



The **Modern** Work Environment

Solutions to Increase Employee Productivity
and Satisfaction

Abstract

The everchanging corporate landscape has seen an immense shift over the last three years. Employees at every level and in every industry across the globe have faced changing work models, significant adjustments to company culture, advancements in workplace technology, and more. What is the driving force for this change? An increased demand for flexibility.

As many employees were forced to adapt to a fully remote work model during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, others were inspired to take on a hybrid or work-from-anywhere model, splitting their time between the office and home. While this shift has brought many benefits, like an increase in work-life balance as well as cost savings on the everyday commute and office supplies, it has also brought new challenges to the forefront of the corporate space.

Our research, conducted alongside professionals in a wide variety of industries, serves to assist organizations with best addressing these challenges and adding focus to employee productivity. This helps organizations enhance the overall experience for both employees and customers, as well as improve their bottom line. The research outlined in this paper has in turn influenced best-of-breed technology solutions designed to build, expand, and optimize communication and user-engaging channels.

With the latest technology in digital signage for corporate communications, the modern office environment can operate more efficiently. And when corporate leaders are informed on the latest trends impacting their environment, organizations can produce results like never before.



The Post-Pandemic Office Environment

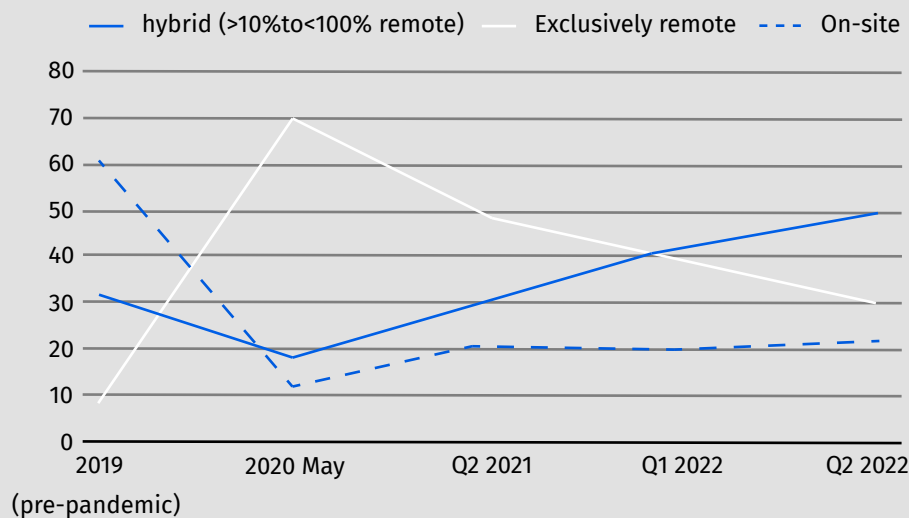
The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped employee preferences for where, how, and when they work. Prior to the pandemic, fewer than 6 percent of Americans primarily worked from home.¹ Now, according to Gallup, approximately 56 percent of full-time employees in the U.S.—more than 70 million workers—say their job can be done remotely.² Nevertheless, full-time remote work rates are falling. Gallup's analysis indicates that fully remote arrangements will continue to decrease from the pandemic high of 70 percent to level out around 20 percent.

70
Million Workers
say their job can be done by working remotely from home.

This doesn't mean that workers are necessarily returning to the office full-time. Microsoft's September 2022 Work Trend Index³ found that 82 percent of business decision-makers see getting employees back to the office in person as a key priority in 2023, but worker compliance with this demand has been mixed. People are returning, but not full-time, and worker behaviors now indicate a strong preference for hybrid work over any other style.

U.S. Employee Work Locations

How many remote-capable employees are currently working hybrid or fully remote?



¹"The Number of People Primarily Working from Home Tripled Between 2019 and 2021." United States Census Bureau. September 15, 2022. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2022/people-working-from-home.html>.

²"Returning to the Office: The Current, Preferred and Future State of Remote Work." Gallup. August 31, 2022. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/397751/returning-office-current-preferred-future-state-remote-work.aspx>.

³"Hybrid Work Is Just Work." Microsoft. September 22, 2022. <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work-is-just-work>.

McKinsey's most recent American Opportunity Survey⁴ shows that 58 percent of American jobholders can work remotely at least part-time – and almost all of them choose to do so. 87 percent of remote-capable workers work from home at least one day per week, and a sizable majority work in the office at least one day per week as well.

Objective building occupancy data from Kastle Systems bears this out.⁵ Its “Back to Work Barometer” uses access control data to track average building occupancy in ten major metropolitan markets. The Barometer is a real-time measurement, fluctuating week to week in response to virus variant surges and weather events. In Q1 2023, it crossed the 50 percent threshold three times – the first time that has happened since the onset of the pandemic. However, during each of those three weeks, there was a 20-point spread between the highest occupancy days and the lowest, confirming that onsite work remains primarily part-time.

Hybrid work is here to stay. Gallup's research has found that 60 percent of exclusively remote employees and 30 percent of hybrid employees are "extremely likely" to change companies if not offered remote flexibility. Furthermore, McKinsey's research indicates that the workers most likely to leave are also the hardest to replace. High-demand computer, mathematical, engineering, and financial operations roles all have remote work availability rates of over 80 percent. If these employees' current organizations are unwilling to offer workplace flexibility, they can easily find it elsewhere.

Challenges Impacting the Modern Office Environment

All available data indicates that employees are committed to the hybrid work model. Surprisingly, however, the same data indicates that **hybrid workers struggle more than their fully remote and onsite peers**. In McKinsey's American Opportunity Survey, hybrid respondents were the most likely by far to report multiple barriers to effective job performance. Somehow, the employees choosing to split their time between home and the office are getting the worst of both worlds.

Supervisors are not immune to the challenges of modern work. Responding to the survey from Microsoft, 85 percent of leaders said that the shift to hybrid has undermined their faith in their team's productivity. Technologies focusing on tracking productivity haven't helped; such tools usually track activity rather than impact. Employees often don't know how or why they're being tracked, and when they do, they may try to “game the metrics,” doing tasks that are measurable at the expense of work that is harder to quantify. The number of meetings held and the hours worked goes up, but productivity flatlines or falls: The result is decreased trust and increased burnout.

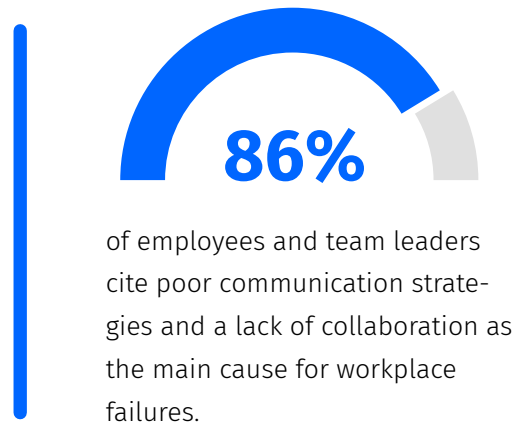
Enterprises can respond to the challenges of the hybrid era with technological solutions – but first, they must identify the right problems to solve. For hybrid teams, three of the most impactful barriers to productivity are degraded communications, weakened engagement, and lack of access to necessary resources.

⁴"Americans Are Embracing Flexible Work—And They Want More of It." McKinsey & Company. June 23, 2022. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/real-estate/our-insights/americans-are-embracing-flexible-work-and-they-want-more-of-it>.

⁵"Kastle Back to Work Barometer." Kastle. March 13, 2023. <https://www.kastle.com/safety-wellness/getting-america-back-to-work/#workplace-barometer>.

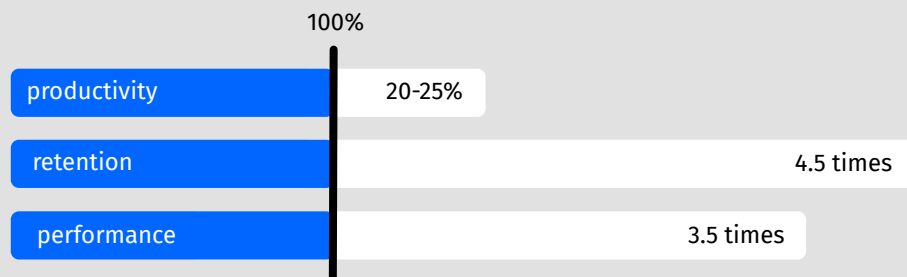
Communication Across the Organization

Studies show that 86 percent⁶ of employees and team leaders cite poor communication strategies and a lack of collaboration as the main cause for workplace failures. For remote workers, the issue is not necessarily quantity, but quality. Detailed analysis in the Harvard Business Review indicates that workers are participating in more remote meetings than ever. They attended an average of eight meetings per week in 2022, up from five per week in 2020.⁷ Much of the increase has come from ad hoc 1:1 meetings – and indeed, those that held more spontaneous 1:1s were more likely to remain in their current job.



Still, 80 percent of workers say they'd like more clarity from their managers on priorities.⁸ Somehow, in all this talking, the right messages aren't landing. In addition, remote work may erode the cross-departmental and informal communications that are crucial to innovation and organizational alignment. Even early in the pandemic, Microsoft found that remote work was dissolving employees' interpersonal networks. Its 2021 article published in Nature found that remote employees contacted those in other departments less often; were less likely to reach out to a new contact after initial introduction; and spent less time collaborating overall.⁹ Their findings indicate that some amount of onsite face time is crucial to maintaining interpersonal networks and preventing silos.

Effective Communication Increases



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As the hybrid work model permeates the business landscape, enterprises must intentionally plan for how they will maintain communication between colleagues and across departments. Providing video-conferencing tools is not enough. The enterprise needs solutions to propagate

⁶"Workplace Communication Statistics (2022)." Pumble. Accessed March 17, 2023. <https://pumble.com/learn/communication/communication-statistics/>.

⁷Brodsky, Andrew and Tolliver, Mike. "No, Remote Employees Aren'T Becoming Less Engaged." Harvard Business Review. December 6, 2022. <https://hbr.org/2022/12/no-remote-employees-arent-becoming-less-engaged>.

⁸"Hybrid Work is Just Work"

⁹Longgi Y. et al. "The Effects of Remote Work on Collaboration among Information Workers." Nature Human Behaviour 6, (2022): 43-54. Accessed March 17, 2023. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-021-01196-4>.

key messages and priorities pervasively throughout the organization and encourage employees to connect organically inside and outside the office.

Workplace Engagement

Worker engagement is also trending downward. This is a new phenomenon: According to Gallup, 2021 saw the first annual decline in workplace engagement in over a decade, and 2022 saw that decline continue.¹⁰ Today, less than a third of U.S. workers say they are engaged at their jobs, and 18 percent report they are actively disengaged. The ratio of engaged to disengaged workers is at its lowest point since 2013.

Note the timing – **the drift downward in workplace engagement coincides with the return to the office.** This should worry business leaders. Analyzing over 50 years' worth of engagement data, Gallup has found that engaged employees are less likely to quit, miss work, or get injured on the job.¹¹ Their organizations have higher productivity, work quality, and profitability.

There are many factors driving workplace engagement, including sense of purpose, ongoing communication, and opportunities for development. Enterprises must seek solutions that reinforce the organization's mission with pervasive messaging; support rich and frequent communication; and integrate training and development opportunities into employees' workflow.

Space Usage

The modern office environment is also impacted by organization and space management challenges. Modern offices need to leverage facility planning to handle the influx of workers, including in-office, hybrid, and remote employees.

With the rise of coworking, hot-desking, and hoteling, what were once pre-assigned desks and conference rooms are now shared spaces. This means that millions of employees must now regularly reserve workspace and meeting rooms while also staying up to date on colleague schedules.

A significant concern for many businesses that operate in a coworking space is how to manage their facilities and support productive scheduling and collaboration. A lack of organized space means a lack of efficiency, which will, in turn, impact business objectives at every level. A recent study by Density reports 71% of office spaces could support four times their actual usage.¹² It also found office buildings' advanced or remodeled features were severely underutilized: Numerous spaces designed for over two dozen people at one organization surveyed are consistently used by just one person. Meanwhile, social spaces intended for 100+ people are used by three people regularly. Most staggeringly, a conference room that costs \$87,000 annually is reportedly sitting empty more than 80% of the time.

¹⁰"U.S. Employee Engagement Needs a Rebound in 2023." Gallup. January 25, 2023. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/468233/employee-engagement-needs-rebound-2023.aspx>.

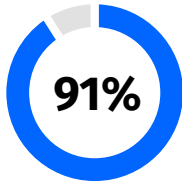
¹¹"What Is Employee Engagement and How Do You Improve It?" Gallup. January 1, 2023. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/285674/improve-employee-engagement-workplace.aspx>.

¹²"Return-to-Office Reality Not Meeting Expectations: 71 Percent of Spaces Can Support 4x Actual Usage." BusinessWire. Density, October 5, 2022. <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20221005005203/en/>.

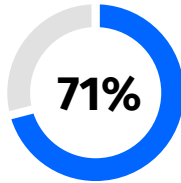


Access to Resources

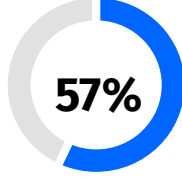
Whether at home or in the office, workers must have access to the proper technology to be productive. In a 2022 survey, Freshworks found that the vast majority of workers are unsatisfied with their workplace technology.¹³



91%
of employees are frustrated with work technologies.



71%
of managers say employees will switch jobs if they don't have tools to do their jobs well.



57%
of employees feel they are restrained by legacy tech.

Again, the stakes here are high. Inadequate technology can actually motivate workers to quit. Outdated technology is not the only problem; increasing complexity can also be a drain on productivity. Though enterprises have invested heavily in new digital tools over the past three years, many organizations have not yet addressed how their workforce can perform optimally in their new digital environment.

According to Asana's 2023 Anatomy of Work Report, knowledge workers use 8.8 apps per week, while their supervisors use ten or more.¹⁴ The "switching cost" of toggling between these platforms wastes 5 hours a week per person – over 32 days a year. The growing app stack is degrading productivity in other

¹³"State of Workplace Technology." Freshworks. April 1, 2022. <https://www.freshworks.com/resources/reports/workplace-tech/>.

¹⁴"The Anatomy of Work." Asana. January 1, 2023. <https://asana.com/resources/anatomy-of-work>.

ways as well. Coveo¹⁵ estimates that employees up to 3.6 hours per day searching for information across platforms.

The research makes clear that modern technology is essential to productivity – but it must also be stable and strategic. The solution is not to constantly add new platforms but instead to embrace flexible platforms that can evolve along with the business and technology landscape. This approach will allow enterprises to keep the tech stack under control while remaining on the leading edge.

Visual Communications for the Hybrid Enterprise

Aggregate data from across the corporate landscape concludes:

- To retain and attract talent, organizations must offer hybrid work options for remote-capable positions.
- Hybrid employees face more barriers to communication and engagement than fully remote or onsite employees.
- Access to the proper space and technology resources is critical to addressing this gap—but without a proper strategy, organizations risk adding complexity without improving employee experience or productivity.

22Miles uses these learnings as a guide to inform its product development for enterprise solutions. In consultation with partners and customers, the company has found several ways in which visual communication technology specifically can help alleviate the challenges of the modern work environment.

Space Management and Room Booking

Simply mandating that employees spend a minimum number of hours per week in the office will not improve communication or engagement. Responding to Microsoft's Work Trends Index survey, 73 percent of employees and 78 percent of business decision-makers report that "they need a better reason to go in than just company expectations." Fortunately, the factors that most effectively motivate people to spend time onsite simultaneously build value for the business: 84 percent of employees will come to the office to socialize with their co-workers, and 85 percent will do so to build team bonds.¹⁶ Additional research by Accenture identifies access to technology and inspiring spaces as motivators to be onsite.¹⁷

¹⁵"Workplace Relevance Report 2022." Coveo. March 31, 2022. <https://www.coveo.com/en/resources/reports/relevance-report-workplace>

¹⁶"Hybrid Work is Just Work"

¹⁷"2022 Future of Work Research." Accenture November 29, 2022. <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insights/consulting/future-work>

What drives people to want to be onsite?

Technology

Easier access to technology onsite than at home.

Colleagues

Collaborate with colleagues in face-to-face settings.

Routine

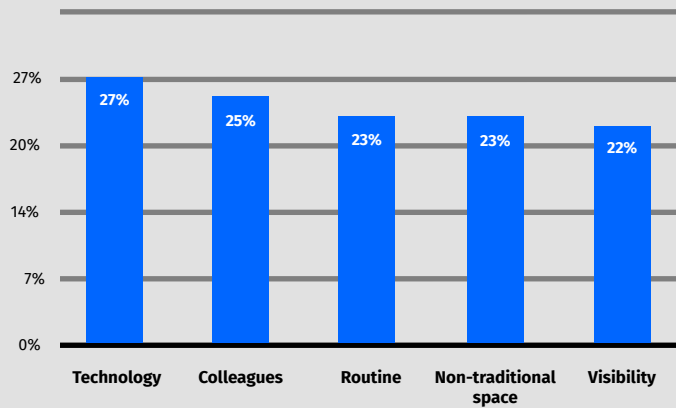
Benefit from the routine that going onsite creates.

Non-traditional space

Need non-traditional space to ideate and innovate.

Visibility

Improved visibility to leaders.



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These statistics reveal the importance of providing tools to help employees coordinate their schedule across teams. With an advanced space management and room booking system, team members can plan to be at the office together and reserve shared or adjacent workspaces. To ensure spaces are being used and reserved for their optimal potential, users can also use booking tools to filter spaces by the features they need to be productive and supported for their meeting: size, technology systems, furnishings, etc.

Space management systems should support not just planned meetings, but also spontaneous interactions. Recall that employees who participate in frequent unplanned 1:1 meetings are more likely to remain with the company. A space management system that integrates with onsite wayfinding and directory systems can help colleagues locate each other in real-time, even in co-working or hot desk environments.



Although space booking and room management technologies optimize time spent onsite, the system design should not neglect remote and hybrid workers. Inviting a remote colleague to an ad hoc sync should be as easy as locating a peer onsite. Ideally, the space management and room booking system should integrate with enterprise video conferencing platforms to allow users to find and reserve the space they need, invite onsite colleagues to join them, and create and send a videoconference meeting request for any offsite participants—all without incurring the switching cost of leaving the app.

On the backend, user interaction with the space management and room booking system will help the enterprise assess resource usage and streamline its assets. Facility managers can monitor peak and lowest occupancy. They can also see which search filters employee use most frequently, revealing which technology and facility resources are in highest demand versus which rooms are only booked as a last resort. This data informs technology investments and helps business leaders assess when it's time to update spaces or resize their physical footprint.



A space management and room booking solution that integrates with wayfinding and unified communications solutions supports rich onsite engagement and helps facilities align technology and space resources to their employees' needs.

Digital Signage

Enterprises have used digital signage to create work environments that reinforce their missions, priorities, and values since well before the pandemic. In the era of hybrid work, however, using digital signage to reinforce corporate culture has become an essential tactic. Many organizations have tried to make up for reduced in-person communication with more remote meetings and asynchronous communications like email and Slack messages. As our research shows, these tactics have not provided hybrid workers with the clarity they need to succeed.

Neuroscience has advanced our understanding of how people learn. It's now understood that multisensory approaches are far more effective than approaches relying on one style of communication

for conveying new information.¹⁸ If enterprises want their employees to really internalize their messaging, emails and meetings aren't enough. They must support their core messaging with strong visuals and even interactive displays.

Digital signage can also play a vital role in closing the skills gap as employees adapt to new technologies and work styles. Roughly 80 percent of workers say they don't have all the skills they need to do their day-to-day work.¹⁹ To address this issue most effectively, enterprises should integrate training materials into the workflow, making it easy and natural for employees to learn how to navigate unfamiliar systems.

A digital signage content management system can help propagate training materials to where they are needed most. An idle display, Teams device, or control panel can be configured to display digital signage content as a "screen-saver" – including training materials and "how-to" resources for any technology systems in the space.

Intelligent Unified Content Management

Digital signage, space management, room booking, wayfinding, directory, and room signage applications overlap heavily in terms of data sources and hardware. These applications exchange data with the same third-party systems, and sometimes even display that data to the same screens: for example, a wayfinding and room-booking kiosk may display digital signage content in "idle" mode. To achieve the maximum benefit of these application, enterprise should manage them from a single unified content management system (CMS)

A unified CMS allows employees to access all the features they need without needing to use multiple apps or devices, reducing "switching costs" that drag down workforce productivity. It also allows the enterprise facility management team to make global updates that propagate to all screens and applications, and get holistic insights from their backend analytics.

The right CMS will offer both simplicity and sophistication. For example, 22Miles has developed a template library with options spanning all the applications described above. A unique AI automation feature prepopulates each template with the company's brand and logos, and generates recommendations based on past favorite templates. Third party-data and interactive features like space booking can be added with a single click.

The depth and quality of API integrations available from the CMS provider is a key consideration: More natively available APIs requires less customization to build a solution that meets the enterprise's needs. The resulting system will be more stable and easier to maintain and expand over time.

¹⁸Prasannakumar, S. "Improving Working Memory in Science Learning through Effective Multisensory Integration Approach." International Journal of Mind, Brain, & Cognition 9, no. 1 (2018). Accessed March 17, 2023. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED598823.pdf>.

¹⁹"Hybrid Work Is Just Work."

The 22Miles Difference

22Miles has spent the last 15 years developing the most flexible, capable CMS on the market. The company began as a provider of one of the most technologically complex visual communication applications – 3D wayfinding – and built on that foundation to create a unified platform that can send any content to any screen at any scale. Our technology empowers the user to create powerful enterprise digital signage and space management solutions with less day-to-day work.

22Miles fully integrates with all your organization's tools, programs, and data feeds. The 22Miles CMS gives you the flexibility to manage your resources, support improved communication, and inspire your workforce using one unified system. Our system can efficiently operate digital signage, deploy immersive 3D wayfinding technology throughout your facility, and streamline building usage via data-driven space management. Let our team of experts help you join the forward-thinking companies embracing these new technologies. We are well-versed in designing efficient solutions that unify hybrid workforces like never before.

Visit www.22miles.com to learn more workplace communications solutions.

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