tidaro

How to manage the office comeback in 2023

A guide for office, HR, and workplace managers in companies with employees ranging from 50 to 300



Back in 2020 we were hearing: office space is dead, long live remote work. Things will never go back to the 2019 status quo.

Fast forward, in September 2022, in the UK, the ‚Back to school' week became also the ‚Back to the office' week. The average office occupancy reached its highest peak since the pandemic - 31%.

According to Kastle and their Back to Work Barometer, in dec 2022, the occupancy rate in the workplace rose to 48.4%. The data tracks the occupancy of 2,600 buildings, 41,000 businesses, across 10 cities in the US.

The COVID-19 pandemic has broken through cultural and technological barriers that prevented remote work in the past. It redefined the status quo in a lot of industries.

But now that COVID-19 pressure has diminished, many employers are requiring their employees to get back to the office.

The people behind the back-to-office strategies have a great responsibility on their shoulders: ensuring a flexible comeback that will consider employees' creativity, productivity, and wellbeing.

This guide is here to help.

48.4% Occupancy rate in the workplace — December 2022

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CHAPTER 1

Why do employers want to get employees back to the office?

When employers start talking about returning to the office, it's natural to see resistance from employees. The thing is that many of the benefits of working from home are good for the individual, while many of the benefits of working from the office are good for the company. So, it's obvious that this can lead to frustrations on both sides, as both sides have different goals.

As per the reasons why employers want to get employees back in the office, we'll keep this short. So, here we go:

01 There's a belief that most professionals learn their job through an apprenticeship model, which is almost impossible to replicate in a Slack world. This is the view of many CEOs and founders, such as Morgan Stanley's CEO, James Gorman or Netflix' CEO, Reed Hastings.

02 85% of leaders say that the shift to hybrid work has made it challenging to have confidence that employees are being productive, according to Microsoft's Work Trend Index Special Report (September 2022).

03 Employers feel that remote work erodes workers' sense of belonging. For example, Spotify implemented a program called „Working from anywhere". After a year, they wanted to measure the effects. They realized that people feel less connected to Spotify as a whole, but (there's always a „but") they feel more connected to their immediate team. So, there might be a tradeoff.

04 Certain employers feel the seniors need to be in the office, following the principle that „the more senior you are, the more visible your presence must be". This is exactly what Elon Musk thinks. And it seems that there's even a term for this from the psychology perspective: the „mere exposure effect." It suggests that the more individuals are exposed to someone the more they like that person. Increased exposure may generate positive assumptions such as „these people work harder."

05 Companies have invested lots of money in offices and campuses that are no longer being used to their full potential. This gives rise to „the sunk cost fallacy", which refers to sticking with a „losing" investment because you've sunk money into, as well as time and other resources that you can't get back.

06 Older managers are not used to working with remote teams and can even hold prejudices.

07 Some executives think that seeing work by others can lead to a phenomenon called „goal contagion". This translates like this: being around a group of people who are working toward a common goal reinforces that goal in everyone in the workplace.

08 Many executives feel you have better control and visibility if everyone is in front of them.

09 Many executives feel that collaboration in the workplace better ignites creativity.

10 It's harder for new colleagues to be integrated in the team.

11 Employee engagement is an issue of concern for many managers.

And yes, all of these might hold true, depending on the type of company, its culture, its employees.

CHAPTER 2

Why don’t the employees want to get back to the office?

We’ve compiled a shortlist with answers to this questions. Here it goes:

01

Working from home saves lots of commuting time and diminishes the stress that comes with it. Nick Bloom points out in one of his studies that the average US employee saves about 70 minutes a day, with this time usually split into both additional work and leisure by employees.

When people save time from commuting, they have more time for their family, friends, and hobbies. And this leads to a happier life.

02

Working from home also means savings when it comes to gas, car maintenance, lunch (unless you order lunch home as well), and even clothing. On the other hand, in the countries affected by the energy crisis, working from home can put pressure on electricity bills.

03

Many employees can design their own “work-friendly happy corner” where they can cut potential distractions.

04

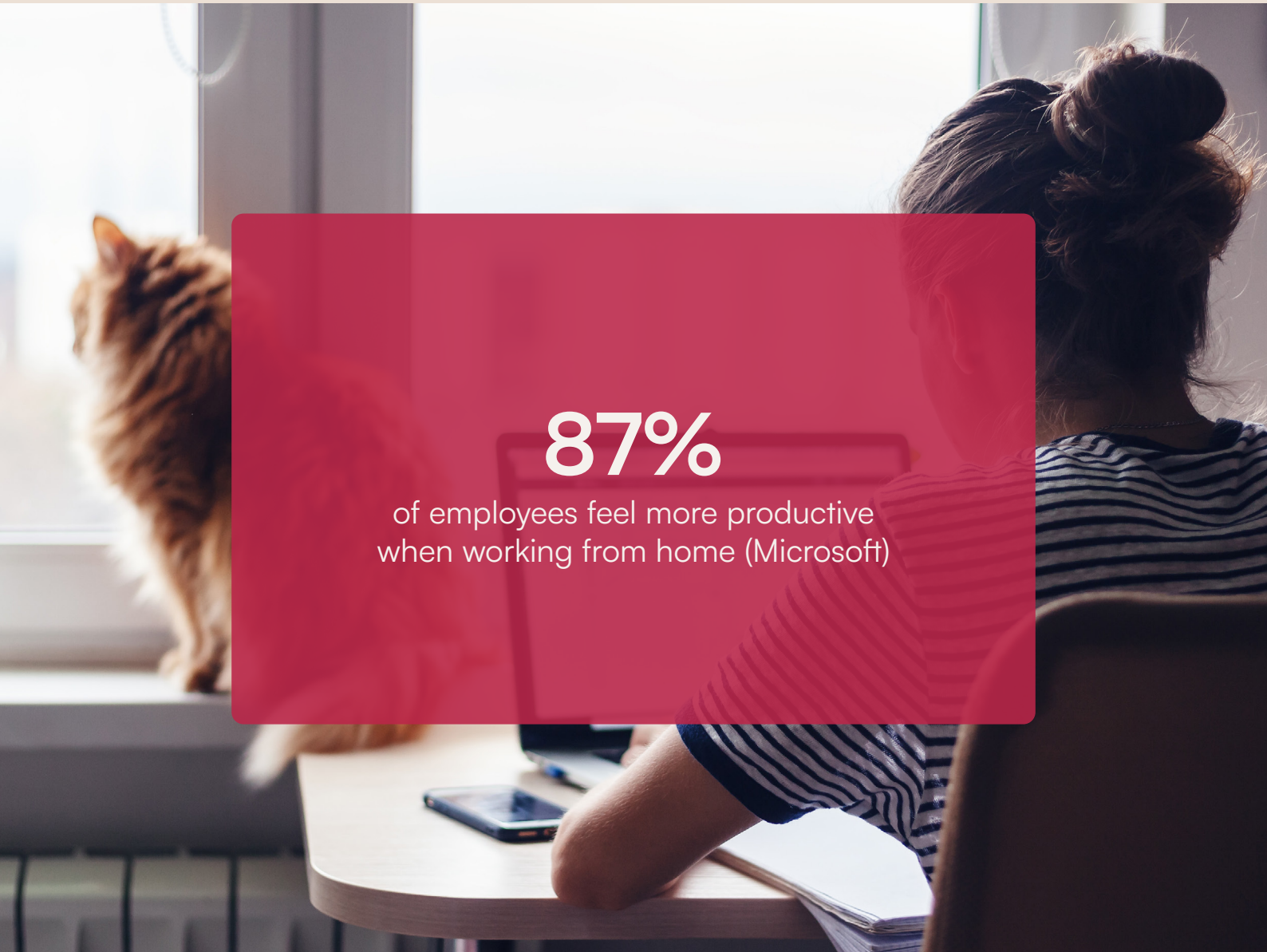
A survey conducted by Pew Research Center in Jan 2022, in the US, showed that 64% of those who were working from home at least some of the time but rarely or never did before the pandemic say it’s easier now for them to balance work with their personal life.

05 During the pandemic, the number of people with pets increased. They have become important in our lives, and people find it hard to manage them when away from home.

06 For many people, with the pandemic, it was time to relocate. Some wanted to be closer to family, others didn't see the point of renting an apartment in the city center and working remotely allowed them to make a change. Such employees would sooner change jobs than start attending the office regularly again.

07 For many people, the office isn't a cozy workplace, that can make them feel comfortable. Not every company affords having a campus like Google or LinkedIn.

08 87% of employees feel that they are productive when they work from home, according to Microsoft's Work Trend Index Special Report (September 2022).



Now, people often forget that there are people who like going into the office. Here are some of their reasons:

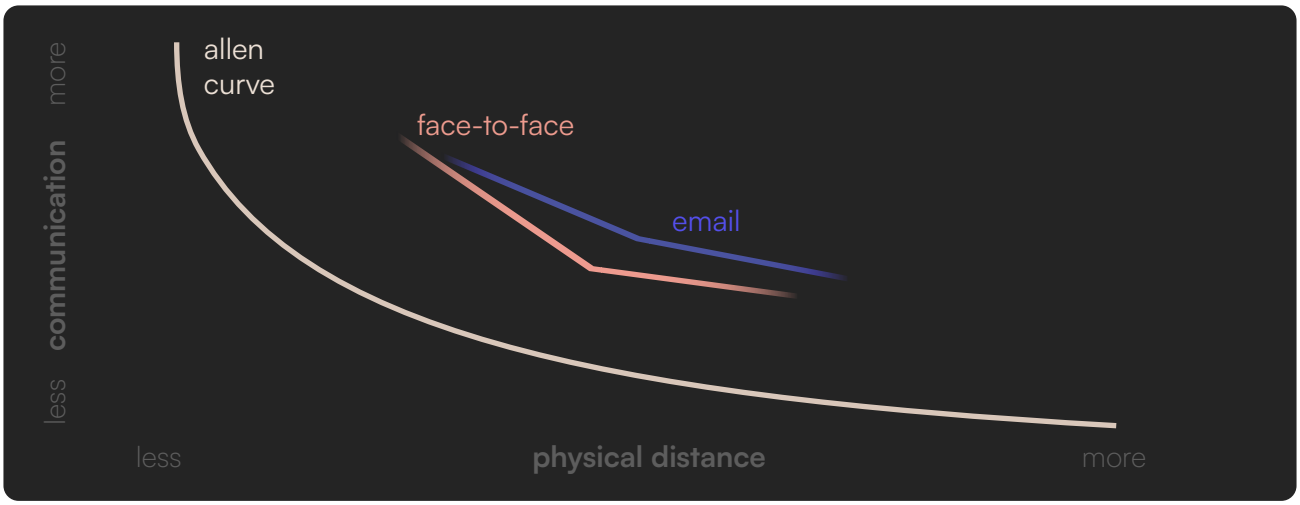
- They have small kids at home, and they can't be productive in their company.

- They can't afford an office at home, or a special place where they won't be disturbed.

- Some people feel isolated.

- Some people feel that they can't disconnect from work when the working day should be over.

- Some people really need to engage with other people, and the office was that place where they could do that. And there's the Allen Curve that shows that people in an office setting who are stationed within 10 meters of one another have the highest probability of communication. It seems that technological advancement can't remove something that probably lies in our DNA: face-to-face collaboration. Probably because you can't erase something that is ancient with something that is still in its infancy, if you relate it to the history of humanity.



• There are surveys suggesting that employees who work from home and are not in the office and close to management are a bit fearful. They feel they might miss out on the next promotion, or other career opportunities. This is called „the proximity bias". They feel left out and perceive that the company is being less inclusive. Think of it like this: "Out of sight, out of mind." This can be true in companies that are not that loose, and in companies where the culture focuses a lot on micromanagement.



CHAPTER 3

How can employers and employees meet midway?

Let's find those reasons that also align with individual goals, as well, when it comes to getting teams back in the office.

Here's our shortlist:

People want to go to the office to meet with people they like.

Microsoft data shows that 85% of global employees come back to the office for the promise of socializing. Now, there might be an issue with this. When you tell your employees that the unique value proposition of the office is other people, but go into the office and no one is there, you're setting them up for disappointment. So, you need to find fixes for this. One example would be using an app that allows people to see who's in the office, like Tidaro does.

New employees' integration.

Bonds are stronger when people meet face-to-face. It would be advisable for onboardings to happen in the office, with the other team members present.

Projects brainstorming.

When people come together in the same room, form brainstorming or planning, people might feel more connected, more attached to the common goal.

Catching up on some projects and goals.

When important deadlines are being set up, and you need to align the team with regard to what's been done, and what needs to be done, a face-to-face meeting would be useful. Virtual communication can have its glitches, that face-to-face meetings can solve for.



Team bonding activities.

As data shows, the sense of belonging is diminishing when a lot of time is spent doing remote work. From time to time, some office time can be used to take the pulse of the team, to do some activities together.

Celebrations.

Why not celebrate the end of a project, or a milestone? Make people feel as if they are part of something bigger, not just a tiny piece in a bigger puzzle.

Learning and development activities.

Data shows if people can't learn and grow, they'll leave. Also, Microsoft research suggests that the younger generations are also more likely to say that they'd stay at their current company longer if the company gave them the flexibility to pursue side projects or businesses for more income. And yes, learning can happen online, but when you meet for specific activities with a mentor or the team, this would better foster learning.

Breaking the routine.

Coming to the office, employees don't want to do the same tasks and in the same way as they do at the home office. A change in work routine may be what attracts them to the office. If you're planning to have those virtual meetings, forget about it, because they won't see the value of being in the office.

Ensure proper spaces in the office that can foster engagement.

If you have an open space, it is proven that people don't engage much. We've seen it before: total silence, and people talking on Slack...A study showed that the volume of face-to-face interaction in an open space office decreases by approx. 70%, with an associated increase in electronic interaction.

In short, rather than seeing face-to-face collaboration, open architecture appeared to trigger a natural human response to socially withdraw from officemates and interact instead over email and messaging. So, you could design an office with smaller spaces where a few people could meet and talk.

To sum it up, whether it's a hybrid model or requiring employees to come in five days a week, employers need to show the value of asking workers to commute into the office again if workers have been successfully working from home for two years.

CHAPTER 4

Hybrid work or flexibility in the workplace?

As you already know by now, hybrid working refers to flexibility within the place of work.

It's already clear that employees need the freedom to work flexibly and autonomously, in an office or outside of it. In the "Telework in the 21st century" study, it was concluded that in the pre-pandemic US, desks were empty on an average of 40-50% of normal working hours. The rest of the time, employees work from meeting rooms, clients' offices, coffee shops, airports, and just about anywhere with internet connection.

But employees also want to have the flexibility that allows them to go to the dentist, the bank, to get their kids from school, etc.

This leads us to another type of flexibility: flex working hours. Flexible hours mean that employees can have different start and end times, rather than the standard nine-to-five work schedule. Certain companies allow their employees to have a flexible start time, maybe between 8 and 11. Others might allow more flexibility, if people end up with 8 hours a day or 40 hours a week. For example, some employees can work from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. and then from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. Or, what about working more than 8 hours per day for four days instead, then having a shorter Friday? Working compressed schedules can be very rewarding for certain employees.

At the end of the day, flexible hours can enable employees to work as they want if they keep their productivity level and meet targets.

Ultimately, employers must take overall flexibility into account, because it brings in two important benefits:

Higher employee retention and loyalty.

When employees have more control over their schedule, they feel appreciated, and this leads to higher work satisfaction and motivation.

The attraction of better candidates.

More people will feel attracted by the opportunity of a flexible schedule, thus companies will have a larger pool of candidates available.

This means that the new working models that will shape 2023 and 2024 will be, flexible and:

- Fully remote
- Remote with a spice of office work - aka hybrid
- Office work with a spice of remote - still hybrid
- Office only

So, yes, hybrid is the New Black. But how can companies handle a hybrid work environment so that they can meet the goals of both employers and employees?

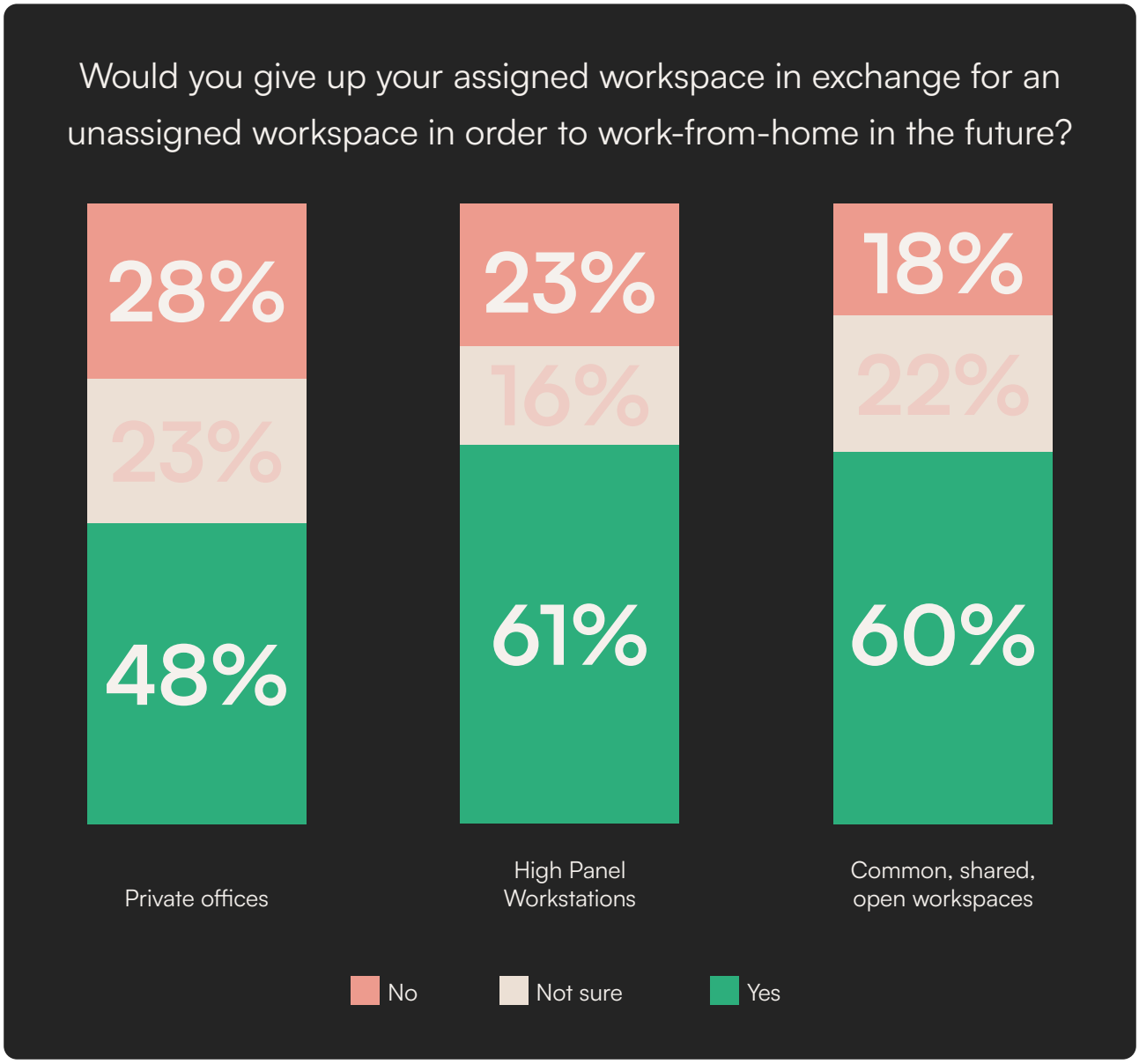
We're going to discuss this in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

How to manage the office comeback?

In a Global Work-from-Home Experience survey, the participants were asked if they were willing to trade an assigned workspace for an unassigned one to benefit from remote work.

The results were mostly in favor of this trade, as seen in the graphic below. 60% of people working in open workspaces would give up on their assigned workspace for a hot desk to be able to work from home.



Now, some companies still have months or even years ahead from their lease contracts, others might choose to diminish the office space.

Under these circumstances office managers and facility managers will most likely need to rethink how the office space is shaped and think of how to fit office zones so they accommodate the hybrid working mode better.

This involves going from a strictly fixed desk environment to different levels of desk flexibility. Office managers and facility managers need to consider office zones that could have:

100% hot desks (desks that are not assigned to employees but can be booked by everyone). When people can reserve desks in advance, we're dealing with the „hoteling" or "hot desking" concepts.

Desk zones assigned only to a given department. Employees within that department can book desks in the zone when needed. This concept is called "zoning" and it works best if nobody within that department has a fixed desk. However, there might be circumstances where selected personnel can have a fixed desk within the zone.

Fixed desks assigned to certain employees. For instance, an IT development department would usually not be suited for flexible desks.

CHAPTER 6

The Hybrid Workplace: The Transition Checklist

Most companies will manage hybrid working models and will have to define a back to work policy that will gain the confidence of employees and minimize friction.
There are several phases to this transition for a new workplace model:

01 Identify the pain points and challenges

In this issue, employees and employers need to meet halfway to minimize friction.

You could first talk to team leads, and get the pulse of each department, then move on to a survey across the whole company.

02 Find ways to address the previously found challenges

Think about:

- How will on-site and remote employees collaborate?
- What touchpoints in our company require in-person interaction?
- How can you strengthen the company culture?
- Are there some legal requirements that we should know about?
- How will employment contracts change?

- How to deal with the safety and security of data when working from home?

- Do certain employees and departments have specific needs? You'll see customer support, sales, HR, tech, marketing, all have different needs, individually or as a team. Also, older people might feel the need to stick to their fixed desk. Newbies can get frustrated if they are not seated next to their team leader. Also, you might realize that some teams need their own office space, because it's mandatory to stay together and collaborate. In a flexible office you need to think of productivity, on how to foster collaboration and employee satisfaction.

- How will communication be affected by the hybrid work policies? The loss of a familiar workspace, and the separation from teammates and managers, makes some people feel unsupported by the management.

Don't neglect this research phase, because it will inform all other activities.

HINT: If you give people the chance to get involved in shaping the new hybrid work policy, they will be more likely to support it.

03 Create a clear and transparent hybrid work policy

Here are some questions to guide you when preparing the policy:

- Who is eligible for hybrid work? Are there differences between certain teams?

- Working hours. Are there flexible working hours? How are they managed? Must team leaders and managers approve flexible working schedules for employees that request them?

- Work system — how many days can be spent in the office and at home? For example, certain countries do not allow employees to work from a place that is not their home. So, it's important to be informed about the latest legislation when it comes to remote work.

- The resources available to employees (monitors, laptops, headphones, etc.),

- Rules for communication,

- The roles and responsibilities for hybrid workers and their team leads and managers,

- How tasks are tracked, how performance is being measured,

- Safety and security rules,

- Documents management rules,

- The tools and tech stack used to manage hybrid desks (if the case),

- If any expenses are going to be covered by the company. Some country laws specify that the employee will need to split internet or energy bills with the employer.

04 Rethink the office space

Do you still need the same number of desks? What about the meeting rooms? Are there specific zones inside the office? Do they have specific accessibility? Which desks are hot desks, and which are fixed?

Then you need to prepare the needed logistics: desk booking technology, workplace analytics tools that will provide data on how areas are being used, etc.

05 Create a solid communication plan

Choose a tool where you can manage all communications (unless you already have one). Start a channel dedicated to hybrid work. Prepare a timeline for the implementation of procedures. Announce colleagues when milestones are reached, as well as challenges occur. Include them in the conversation and get their feedback along the way.

Make sure to create a flow of communication: who informs who? Who do you need to talk to on particular topics: meetings, performance, desk booking, etc.

06 Prepare the implementation of new tech necessary to support hybrid working.

Is your existing tech stack enough to manage a hybrid workplace?
Do you need sensors, or other third-party tools?

What tools will you use for document encryption, for safe communication? Is data stored safely in reliable cloud infrastructure?

07 Plan social events and meetings

You will need to focus more on them, from now on, because you will need to virtually shorten the distance between employees.

You can even think of virtual coffee hours, where colleagues just engage on different topics, or simply go freestyle, with the purpose of getting to know each other better.

08 Get feedback from employees after 3 months

Based on the feedback received, you can come up with a proposal for changes to be made to the policy.

Now, the purpose of the hybrid work policy is to protect the interests of both employees and the employer, by defining clear working conditions and expectations. In the next chapter we'll go more in-depth with the hybrid work policy and come up with some clear examples as well.

The implementation of hybrid working is a process that needs to be polished along the way. The secret of success lies in transparency and communication.

To be honest, the biggest challenge is to foster a community of employees who feel connected and motivated despite working miles apart. Because proximity bias is a real thing. So, at the end of the day, it's all connected to a healthy company culture. An essential part of a thriving company culture is workplace wellbeing.

CHAPTER 7

Technology to the rescue

In this guide you often heard about hot or flexible desks, office zones, or workplace analytics.

You will need a tool that can help you out with managing your office and bookings in the office.

There are lots of modern workplace solutions, sensors, beacons, and mobile apps that can measure movements, provide people heatmaps and automate bookings based on presence.

Now, most of the time, you won't need sophisticated solutions. The less complex, the better, right?

So, in the hybrid workplace, all roads lead to: desk booking systems.

They can make or break your hybrid model. If the experience leads to friction, it will affect the productivity of employees and lead to the addition of communication issues and other frustrations. This will end up affecting the whole working environment. Colleagues and teams will just distrust the new workplace.

That's totally a no-no!

Therefore, we developed Tidaro with the end-user in mind. It had to:

Be simple,

Be intuitive,

Have rapid onboarding,

Not become a burden to the IT guys,

Encourage employee engagement.

And we did it. We stood by our philosophy of delivering great usability. So, Tidaro is an intuitive desk booking system that makes your workplace smarter and data driven. It allows you to manage your office desks (rooms, as spots as well) in a very convenient way and learn about usage rates, office zones' performance, how employees use the workplace, etc.

Here are some of our happy customers:

Bank BPH

Capgemini

MICHELIN

BNP PARIBAS

fortum

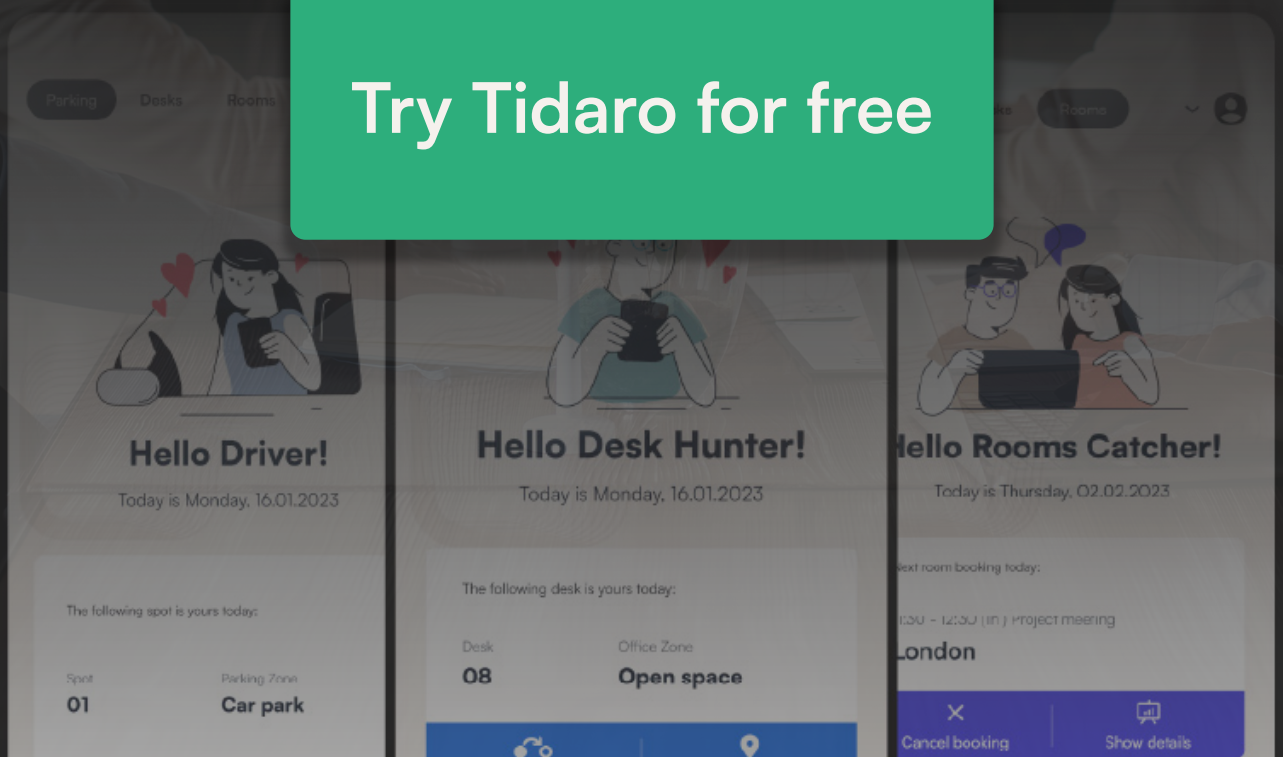
With Tidaro you can:

- Book desks from either mobile or web app,
- Set up different desk and zone types
- Allow employees to book desks from interactive maps,
- Allow employees book a desk next to a certain colleague,
- Understand who is in the office in a specific day,
- Learn how your office space performs,

And there's more!

Wanna see Tidaro in action?

Try Tidaro for free



Conclusions

2023 will be the year when more and more employees will return to their offices. What employers need to focus on is to provide them with the right reasons for that.

We feel that a hybrid will be the go-to for lots of companies out there. Managers will understand that hybrid teams are productive, cost-efficient and that they need to ensure the well-being of employees. The focus will be around desk management, workspace optimization performance goals, and not time spent working.

Ready or not, here I come.

Signed,
Hybrid, the new black

Let’s talk about the hybrid workplace of tomorrow. YOURS.

Talk to us!

tidaro

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