



# A hybrid workplace guide

Insights and resources to build and manage a successful hybrid workforce

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Let's do this.



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# 01 Introduction

The future of work isn't cut and dry. It's an evolving landscape of work from home (WFH) teams, in-office professionals, digital nomads, and flexible preferences.

Many Canadians traded office life for remote work at the onset of the pandemic; and a majority who did now favour their WFH arrangements. Yet while appetites for remote work aren't going away, KPMG's research shows that an increasing number of remote employees are eager to return to the office, either on a full or part-time basis. These competing preferences have given rise to a new and evolving hybrid workforce.

Demands for hybrid work models exist in virtually every industry. Even sectors with a significant onsite, in-person requirement (e.g., construction, brick-and-mortar retail, food and hospitality, etc.) have roles that can be performed remotely on a full or part-time basis. As a result, employers of every stripe face the challenge of adapting to a hybrid model.

Managing a hybrid office can seem daunting. It demands a digitally connected enterprise that supports team engagement and productivity no matter their location. It also requires a supporting framework that includes new or adapted policies, workforce models, regulatory considerations, management skills, and technologies. Creating a hybrid model is no overnight task, but organizations that make the journey can benefit from more efficient, engaged, and talent-friendly operations.

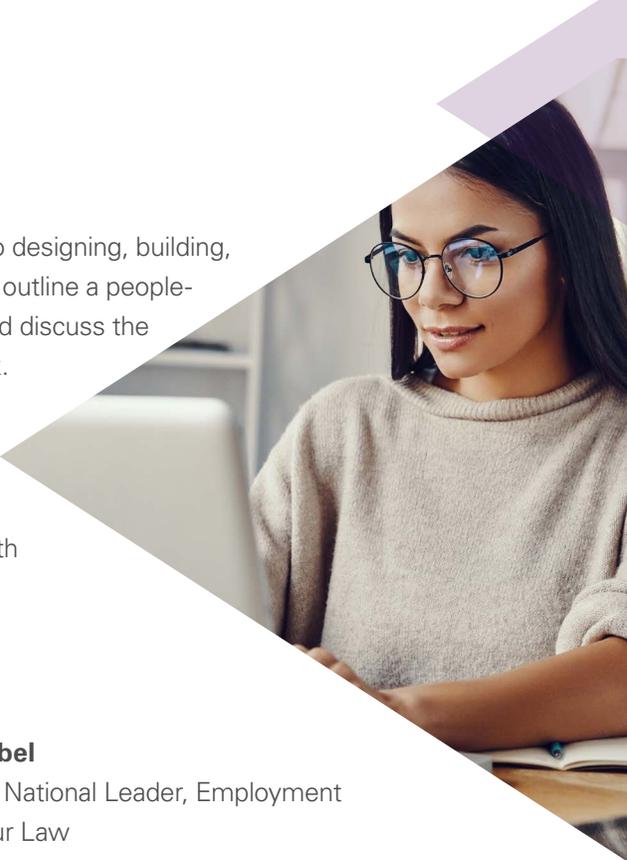
In this hybrid workplace guide, we explore the steps to designing, building, and managing a successful hybrid workforce. We also outline a people-centric approach for reopening physical workplaces and discuss the value of planning ahead for this blended future of work.

There are no one-size-fits-all approaches to this new way of working. The hybrid workforce is a fast-moving landscape with evolving leading practices that our specialists will continue to address and discuss with you in the months and years to come.

When you're ready, **let's do this.**

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## Facts & figures

Where do working Canadians stand on remote work? Here are some perspectives from KPMG Canada’s survey\*



**67%** of Canadians are **satisfied** with their current **virtual WFH environment** but 63 percent want to return to their physical workplace



**40%** of Canadians are still **fearful** of returning to the workplace



**51%** Half of Canadians don’t have to **go back physically** because their employer will let them WFH



**77%** of Canadians like the idea of a **hybrid workplace model**



**71%** believe a hybrid workplace (aka “hybrid office”) should be the **standard model** for all organizations



**81%** are **concerned** their bosses aren’t prepared or equipped to manage hybrid workplace models

\*Source | **KPMG in Canada survey:** Canadian like the hybrid model concept - Workplace reboot

# A balance between two models

Creating an effective hybrid workplace means combining the best of both working models based on the organization’s goals and its team’s preferences.

  
**Individuals want:**

- Purpose**
- Belonging**
- Empowerment**

**The Pros...**

- ✓ Commute avoidance - choice of how to use time and cost savings
- ✓ Ability to manage distractions
- ✓ Better accessibility, more equity, less stress for some

**The Cons...**

- ✗ Social isolation
- ✗ Meeting overload
- ✗ Ambiguous employer expectations
- ✗ Less collaboration and feedback
- ✗ Challenges with relationships and career development
- ✗ Distractions at home

**Remote Working**

**The Pros...**

- ✓ Efficient communication
- ✓ Social connection
- ✓ Visibility / access to leaders
- ✓ Physical setup

**The Cons...**

- ✗ Commuting time and cost
- ✗ Distractions
- ✗ Barriers to accessibility, inclusiveness and equity

**Physical Office**

  
**Organizations want:**

- Performance**
- Efficiency**
- Talent Attraction**
- Innovation**

- ✓ Real estate and travel avoidance
- ✓ Environmental and social benefits
- ✓ Access to more talent, suppliers and customers
- ✓ Gains or neutral impacts to productivity
- ✓ Stronger business case for digitization

- ✗ Complexity for managers
- ✗ Disengagement, attrition
- ✗ Historical pay benchmarks
- ✗ Tax and compliance

- ✓ Ease of oversight and collaboration
- ✓ Relationship building
- ✓ Team cohesion, organizational culture

- ✗ Real estate and travel needs
- ✗ Environmental & social impacts
- ✗ Geo-constrained pool of talent, suppliers and customers

# 02 A focus on flexibility

The pandemic gave millions of workers and their employers a crash course in remote working. Now, appetites for office life are starting to resurface.

In a recent 2021 KPMG poll of Canadian workers, nearly two-thirds of professionals said they were ready to return to their physical workplace. Granted, 66 percent also indicated they were satisfied with their current virtual arrangement, but this cohort was smaller than the 76% who said the same in the early days of the pandemic.

For many, the shine of WFH has faded. Virtual fatigue, WFH burnout, and social withdrawal are drawing more than a few employees back to their former offices.

Still, it would be unwise to see remote working as a failed experiment. The sudden and wide-scale shift to home offices during the pandemic provided Canadians with a taste for a more flexible model of work that a majority aren't willing to give up. For them, the benefits of commute-free days and home comforts outweigh the advantages of being at the office; and over half report feeling more productive in their remote environment. Employers who fail to support these WFH arrangements risk losing talent and key capabilities.

The great WFH revolution did not empty the traditional workplace. It gave rise to a blended model of work that can be advantageous to all parties, provided it is designed, implemented, and managed effectively.



**Half of surveyed Canadians feel more productive in their virtual work environment.**



**Almost half of surveyed Canadians (45%) aren't convinced that their employers actually understand the implications of a hybrid work model.**

## Workers want flexibility

Flexible work arrangements are in high demand. A [KPMG workplace survey](#) of over 2,000 Canadians found that 77 percent want the flexibility to work in the office or from a remote set-up. Furthermore, 71 percent believe this hybrid approach to working should be the norm for their organizations moving forward.

## Elements of a flexible model

Flexibility is fundamental to the hybrid model. More importantly, it is key to becoming an “employer of choice”.

That being said, embracing “flexibility” should not be confused with abandoning structure or letting legal considerations fall off the radar. When designing a hybrid strategy, it’s important to keep employee preferences, capabilities, and limitations in mind while setting clear boundaries that will ensure teams align with the organization’s goals and obligations no matter where (or when) they work.

Ahead are key elements of a flexible model to consider as you define and optimize your organization’s hybrid workplace model.



**Management by motivation and results:** 81% of surveyed Canadians believe their managers lack the skills required to manage hybrid teams. As such, there is a call for managers who can embrace the attitudes and “soft skills” necessary to keep remote workers as inspired and engaged as if they were physically working next door. Overseeing hybrid teams requires managers who can set and communicate clear goals, plans, deadlines, and quality expectations while also establishing guardrails to limit burnout, isolation, and other related challenges that WFH arrangements can magnify.



**Unbiased opportunities and equity:** Nearly half of surveyed Canadians who prefer to work from home are concerned they will be seen as less committed than their in-person peers. They also worry about being seen as less valuable than their in-office peers and overlooked for job opportunities. Adding to these concerns, employees who cannot work remotely (due to their role or personal circumstance) may resent those who can, with implications for workplace culture. Recognizing this, employers who are adopting hybrid models must ensure that these biases are recognized and addressed at all levels. For hybrid teams to work as one, employees must receive the same or equivalent supports, incentives, and opportunities no matter where they choose to work.



**Balanced schedules:** A hybrid model does not mean giving remote employees “carte blanche” to make their own hours. It does mean being more aware of individual circumstances, preferences and challenges, and establishing arrangements that work best for the team’s overall objectives.



**Safety:** Health and safety concerns are driving the need for hybrid office models. Over half of surveyed Canadians (nearly 55% in Ontario) don’t want to return to a physical work environment until they can be assured that their colleagues have been vaccinated and their employers are doing all they can to mitigate the risks of COVID-19. Considering these health and safety risks remain well beyond mass vaccination, it’s likely these more cautious workers will prefer to clock in from home.

 **Flexible supports:** Choosing to work from home should not come with additional costs. True flexibility means providing financial and logistical support to help individuals thrive whether they are sitting in the office next door or an apartment across the city. Consider the costs your remote teams are incurring (e.g., internet, smartphone, office equipment, etc.) and decide which will be compensated by the organization. Keep in mind that remote workers may actually be saving the company resources by not taking up physical space and resources.



### Insightful resources

- [Harnessing the power of digitally enabled workforce](#)
- [Discouraging work from home option post-pandemic could impact retaining talent: KPMG partner – Video on BNN \(bnnbloomberg.ca\)](#)
- [Working from home and the office won't be as easy as you think – \*\*podcast | Financial Post\*\*](#)

## As your workplace evolves, so do your legal considerations

The pandemic turned traditional office models on their heads. Now that the dust is settling, it's important to understand the legal impact that these changes have on your organization now and the ones that can arise when implementing a sustainable hybrid work model.

For example, changes made to the workplace during the pandemic may have legally affected changes to employees' existing terms and conditions of employment or given rise to new terms and conditions. Setting up remote office in different provinces (or even countries) may have also surfaced tax, immigration, or data security implications.

These are all important considerations that require a sound understanding of one's legal obligations and risk exposure – both now and into the future. Herein, organizations pursuing a hybrid model will benefit from having a strategy for navigating the legal risks of change (e.g., constructive dismissal claims, class action risks, and unionization-related issues, etc.), and keeping legal considerations top of mind.





### Enabling work flexibility with the right compliance structures in place

Offering flexibility creates valuable opportunities but also some complexities. In fact, the level of flexibility offered to employees will also determine the level of structural, compliance and legal requirements your organization will have.

Consider a phased approach to implementing flexibility in order to effectively manage and address any related tax, legal and immigration implications.



### CEO corner



of Canadian CEOs agree that the shift to remote work has widened their potential talent pool.



of Canadian CEOs plan to invest in technology that harness the power of a digitally-enabled workforce.



### Insightful resources

- The “Work from anywhere” shift – Is your business ready?
- Tax & Legal implications from remote cross border working
- Majority of Canadians are questioning their employers’ ability to handle hybrid work model

# 03 The building blocks of a hybrid workforce

Being suited for a hybrid workforce is different from being ready. Organizations may be able to accommodate a mix of in-house and remote teams, but it takes a well-thought plan and framework to make hybrid work, *work*.

Multiple enablers are required to build a successful and sustainable hybrid work model, including those outlined here:



## There are no one-size-fits-all hybrid models.

Each organization must define its own unique vision based on the following building blocks:

**Business goals:** You must define your reasons for going hybrid so you can tailor your investments, training, and technologies to get meaningful results. To begin, ask:

-  **Why are you pursuing a hybrid model?**
-  **Is the goal to drive productivity?**
-  **Attract or retain talent? Reduce your office requirements?**
-  **Is it all of the above?**

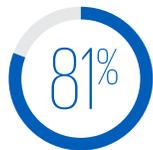


### Insightful resources

- [How to make the hybrid workplace work for everyone](#) – blog post



### Fact



of surveyed Canadians are concerned their bosses aren't prepared or equipped to manage hybrid work models.



### Questions to consider

- Which roles will be eligible to work remotely, at least some of the time?
- Will employees be required to obtain a manager approval to work remotely?
- What are your expectations for remote employees? For example: advance notice of WFH, availability, responsiveness, productivity.
- How will you define success for hybrid teams?
- What will your remote workforce expect from you?
- How will you demonstrate that employees are valued, regardless of where they do their work?

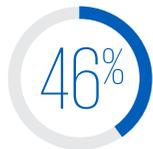
**Management training:** Developing a hybrid workforce will require an honest assessment of one's hybrid workforce management capabilities and the biases or blind spots within. And given that most Canadians surveyed by KPMG believe their managers need to be better trained to oversee hybrid workforces, this is an area that requires honest and in-depth examination.



#### Fact



of surveyed Canadians workers are concerned they could be discriminated against or be overlooked for job opportunities if they wanted to keep working remotely.



of surveyed Canadians feel their managers would treat them differently or penalize them if they didn't go into the office every day.



#### Questions to consider

- **Are your managers equipped to clearly interpret remote work eligibility criteria and expectations?** Do they have a sound understanding of the skills required to make WFH arrangements work? Are they adept at balancing WFH employee needs with organizational goals?
- **Can they create an engaging team atmosphere?** Keeping remote teams engaged and productive will require leaders who can gauge morale, monitor team progress, recognize achievements, and read body language from behind a screen.
- **Can they fairly assess team limitations and performance?** The shift to a hybrid model should not come at the cost of inclusion and diversity. Managers must ensure each employee's circumstances are being taken into consideration no matter where they log-in, and that they are being considered equally when career opportunities arise.
- **Do they have the technology and facilitation techniques to run effective meetings with team members sitting across locations?** Managers must have the skills and technology tools to promote collaboration and connectivity among their hybrid teams.



**Technology needs:** Hybrid workforces thrive on their ability to keep all teams connected and equipped to handle anything that comes their way, no matter their location. That means adopting video conferencing tech, team collaboration platforms, and online resources (e.g., “desk booking”/“hotelling”), while ensuring WFH employees have the same tools as their in-house colleagues. When planning, take stock of your existing technologies, assess what’s needed, and make a plan for filling the gaps.



**Insightful resources**

- [How to choose the right technology for the hybrid workforce](#)



**CEO corner**



Canadian CEOs revealed plans to invest in technology that would harness the power of a digitally-enabled workforce

**Digital security:** Your office network may already be secure, but allowing remote employees to access sensitive data and key systems from outside your defenses breeds cyber security risks. Therefore, it’s important to

assess and your cyber maturity and the gaps that you’ll need to address before opening your network to remote systems.



**Insightful resources**

- [GetCyberSafe blog post](#)

**Administrative processes:** From the digitization of paper-based processes to adding clarity on business travel policies and expenses reimbursements, organizations need to update their processes and operating procedures to reflect the hybrid workforce.

**Office layouts:** Planning a hybrid workplace is an opportunity to rethink how you’re using your workspace. Consider re-configuring your real estate in ways that promote safe working practices, increased collaboration, and effective interactions between employees that come into the office and those working remotely. Simple changes can include hybrid meeting spaces, multi-purpose team rooms, or movable walls and desks.

These building blocks will lay the foundation for hybrid work. To stay on track, however, requires an equal focus on making physical offices safe and managing unique regulatory risks.

# 04 Return to the physical workplace

## Preparing offices for the post-pandemic

The office is not obsolete. Organizations and employees still want the choice of a physical workspace.

At this critical juncture, safely opening up and managing workplaces requires a people-centred roll-out strategy with a strong operational framework in place. That strategy is best led by an internal task force with a focus on employee/worker and visitors' health and safety, governance and risk, workplace preparation and management.

Employees – and the public at large – need to feel confident that employers are properly following government guidelines and best practices to successfully reopen and transition life back to a sense of normalcy. For hybrid models to thrive, considerations must be made to ensure these spaces are safe, engaging, and connected.

## Returning with purpose

A return to the office should be gradual. It is also advised that this transition occurs in phases, allowing organizations to test, evaluate, and adjust mitigation processes and protocols before reopening their facilities to larger numbers of returning employees and visitors.

Several steps should be completed before offices can open their doors. They include:

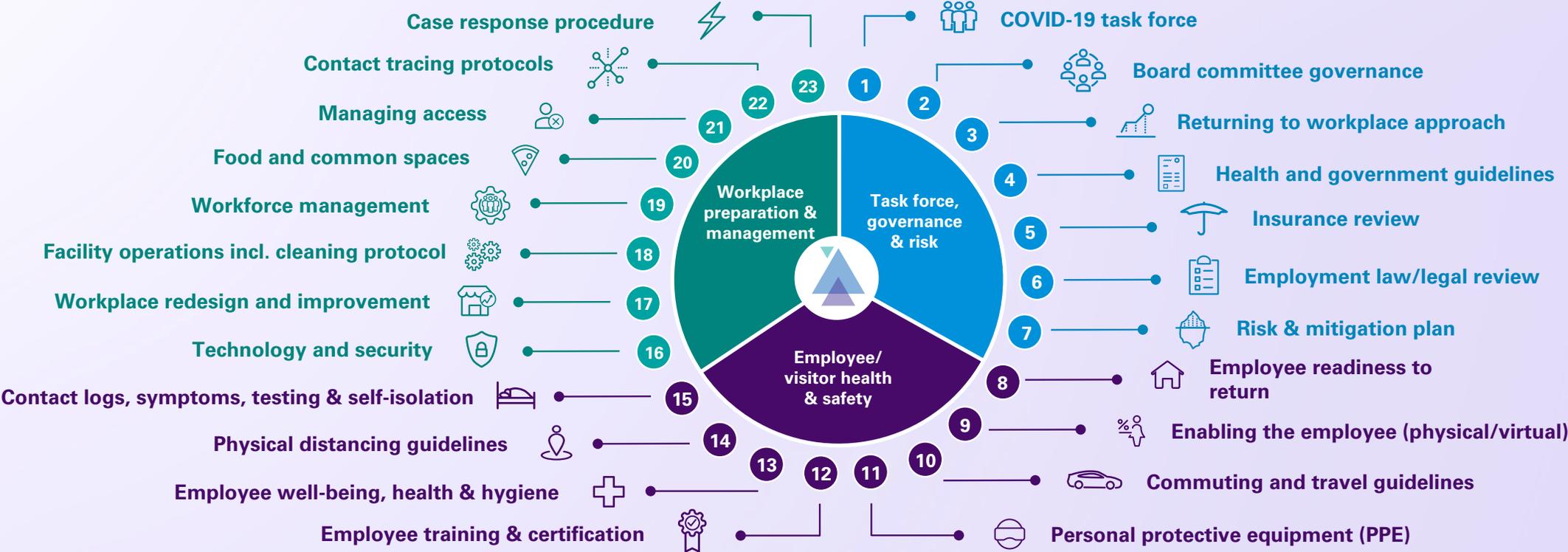
- ✓ **Current state assessment**, to understand everyday activities, ideal reopening timelines, and critical areas and roadblocks.
- ✂ **Planning and addressing gaps**, by developing and implementing plans to address the gaps identified in the initial assessment. Assessments should also be done to gauge the organization's readiness to return and its employees' willingness to come back.
- 👤 **Welcoming employees in phases**, by assessing the performance of each incoming wave, expanding or reducing the number of people in your workplace accordingly, evaluating what is working (and what's not), and making ongoing improvements.



# A Return to the Workplace Framework

KPMG’s return to the workplace framework considers three stakeholder groups who will require information, direction, and coordination from leaders to ensure a safe and productive office

They include:



## KPMG's Playbook

In researching office reopening best practices, KPMG has created a [Return to Workplace Playbook – A guide for employers](#) with specific actions that will help employers make good on all the aspects of our Return to Workplace framework.

Contact a local KPMG partner by [email](#) or by visiting [home.kpmg/ca/covid19](https://home.kpmg/ca/covid19) for additional resources.



For hybrid models to thrive, considerations must be made to ensure these spaces are safe, engaging, and connected.

- **How strong is your health and safety (H&S) program?** Health concerns are keeping two out of five Canadian employees from returning to their former offices. To win their confidence, organizations must embed enhanced cleaning programs and protocols, monitor health risks as they emerge, and communicate H&S initiatives to their teams regularly. Considerations for healthy indoor air quality (IAQ), social distancing, touchless technologies, and other H&S practices should also be included in reopening plans.

A post-pandemic H&S safety plan will require many perspectives. It is best developed in consultation with your Human Resources team, representatives from Health & Safety, Legal, and Quality & Risk Management. You may also consider engaging a local medical professional or an expert in the prevention of infectious disease transmission in the workplace to review the reasonableness of your physical office plans. As well, general guidance is typically available from provincial workplace health and safety organizations, such as Workplace Safety and Prevention Services in Ontario.

- **Who needs to be back in your physical premises?** Not everyone needs to be in the physical workplace all the time. Assess each role for the extent to which it can be done remotely. You may also consider employee preferences as long as these do not conflict with the goal of their team and the organization.

- **How will you respond to your employees' anxieties about returning to work?** In a May 2021 survey, KPMG found that 40% of Canadians were still fearful of returning to the workplace, primarily due to the perceived risks of being exposed to COVID-19. Recognizing this, employers must go beyond simply implementing health and safety measures consistent with public health guidelines. Employee communications need to take focus, and management must take consistent steps to demonstrate that employee concerns are being heard and reasonably addressed.
- **How will you manage attendance volume at your workplace?** Many employees will continue working from home, at least part of the time, if given a choice. However, as the hybrid model evolves and a return to the workplace becomes a reality for more people, it will be beneficial to adopt robust information management systems (e.g., to manage attendance volume, 'desk booking', etc.) alongside reporting tools. These will help your organization manage a seamless roll-out of operational transitions as well as prompt, transparent communication to maintain the trust of your key stakeholders.
- **How will you maintain momentum?** It takes daily efforts to manage remote teams and prioritize health and safety. Consider establishing internal task forces that will address these priorities and keep leaders updated on their progress.



#### Insightful resources

- [Webinar replay: Employee relief and support looking forward](#)
- [Webinar replay: Employer relief and support: where are we now?](#)
- [Ontario Ontario Government to Legislate Paid COVID-19 Sick Leave](#)





### Legal considerations

- In a physical office, the flexibility to keep pace with occupational health and safety standards will be a key legal consideration as the pandemic runs its course. This requires an up-to-the-moment knowledge of laws and best practices for preventing transmission of the virus, and a commitment to implementing health and safety policies and processes that align with employees' rights.
- For example, where appropriate and justified by health and safety concerns, employers may consider requiring employees to confirm their COVID-19 vaccination status and/or complete COVID-19 rapid antigen testing as a condition of attending the physical workplace. Legal considerations that factor into the preparation of such policies and processes include the need to obtain employee informed consent and to securely protect employees' private information.
- Importantly, some employees may be restricted in their ability to return to the physical workplace due to a compromised immune system, childcare obligations, or other factors. Where these factors amount to a human rights protected ground (e.g., disability, family status, etc.) employers must provide employees with reasonable accommodations to the point of undue hardship. This does not necessarily mean accommodating the employee's preferred work arrangement. Instead, it means being ready and willing to engage individual employees in a process that enables them to participate in the hybrid workplace while accommodating their protected human rights needs as much as possible and without undue hardship.



**Reopening a safe workplace using digital tools**

Managing a safe and productive office requires an ability to rapidly manage, collect and analyze information to mitigate the risks. And that information will change quickly, on a daily basis. Using spreadsheets and emails can quickly become cumbersome if the organization has more than a few dozen employees. Technology which facilitates workflow, information-sharing and reporting can be helpful in reducing the management workload.

KPMG’s Workforce Safeguarding App, for example, equips organizations with flexible, turn-key office reopening and maintenance processes. It enables a connected experience between organizations and their employees that provides:

- Critical information and support for office occupants and visitors, such as guidance on what to expect when working onsite, and a link to the provincial questionnaire to self-assess possible symptoms of COVID-19.
- An easy-to-use platform for streamlining office reopening and maintenance processes, such as a workflow for manager approval of employee requests to work from home or onsite, or for an office manager to report readiness to the office to receive visitors.
- Easy integration with existing technologies to reduce implementation time.
- Alerts and reminders to foster employee health, well-being, and engagement.



**Insightful resources**

- Webinar replay: [Digitally enabling the workforce: case studies using ServiceNow](#)
- [KPMG Workforce Safeguarding App](#)



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# Legal considerations of a hybrid work model

More workplace flexibility presents greater legal complexities. This is especially true when hybrid models evolve from allowing employees to work from home in the same Canadian province to letting them work regularly in a different province or country altogether.

For most employers, applicable workplace laws (e.g., employment standards, human rights, occupational health and safety, etc.) will differ by the province. This may result in different requirements that need to be applied to employees who work in different provinces. As well, employees who perform work outside of Canada might have new considerations arising from tax, immigration laws, or data security laws.

In short, employers who wish to institute more flexible hybrid work policies must be prepared to navigate increased legal complexity to ensure compliance and effective mitigation practices.



Here are some other legal considerations:

**New vs. existing employees:** For existing employees, instituting a hybrid work model likely means making changes to workplace conditions. This might prompt affected employees to claim they have been constructively terminated as a result of the change, and make a legal claim for wrongful dismissal damages. To mitigate this risk, employers can use employee surveys and advance consultation to gauge employees' expectations with respect to proposed change, and to take an appropriately graduated approach to make the change.

When on-boarding new employees into an established hybrid work model, employers have greater flexibility to make future expectations clear at the outset of the employment relationship. Herein, it is good practice to have clearly defined policies and contract terms from the beginning, as well

as a hybrid work model that enables management to implement future changes accordingly.

**Changing policies and contracts bring different levels of mitigation, enforceability, and expediency:** Legally formalizing the processes, terms, and conditions that govern a hybrid work model will ensure their clarity and enforceability down the line. The challenges associated with these changes will depend on the level of mitigation, enforceability, and expediency an employer is aiming to achieve.

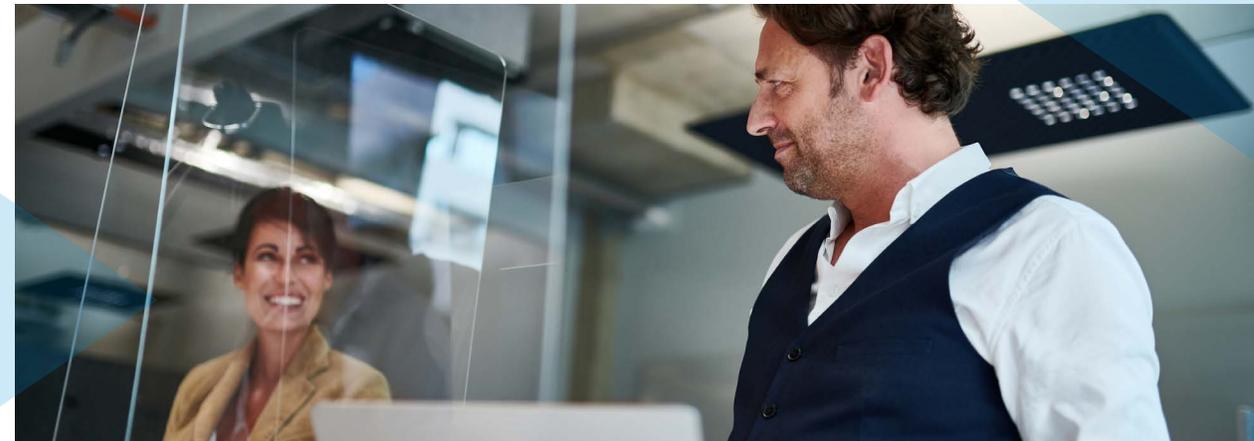
On one hand, making changes only at the level of workplace policies can provide an expedient option to formalize changes across employees. On the other, making changes through renewed terms of employment or a contract addendum can provide for greater enforceability and mitigation down the line.

Under either approach, providing advance notice and obtaining employee sign-off on workplace changes is essential for formalizing the changes required to establish a hybrid work model.

**Security vs. privacy:** Different provinces provide different levels of privacy protection to employees. In general, while employers are permitted to monitor employees for legitimate purposes (e.g., protecting confidential

documents, ensuring workplace health and safety, etc.) there are limitations on the monitoring methods an employer can take. In most cases, employees should not be subject to surveillance and monitoring without their consent. As well, employers should take measures to both limit and protect any personal information that is collected through such surveillance and monitoring, such as information regarding employees' vaccination status and COVID-19 testing results.

**Human rights considerations:** Not all employees will be equally impacted by the transition to a hybrid work model. As such, employers should be prepared to address individual employees who require accommodations based on protected human rights grounds.



Employers who implement a hybrid work model should consider how hybrid work can best be made equally available and accessible to all employees who perform comparable work. For example, measures may be required to make WFH equipment and technology training available to all eligible employees.

Once a hybrid work model is launched, employers must remain vigilant and prepared to address the needs of existing and new individual employees who may require different arrangements due to protected grounds (e.g., disability, family status, or religion). Where possible, plan for employees' anticipated accommodation needs when developing a hybrid work program in order to minimize future unanticipated disruptions.

**Occupational health and safety:** Employers should expect their workplace health and safety protocols to evolve significantly as the pandemic runs its course. They should also prepare their leaders and employees accordingly.

Drivers of ongoing H&S changes and developments include:

-  **A) Changes to safety standards** with respect to personal protective equipment, COVID-19 testing, and vaccination status checks as knowledge and understanding of COVID-19 evolves. As our knowledge and understanding of COVID-19 evolve, employees may also have new reasons for refusing work on the grounds that they consider it unsafe.
-  **B) Changes to the legal obligations** employers face in regards to inspecting and ensuring the safety of employees' remote workspaces.
-  **C) New measures and approaches** that are necessary to address forms of workplace harassment and workplace violence that arise from an increased reliance on remote work, virtual communications, and fewer face-to-face interaction among employees.



## 06 How we can help

We hope this guide leaves with you a good starting point for your transformation. Moving forward, KPMG teams can help you build and effectively manage a successful hybrid workplace. Our diverse teams of specialists in law, tax, change management, organizational design, inclusion and diversity and digital transformation can work with you on defining and implementing a successful hybrid model.

Examples of how we can help include:

- Surveying your managers and staff for their needs and expectations about remote work
- Working with your teams on defining the right model for your organization
- Developing the case for change to hybrid working
- Advising on tax and legal employment agreements and compliance
- Advising on workplace health and safety models and practices
- Outlining remote work policy and guidelines
- Implementing and driving adoption of collaboration and productivity technology tools
- Developing processes and guidelines for your teams to work effectively in a hybrid approach



Build your  
hybrid  
workplace

**Book your complimentary  
30 minute discovery call**

**Book Now**





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