



# The Reimagined Workplace

## Return-to-the-Office Guide

The pandemic shattered many of the beliefs we held about the workplace culture.

*People are more productive in the office. Effective team collaboration suffers. Ideas from water cooler chats dry up. The office is the only place “real work” gets done.*

That was the conventional wisdom pre-COVID and before the great work-from-home experiment of 2020. But, it’s 2021 and the results are in. The traditional office is gone forever. Hybrid and remote work has replaced 9-to-5.

Recent research confirms what we already know: 70% of firms plan to move to some form of hybrid work<sup>1</sup> and 75% of employees want to go into the office at least one day a week.<sup>2</sup>

The pandemic gave us the freedom to Rethink the workplace in ways that were previously “unthinkable.” Every corporate leader has the same high-level goals:

- Returning to the office safely
- Reconnecting and reinventing how we work together
- Renewing and retooling our businesses to ensure they thrive during the next economic disruption

How and when you achieve those goals could mean the difference between a resilient, future-ready business and a company stuck in the past. The tactics and strategies you use will depend on your role – pre-pandemic workplace, your industry, and where you are technologically. The ultimate workplace redefines business resiliency so you can embrace — and welcome — change.

As you weigh your options, take a look at this step-by-step guide for HR to see what you need to consider to reimagine your workplace. Then, contact us and we’ll help you determine your plan of action based on your workplace ecosystem and timelines.

1. Bloom, Nicholas; “Don’t Let Employees Pick Their WFH Days”; Harvard Business Review; May 25, 2021 <https://hbr.org/2021/05/dont-let-employees-pick-their-wfh-days>

2. Americas Return to the Workplace Survey; [https://assets-global.website-files.com/5f54d5d0d20ccc918d21aed2/60c27f9b6779e12b2588db43\\_Americas%20Return%20to%20the%20Workplace\\_Survey%20Q2%202021.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/5f54d5d0d20ccc918d21aed2/60c27f9b6779e12b2588db43_Americas%20Return%20to%20the%20Workplace_Survey%20Q2%202021.pdf)

# Human Resources: Return-to-the-Office Checklist

HR departments are actively planning for the return of team members to the office and working closely with Facilities and IT to plan and execute effective reopening strategies. As an HR professional, it's your job to take the lead and establish policies on how to reopen the office that will satisfy both company leaders and team members.

Here is a checklist to help you develop a thoughtful policy and ease the transition back to the office for everyone.

1. Create a return-to-the-office taskforce consisting of key stakeholders from facilities and IT with appointed group(s) leaders and a taskforce project manager. Coordinate any decisions with legal.
2. Work with key leaders on how to move from a location-centric to a human-centric strategy.<sup>3</sup> To help formulate your strategies, discuss the primary purpose of in-office work with the taskforce and what value employees will gain from: formal meetings, collaboration, innovation, socialization, productivity, and essential work.
3. Communicate, communicate, communicate. Be transparent so employees understand the reopening-the-office plans, the return dates, and what safety measures are in place. In one survey, 80% of employees said increased communication is the biggest driver of readiness in feeling comfortable in returning to the workplace.<sup>4</sup> Another survey found that 61% of employees want increased health and safety measures and 67% want more comfortable design features.<sup>5</sup>
  - Survey employees to find out what safety concerns they have.
  - Communicate reopening plans, safety measures, policies, physical office changes to employees, visitors, vendors, and customers (if affected).
  - Use multiple methods of communication: digital signage, posters, signs, email, text alerts, etc.
  - Prominently display health and safety notices from the company, local health officials, and building management for anyone entering the building including occupancy limits, PPE, sanitization, etc.
  - Communicate/display daily health reminders, work schedules, meeting room/desk availability, cafeteria menus, etc.
  - Create a communications portal/email address for questions.
  - Make sure employees are aware of all guidelines.
4. Create in-office, remote, and hybrid work policies. Solicit input from department heads and employees.
  - How will your hybrid workforce communicate?
  - How will you ensure a seamless collaboration experience in office? When working from home?
5. Define and refine bring your own device (BYOD) policies. Consider how you will monitor the policies and what technology IT needs to put in place to monitor the process.
6. Draw up schedules for hybrid work.
  - Will schedules be based on company needs and social distancing/safety guidelines?

The most influential factors affecting U.S. workers' comfort levels regarding health and safety at work and what you need to consider.<sup>6</sup>

58% PPE

52% Quality of safety policies

48% Amount of social distancing



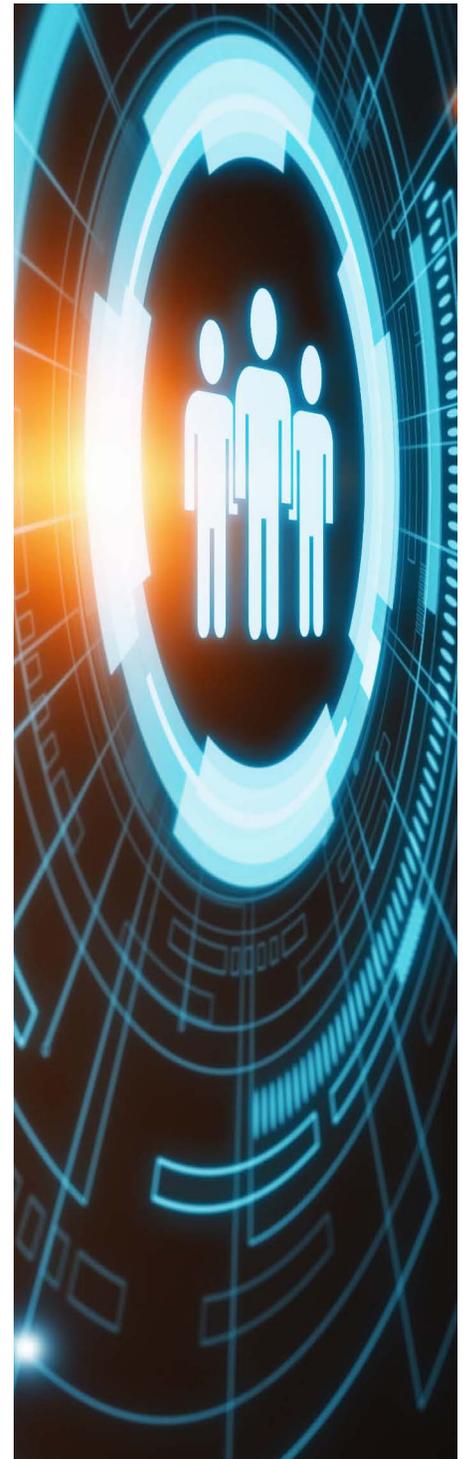
3. Venkataramani, Swetha, Contributor; "Gartner Returning Employees to an Office? Consider the Talent Risks"; Smarter with Gartner; June 3, 2021; <https://www.gartner.com/smarter-with-gartner/returning-employees-to-an-office-consider-the-talent-risks/>

4. Alonso, Alexander; "Return-to-Work Issues That Unsettle the Brain," SHRM, May 24, 2021; <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/summer2021/Pages/return-to-work-issues-that-unsettle-the-brain.aspx>

5. Adams, R. Dallan; "Employees did not like the old office. Here are the office changes they want.," TechRepublic; July 2, 2021; <https://www.techrepublic.com/article/employees-did-not-like-the-old-office-here-are-the-office-changes-they-want/>

6. COVID-19 & the Workplace: A Retrospective on the Pandemic One Year Later, SHRM, 2021

- Do specific roles/functions/teams need to be in the office simultaneously?
  - Would a phased-in, rotating, or staggered days/weeks in-office approach work better?
  - Can employees volunteer to be in the office full time?
  - Will in-office days be consecutive?
  - Can employees choose their in-office days?\*
  - Will there be days when all employees can work from home?
  - Most importantly, publish and display work schedules and policies via a centrally managed company-wide communications system for both in-office and remote employees.
7. Determine actions/responses for employees who:
- Are unable or unwilling to return to the office.
  - Fearful of returning to work.
  - Have family obligations that interfere with the return to the office.
8. How will you change the physical workplace environment? Work with facilities and IT to reconfigure the office keeping safety as the number one priority.
- Reconfigure floor plans, remove desks/furniture, and Install walls, plastic shields, or other barriers to create distance between workstations and seating areas?
  - Create/reconfigure hot desks, more and smaller huddle spaces, technology closets, comfort centers, conference rooms, etc.
  - If offices and desk spaces are consolidating in numbers, will you need additional collaboration spaces for returning workers?
  - Do you need new furniture for hot desks, meeting spaces, and other reconfigured areas?
  - Reconfigure cafeterias, lunch rooms, and break rooms. Will you cordon off areas or block seating? Remove all self-service stations?
  - If considering downsizing, consult real estate experts to determine how to make the best use of your space.
9. Establish social distancing/occupancy guidelines.
- Determine safe distancing and occupancy limits for office areas, conference rooms/meeting spaces, cafeterias, rest rooms, and all communal areas, including elevators.
  - Are you planning on using occupancy sensors that would enable/disable building/room entry or trip alerts?
  - How will you monitor desk/hot desk occupancy and usage? Note: occupancy and usage sensors can provide valuable data if you're considering downsizing.
  - Establish in-person meeting distancing policies, such as, slide alternate chairs back or leave a chair open between each person, remove furniture, cordon off areas, etc. Skip the handshakes and wash your hands immediately before and after each meeting. Any gathering with more than 10 people should be virtual, for the near term.<sup>8</sup>



<sup>7</sup>. Bloom, Nicholas; "Don't Let Employees Pick Their WFH Days"; *Harvard Business Review*; May 25, 2021; <https://hbr.org/2021/05/dont-let-employees-pick-their-wfh-days>

<sup>8</sup>. Allen, Joseph G., Macomber, John D; "What Makes an Office Building 'Healthy'"; *Harvard Business Review*, April 29, 2020; <https://hbr.org/2020/04/what-makes-an-office-building-healthy?ab=hero-main-tex>

- Will you use interactive signage or kiosks to display room/space/desk availability and reservations?
  - Are you considering safe-meeting/touchless AV collaboration and presentation tools?
10. Do you plan to replace high-touch surfaces with contactless/no-touch technology for entrances, elevators, conference room/video sharing, coffee/water dispensers, rest rooms, etc.?
11. Establish cleaning and sanitization guidelines and procedures with facilities and/or the cleaning services for:
- Nightly cleaning: desks, public areas, rest rooms, elevators, entrances, lobbies, etc.
  - Cleaning between users: Hot-desks, conference rooms, huddle spaces, coffee/break rooms, cafeterias, etc.
  - How will you manage on-demand cleaning?
  - Will you use signage, messages, and other communication methods to post clean desk/room availability?
12. Develop an exposure-response plan that addresses:
- Isolation, containment, contact tracing, and sanitization.
  - Stay-at-home policies.
  - Communications to affected employees.
13. Review/update existing policies such as sick leave, PTO, travel, etc. to determine if you need changes based on pandemic restrictions, employee health, and governmental guidelines/regulations.

Download our full Return-to-the-Office Guide for HR, Facilities, and IT at [BlackBox.com/ReimaginedWorkplace](https://BlackBox.com/ReimaginedWorkplace).



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