whether your wellbeing strategy offers the right mix and provides the right return on experience and value. Most organisations have an Employee Assistance Program, but are employees using it, did it help them, and does your organisation have visibility of its outcomes? It's also important that organisations engage with wellbeing at every level. This means upskilling leaders, managers and teams.

Curate a mental health and wellbeing playlist tailored for your business

Consider guidance about how to curate evidence-based programs, resources and tools fit for your organisation's needs, budgets and workforce. There are a range of great resources already out there to leverage from the National Mental Health Commission, the Black Dog Institute, or the Department of Health's Head to Health initiative, for example.



Horizon 3

Reimagine: Empowering future growth

Digital solutions offer anonymous, rigorous support and information

Organisations should consider how digital tools can be used to develop wellbeing literacy and capability for employees over time. Many people don't access mental health and wellbeing support at work for fear of disadvantage. Suites of evidence-based tools preserve employee anonymity and empower staff to access relevant materials themselves.





How we make it work

We risk sleepwalking into legal, performance and financial issues. But failing to act is not an option

Working across multiple places and spaces can be complex and difficult to navigate. Organisations must protect and support workers, particularly those working remotely, by meeting legal and other compliance obligations. The challenge is doing this in a way that ensures your processes and systems support, and don't compromise, performance or productivity in a dispersed working environment.

To realise the opportunities of hybrid working, organisations must get clear on the rights and obligations of - and towards - their employees. This means making sure expectations around flexibility line up with the minimum terms of employment and industriallyacceptable conditions about core hours. Similarly, organisations have to consider the impact of new 'work from anywhere' arrangements on salary packages, payroll, tax and even ownership of intellectual property. For example, if an employee's salary was determined based on market factors in Perth, does it change if they then relocate to Margaret River?

Empowering remote workers isn't just about video meetings and cloud apps. New work types impact safety, performance management and risk.

Making the future of work work means organisations must urgently consider how their current and evolving hybrid work plans impact their legal and other compliance obligations towards staff. But don't be afraid to experiment.

Step two is to consider what remote performance management looks like and to understand the impact of proximity bias. It's important to make sure staff who come into the office are not favoured over those who don't and leaders are up to the task of managing dispersed workers while understanding their obligations.

Industrial relations missteps can set organisations back considerably, impacting staff retention, productivity and cost. But those organisations who successfully complement business needs with employee preferences and legal obligations will not only deliver greater value, but also a compelling employee value proposition.

Pursuing an aggressive, 'all-in' strategy may be expensive to unwind. Organisations should expect to drive change through pilots and prototype activities while collecting data on what does and doesn't work.





Worker health and safety must be the number one priority

Organisations must first get clear on the rights and obligations of – and towards – their staff in a hybrid work environment, focusing first on developing hybrid-ready Work Health and Safety protocols. A safe workplace encompasses measures from an ergonomic set-up and policies around electronic communications, to whether your workers are more likely to be vulnerable to domestic violence or mental health issues if working remotely. Work in close partnership with HR and legal teams and update WFH checklists to reflect the new normal.

Horizon 2 Redefine: Work after the vaccine

Make sure you enable the shift to your desired future working model both legally and practically

Clarify your obligations in areas including remuneration, performance measurement, and those specific to out-of-jurisdiction workers - including immigration, tax, privacy and business protection (eg IP) laws. Compliance with awards, other industrial instruments and evolving workplace laws will be key, as will ensuring the organisation has proper visibility over the hours – and times – that people work.



Horizon 3

Reimagine: Empowering future growth

Be strategic, data-driven and fair

The hybrid work environment can drive all types of bias, from how you determine who can access the office to how you onboard or manage performance in a remote environment. Update policies across the board, using data to support your decisions.

Remember that the future was underway long before COVID-19

Ultimately, legal and other compliance considerations should extend beyond the immediate question of hybrid working to encompass increasing organisational dependence on contingent work models, gig working and the growing impact of AI in our workplaces. Long-term business strategy should be at the heart of any decisions made.





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Our experience of work

Traditional, established leadership behaviours are increasingly outdated

Leadership has never been more critical to the success of your organisation. Yet, one third of Australian CEOs do not have plans to reconsider their investment in leadership for hybrid working.

One of the roles of leaders is to identify and meet the emotional needs of their people. Traditionally, leaders often did this by using face-to-face and external levers to influence and inspire. For example, having a shiny CBD office, driving professionalism through a strict dress code, and inspiring a team through in-person speeches.

These traditional methods are not just less effective with remote employees, but are becoming increasingly irrelevant. Employees have different needs that need to be met in new ways, and this can mean that sometimes leaders don't feel as in control. There is a strong pull for some leaders to go back to the way things were and to use the same levers and behaviours to inspire and engage their workforces. While it may feel familiar and reassuring, that style of management best suits a world that no longer exists.

Hybrid working means that leaders need to adapt their style and behaviour. They need to balance rational behaviours with emotional needs, make data-driven decisions, and cater to different segments of their workforce to create a compelling employee experience, wherever people work.

33% have no plans to change their long-term investments in leadership and talent development over the next three years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic³

Relatively few Australian CEOs say their organisational competitiveness can be boosted by focusing on developing tomorrow's leaders (16%)

 Building resilience: from reactive to proactive', PwC Australia's 24th CEO Survey, accessed 16th March 2021, https://www.pwc.com.au/ceo-agenda/ceo-survey.html Behavioural science reveals how, rather than focusing on control, leaders have to prioritise the needs and motivations of their teams.

According to PwC collaborator NeuroPower Group, high-performing teams have six emotional needs aligned to their neurological requirements, ranging from the need for psychological safety and belonging to the desire to learn and progress.



The first step in understanding the needs and motivations of teams is getting clear visibility to understand which emotional needs that require the most attention in the organisation. Once aware of these needs, leaders can empower teams to cocreate solutions to meet them. And solutions don't need to be overly complicated. If you're struggling with belonging, simple fixes could be to define structured team-oriented activities, create open channels for communication (like a shared chat) or schedule regular face-to-face sessions. The disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity to reimagine leadership and embrace flexibility. This requires a move from a mechanical leadership model relying on structured places, hours and roles for work toward an organic model based on flexibility in both time and place, a focus on strengths-based work and decentralised decision-making.







Check-in, understand and recalibrate

It's critical to understand your people's emotional needs - as well as where they need support. Check-in and ask them directly, and complement what you hear with observable data. Then start planning how best to make those changes. One strategy is to create employee archetypes to help highlight distinct characteristics, preferences and needs.

Realign your leadership strategies

Let new ways of working emerge rather than reverting to binary or arbitrary decisions. Then equip your leaders with the right insights and tools to respond to those people's needs. Consider ways to focus on role clarity, strategies to identify hidden anxiety, or tools to bring positive emotion into meetings.



Horizon 2

Redefine: Work after the vaccine

Reimagine your leadership model

As teams begin to stabilise, it's time to adopt an organic leadership model that prioritises connectivity and team empowerment over control and centralised decision-making. Give leaders the skills to build teams that move beyond roles and into strengths, with the maturity to organise themselves more fluidly around the work to be done.

Horizon 3

Reimagine: Empowering future growth

Adapt, improve and grow

As expectations evolve, so will the demands on leadership. Define how you measure outcomes, success and culture, and develop quick mechanisms to adapt and improve. Think about aligning how performance is measured with new models of leadership by rewarding teams rather than individuals, measuring outcomes rather than outputs and designing fast, higher quality feedback loops.



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Looking beyond COVID-19 to define your future of work journey

Organisations needed to reconsider their workforce, worktype, workplaces, and experience of work well before the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the disruption has presented a lot of challenges, often creating more questions than answers, one thing is clear. The future of work is hybrid.

Knowing where to start to make the most of this reality can be difficult. But there are clear steps that organisations and their leaders can take to make sure they're heading in the right direction:



Align leadership on the opportunity ahead

This includes understanding the organisation-wide challenges, agreeing on the forward strategy and getting buy-in across senior leaders so there's a clear message for employees.



Assess your maturity across the four dimensions of workforce, work type, workplaces and the experience of work

Take stock of what you're doing now and your organisational capability to deliver on it, then assess whether or not it will take you where you need to be. And check that it lines up with your EVP. And getting buy-in across senior leaders so there's a clear message for employees.



)5 Invest in leadership capability

It isn't good enough to set and forget, assuming that a new policy or process will hit the mark. You need to invest in building the skills, knowledge and capability of leaders at all levels in what is becoming an increasingly complex environment. After all, if the future of work is about teams, you need to make sure you support the people leading them.



Develop a roadmap of prioritised initiatives across horizons

While you won't be able to do everything on your list, it's important to understand which initiatives will have greatest value and impact. And be sure to prioritise over the three different time horizons so you are realistic in working towards your strategic ambition.

02 Engage your people to understand their expectations and build a compelling employee value proposition (EVP)

While top-down leadership may be effective in times of crisis, it won't cut it moving forwards. Get clear on the experiences and expectations of employees to articulate a clear EVP based on the diverse motivations and personas that reflect your organisation. The future of work is hybrid. The opportunity for Australian organisations now is to embrace it and co-create a future of work that's better for all by reconsidering the role and design of the office, re-evaluating wellbeing, rethinking our obligations, and reimagining leadership. It's time for a joined-up, whole-of-organisational effort that learns the lessons of the recent past but is not constrained by them.

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Take the next step

The future of work sounds complex but it doesn't need to be complicated. PwC has experts within each part of the work ecosystem - across work type, workforce, workplaces and the experience of work. Find out how to use that ecosystem to create your hybrid working future by contacting our Future of Work leaders:



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The Future

of Work



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