

Hybrid (Return to) Workplace – How will it shape up in 2021 and beyond?

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HYBRID (RETURN TO) WORKPLACE

COVID-19 continues to have a dramatic influence on economies, companies and individuals. Even with the increased availability of vaccines, the number of vaccinated citizens remains low. The limited accessibility to vaccine shots is insufficient to achieve herd immunity in developed countries before the end of 2021. Mutations of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which is significantly more contagious, may further spread with notably higher incidence levels. The UK and Ireland highlighted this trend. Vaccination strategies in most countries are also burdensome to companies and employees, with the scarce vaccine initially provided to particularly vulnerable groups of people (medical personnel, the elderly and the previously ill). While this is understandable from an ethical point of view, for employers it means that COVID-19 will almost certainly keep them busy throughout 2021.

At the end of 2020 and early 2021, we saw the third wave of COVID-19 in the US. Europe is also nearing a severe lockdown state where companies have been asked to let employees work from home wherever possible. In mid 2021, it has spread to the APAC region.

Amid the pandemic's devastating effects, there are a few positive outcomes from the conditional lockdowns and working from home initiatives. Compared to 2019, CO₂ emissions in 2020 decreased by 6.3%¹ worldwide, by 13.1%¹ in the USA and by 9.4%¹ in the EU. This is also evidenced by lower air pollution and less congestion in cities last year. Under the Paris climate protection agreement requirements, this is a positive development and paves the way to a climate-neutral society. All of this shows a clear message to companies to prepare for the future mode of work now.

"There is no back to normal as we knew it in 2019. Even after the COVID-19 pandemic, workplaces will be a hybrid mix between office and work from home, wherever possible and feasible for employees."

Wolfgang Schwab, Head of Cyber Security, PAC | teknowlogy

¹ Source: Statista.com



WHAT CAN MAKE WORKPLACES SAFE AND PRODUCTIVE?

There are two types of worker scenarios:

- Employees who need to be onsite such as medical staff, production staff in factories, craftspersons, salespersons in shops, to name but a few.
- Employees who can work from home at least some of the time with the right infrastructure, organization and mindset in place.

Both groups need to be offered safe working environments that they are satisfied with to be truly efficient.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE IN THE MINDSET OF MOST COMPANIES TO ENABLE A HYBRID WORKPLACE?

Organizations need to develop a vision of future working models for different roles and individual situations. The basic questions that need to be answered are which working model fits the organization and the needs of the different roles and individuals in an organization, and how an overall working model will look.

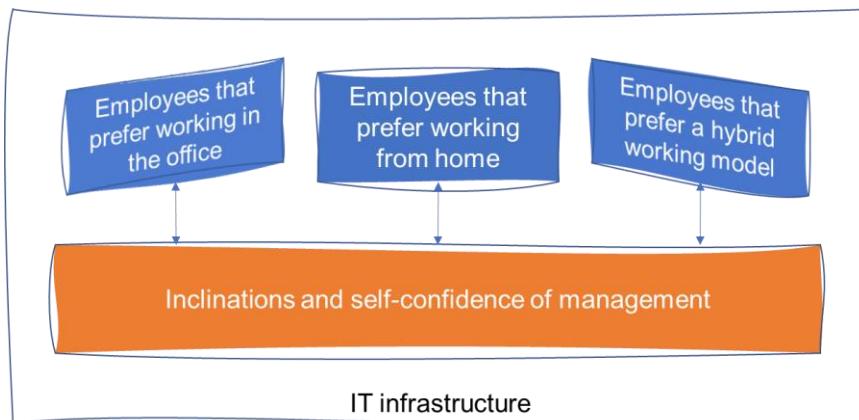
“From a job description perspective, only about

30%

of all employees can work efficiently from home. In reality it's lower!”

Wolfgang Schwab, Head of Cyber Security, PAC | teknology

To define a valid future working model, the requirements of employees and management need to be aligned with the abilities of the organization and its IT infrastructure.



"The biggest challenge is to reconcile the needs of employees with the sensitivities of middle management."

Wolfgang Schwab, Head of Cyber Security, PAC | teknowlogy

Middle and upper management must rethink their approach in many organizations. Many managers sang their own praises during the first phase of the pandemic for their flexibility and the rapid introduction of remote working. However, they neglected to ensure that employees were at least as flexible in turning their kitchen tables into offices and thus keeping operations running. They overlooked the fact that such distributed organizations require different management techniques.

During the first wave of the pandemic, some managers realized that they had an issue with not seeing their teams, that trust in the working habits of team members was a necessity, and that management by walking through the office would no longer work. This is why quite a few organizations asked their employees to come back to the office during the summer of 2020.

This move raises two issues:

- Some employees enjoyed the remote work experience and its advantages, such as work-life balance, elimination of commute times, and being more productive or creative due to the absence of any disturbance. These employees are reluctant to go back to the office daily, affecting motivation, loyalty and commitment.
- Some employees were unable to deal with this new freedom, as they missed the social interaction with colleagues, or they simply did not have a suitable place to work at home for long periods. These employees were happy during the summer and are finding it hard to work from home again.

Therefore, a more flexible approach will be needed in the future, and management needs to handle it.

The future working model in most organizations should strongly focus on individual needs with a close connection to organizational needs. Consideration for individual needs leads to higher motivation, loyalty and commitment, and might attract talent.

Obviously, this has to be matched with the needs of the organization. Videoconferencing can replace in-person meetings in many cases, but not in all. Therefore, even if working from home is an option, there may be a need for regular (but not necessarily frequent) office days.

To understand the individual needs of employees, managers must talk to their staff. Understanding such needs allows a suitable working model to be found, eliminating irritation and frustration on both sides. These needs might change over time, meaning that decisions on working models need to be adjusted from time to time.

Organizations must learn to deal with a new approach to work, and especially those with little experience in remote working need to understand that new working models can improve their overall performance. It may take some time for this realization to take hold. It is crucial for senior management to back such a new strategy, and it also needs to be implemented in middle management.

"The future mode of work will in many cases be a hybrid model, i.e. spending some time in the office and some time working from home – technology can support this."

Wolfgang Schwab, Head of Cyber Security, PAC | teknology

WHAT NEEDS TO BE IMPLEMENTED FOR ONSITE WORKERS?

Onsite workers at all levels need a safe and healthy working environment. To provide this, enterprises can and ultimately must take a number of measures and precautions:

- Precautions at the factory gate:
 - Health disclaimers: Employees must be informed about rules of conduct for COVID-19 prevention. Rules such as social distancing, mask wearing, regular hand washing, and compliance with guidelines on how many employees may work in a certain area must be clearly and comprehensively documented and made available to every employee.
 - Detection of potentially infected workers: It is essential to stop unwell employees from entering the factory. An easy way to do this is an automatic contactless measurement of body temperature. Employees with abnormal temperatures must be refused entry and isolated for medical examination. For highly sensitive sectors such as the medical field, a corona rapid test can be a suitable option.
- Compliance monitoring in the company premises:
 - Wearables: Every employee should get a wearable device to track information and be identified for important measures such as contact tracing.
 - Occupancy analytics: Canteens, office spaces near coffee machines or printers tend to be crowded at certain times. Information at the factory

- gate on less occupied spaces or occupancy of different canteens before lunch break can ease the situation.
- Contact tracing: This is the most important tool for stopping an outbreak immediately after the first infection is identified. All risky contacts of the last five to ten days must be identified, isolated and tested. The faster this can be done, the better.
 - Mask compliance: Wearing masks for long stretches can certainly be uncomfortable and hinder some activities. Nevertheless, it is essential to do so at defined places. Sometimes, employees forget to wear masks. Appropriate video surveillance with automatic mask recognition that reminds the employee to put on the mask can be useful.
 - Social distancing: This is important to stop the virus from spreading. Nevertheless, there are situations where employees can get too close to each other. Appropriate video surveillance with automatic distance recognition is helpful, especially if it reminds the employee to step back.
- Wellness and health:
 - Air quality: Enclosed spaces and exhaled aerosols pose a particular hazard in the transmission of the infection. Therefore, masks should be worn, and the number of people in individual rooms should be limited. In addition, it is important to monitor the air quality in individual rooms, corridors and factory halls and provide sufficient fresh air.
 - New types of huddle rooms: The use of small meeting rooms for spontaneous meetings or conference calls is not appropriate at the moment. However, the idea of small, well-equipped cabins or plexiglass cubicles with a fresh air supply for individuals is compelling, not only in times of pandemic. This type of workspace is not only safe, it is also quiet.
 - Human-robot collaboration in production environments: Social distancing and separation are relatively easy in office environments. On the shopfloor, this is more complicated. Some tasks require two or more persons to work closely (less than 1.5 meters apart) to install parts. For such environments, investments in modern robotics can be an option. One human plus as many robotic arms as required can perform the job without risking the spread of infection. If this is not an option, daily corona rapid tests are a necessity.

All in all, the necessary effort for onsite employees is high but essential to ensure a safe working environment and mitigate the risk of an outbreak.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE IMPLEMENTED FOR OFFSITE WORKERS?

For efficient offsite working, certain prerequisites must be met:

- Remote employees need hardware with the necessary application which they can use at home and an Internet connection for data transfer.
- Digital workplace: Very few people can work completely on their own. Therefore, collaboration tools (video conferencing, enterprise chat) and document sharing tools need to be in place, not only for the offsite employees but for their peers onsite as well. In other words, a digital workplace concept needs to be implemented to allow employees to work from anywhere with the same tools and with a consistent user experience.

Case study of a chemicals company:

A large global chemicals company had to keep its lights on throughout the pandemic – amongst other products in its portfolio, it was producing critical ingredients for hand sanitizers. The team wanted a safe and secure application to alert its employees about their health conditions. Infosys deployed its Intelligent Workplace Platform and launched company-branded mobile applications. Both were extremely user friendly. It took responding to five questions and five clicks to determine if an employee was safe or not to work. To ensure compliance and a safe workflow, the health check was integrated with physical turnstiles and badging systems. This integration allowed the company to monitor daily compliance, identify unsafe candidates and support them, reduce operational and manual interventions at factory gates and in parking lots, and provide a simple and effective tool for users to comply with.

Case study of global major company specializing in agricultural and construction equipment:

A global major company specializing in agricultural and construction equipment had to put local safety measures in place. Based on the spread of the disease and local regulations, it needed a dynamic solution that enabled it to keep its workplaces safe, detect contamination, and contain spread. While it was able to ensure safety on the premises, it realized it could not control the environment once employees completed their shifts. The client approached Infosys for a contact tracing solution. We enabled the company with our mobile-based (Android) contact tracing solution for its office workers and wearable-based contact tracing solution for its factory workers, orchestrated by the Intelligent Workplace Platform. The platform provided a single interface for its EHS, HR and IT teams to work across different types of workers and needs, manage compliance with local laws, and ensure company standards. The factory workers now used an unobtrusive device that would provide haptic feedback when social distancing norms were breached. The contact details allowed HR and EHS to contact employees and notify them of exposure.

ANNEX

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Independence

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ABOUT INFOSYS

Infosys is a global leader in next-generation digital services and consulting. We enable clients in 46 countries to navigate their digital transformation. With over three decades of experience in managing the systems and workings of global enterprises, we expertly steer our clients through their digital journey. We do it by enabling the enterprise with an AI-powered core that helps prioritize the execution of change. We also empower the business with agile digital at scale to deliver unprecedented performance and customer delight levels. Our always-on learning agenda drives their continuous improvement through building and transferring digital skills, expertise, and ideas from our innovation ecosystem.



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The Infosys Intelligence Workplace/Return to Workplace Framework

Building safe, nurturing, and resilient workspaces

Before the pandemic, employees' primary concerns were deadlines, collaborating with colleagues, and leaving work on time. Now the focus has switched to isolating themselves from others, wondering who is infected, and controlling the distraction that is the COVID-19 pandemic. As employees return to work, they must be more cautious than they were pre-pandemic. As economies and companies reopen, smart space solutions play a vital role in building safe, nurturing, and resilient workspaces.

The future of safety in the workplace is to isolate, prepare, prevent, protect and thrive

The Infosys 'Return to Workplace' platform provides a comprehensive framework and execution-oriented solution enabling enterprises to make their workspaces safe and resilient. This is done by reassessing office spaces, applying best practices recommended by health experts, and weaving in next-gen technologies. Doing so enables preventive measures, protective solutions and robust communication channels while adhering to data privacy standards and practices mandated by the FDA, FCC, ISO, and IEC compliance.



Our Solutions

Our highly scalable suite of solutions reduces the need for human intervention, decreases the risk of lapses, and enables fast decision making with the ease of compliance reporting. With this solution's help, Infosys will provide its clients with

a holistic view of their organization's health, resources, and operational efficiencies.

Our solutions include:

- **Thermal screening for elevated body temperature** – A fully automated AI-powered thermal scanning proprietary solution captures body temperature data from thermal cameras, processes the data using Computer Vision (CV) and AI algorithms on edge devices in real-time and alerts the relevant team for further examination.
- **Video analytics for social distancing** – AI/ML-based advanced algorithms for facemask detection, assessing mask types, employee face angles and partial occlusion. These algorithms send alerts to facility administrators when masks are not detected or when social distancing is not followed, allowing interventions to be made.
- **Contact tracing** – Bluetooth/ GPS enabled wearable and mobile app based solution, allows enterprises and cities to trace contacts at risk due to proximity to an ill person. This solution allows clients to capture masked proximity/ location information while triggering cues to drive social distancing.
- **Health disclaimer** – A mobile app for users to follow required health and safety guidelines, monitor their activities, and support the Health Department by providing accurate data with user consent. It is a one-stop-shop for pandemic response, connecting users with resources about quarantine and isolation supports, symptom monitoring, and up-to-date disease information from the Health Department.
- **Contactless biometric** – Facial recognition for access control, contactless payment and elevator access via edge technologies to ensure employees and visitors safely enter workplaces without touching frequently used surfaces.
- **Occupancy and workplace analytics** – Real-time occupancy data to identify employee occupancy violations and for employees to plan to visit common places such as food courts and exits. Workplace analytics helps real estate teams track metrics and automate sanitation workflows and elevator workflows.
- **Sanitization solution** – Autonomous rail-guided vehicle (RGV) with surveillance, payload and audio/video capabilities powered by the Infosys Autonomous System Platform for sanitizing workplaces.

ABOUT TEKNOWLOGY GROUP

teknowlogy Group is your partner of choice for European focused IT market data, insights and advice. It brings together the expertise of two research and advisory firms, each with a strong history and local presence in the fragmented markets of Europe: [CXP](#) and [PAC \(Pierre Audoin Consultants\)](#).

We are a content-based company with strong consulting DNA. We are the preferred partner for European user companies to define IT strategy, govern teams and projects, and de-risk technology choices that drive successful business transformation.

We have a second-to-none understanding of market trends and IT users' expectations. We help software vendors and IT services companies better shape, execute and promote their own strategy in coherence with market needs and in anticipation of tomorrow's expectations.

Capitalizing on more than 40 years of experience, we are active worldwide with a network of 50 experts.

For more information, please visit [www.teknology.com](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#).



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