# Going Hybrid:
# Future of Work

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# What is Hybrid Work?

**IN FOCUS:**

## The Hybrid Work Model

The future of work is a drastic departure from the traditional workplace model. It's a lot more open to different arrangements where employees can enjoy the benefits of working in an office and working remotely.

Hybrid work has been a growing trend over the past decade, and COVID-19 has been an undeniable driving force towards this shift. Compliance with social distancing protocols has allowed businesses to view hybrid workplaces as a viable option, and restructure their current setup to make hybrid work.

After getting a taste of newfound autonomy away from the general hum of the office, employees have discovered that they can get more work done. There's simply no turning back to the traditional office setup: the hybrid office is here to stay. But what defines a hybrid office?

A hybrid workplace is a flexible way of working that supports a distributed work-force of employees with the freedom to work partly remotely and partly in-office (or at a specific location).

Since the hybrid model is built on the pillars of flexibility and support, it empow-ers employees by giving them the freedom to choose where and/or when they want to work, instead of sticking to a predetermined schedule in the office.

# What is Hybrid Work?

## Types of Hybrid Work

Hybrid work may be growing, but there's a general consensus among employers, executives, and the workforce that there aren't any hard-and-fast rules about what the new workplace should look like. As employees demand greater flexibility and customer expectations continue to rise, there's an urgent need to stay abreast of the changes and transform the workplace to stay afloat. That said, let's take a closer look at the four emerging models of hybrid work in greater detail.
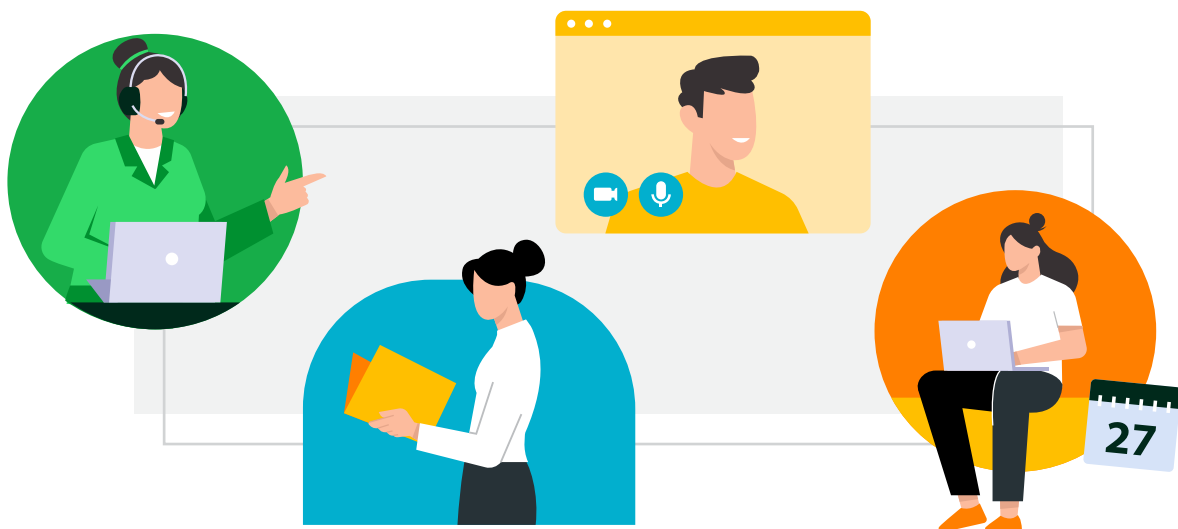


**Remote Hybrid** is made up of remote employees that may report to a physical office when necessary

**In-Person Hybrid** consists of employees that work at a physical office but have the option to work remotely

**Mixed Hybrid** is split into a fully remote and in-office workspace

**Split Hybrid** operates on a shifting schedule: for example, WFO on M/W/F & WFH on T/TH

# Executive Summary

## The future workplace encourages flexibility, collaboration, and engagement.

The way we work is no stranger to change.

The Industrial Revolution during the 1800s ushered in new manufacturing processes that shifted field workers in Europe and the US into factories. During World War II, the demand for female labor in the US shifted rapidly: women worked in factories to build ships and produce military weapons, while others worked as air-raid wardens, train conductors, and evacuation officers. Finally, the 1990s saw the advent of personal computers (PCs) and the start of the Digital Age, which brought millions of users to the internet for the first time.

Recently, COVID-19 has triggered profound shifts to the current workplace landscape. It has driven workers out of the office, forcing companies to implement flexible working arrangements. For many, the future of work is a hybrid model, which is neither fully remote nor completely back to the office: rather, it's a little bit of both. A hybrid workplace lets employees work from home or at the office.

# Executive Summary

The ideal back-to-office policy offers a balance between remote and on-site work. And an immediate return to on-site work is the last thing people want right now.

As leaders and employees reevaluate their personal lives and work obligations given the current sensitivities of the times, they'll need to meet halfway for a sustainable workplace setup. Amidst all the changes, every organization has the responsibility to adapt and innovate.
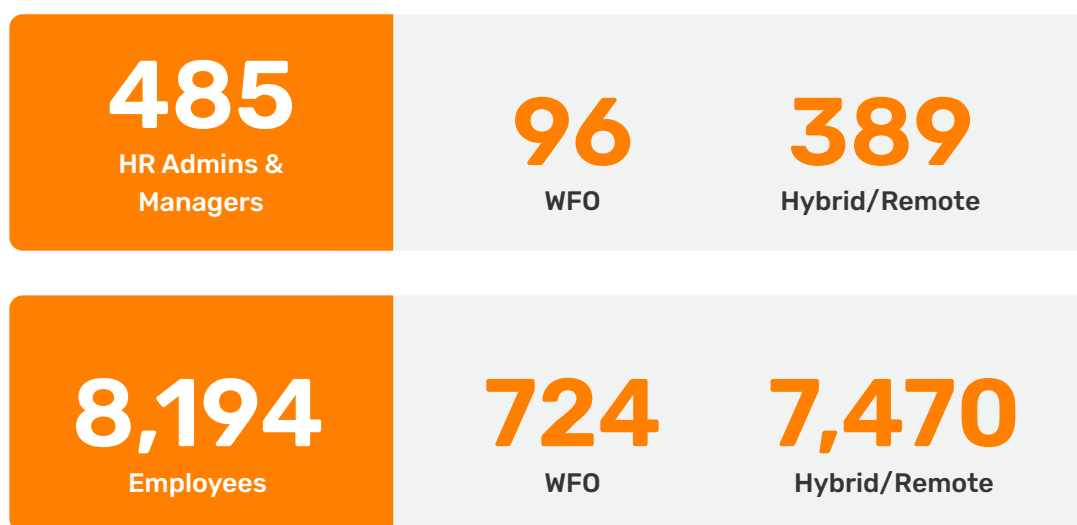
To get a clearer picture of what the post-pandemic workplace will look like, Sprout conducted a survey on employees and managers under a work from office (WFO) and work from home (WFH) setup here in the Philippines.
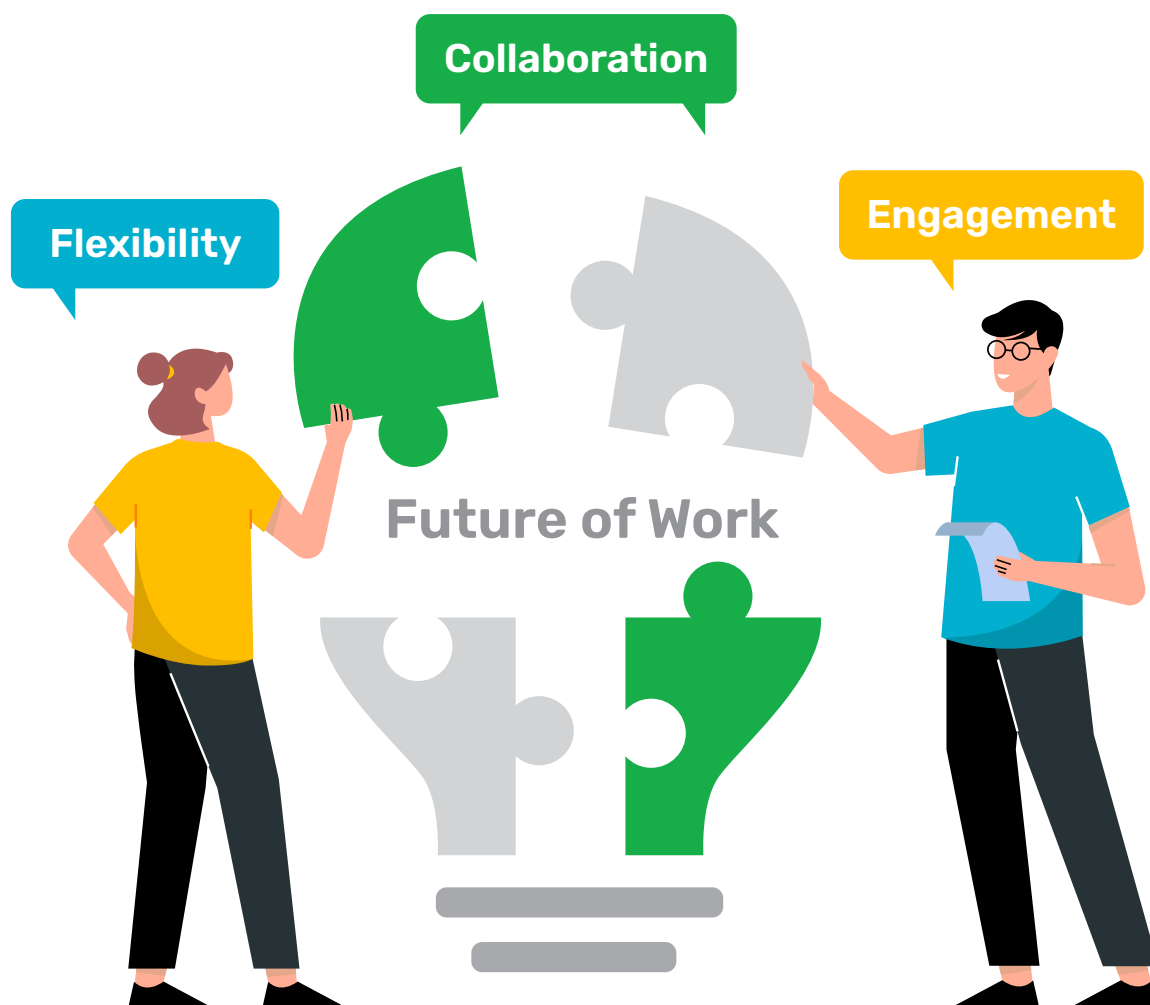
# Methodology

Most workplace/HR reports talk about how the hybrid model is the future of work, so we wanted to get a clearer picture of how Filipinos feel about the hybrid workplace.

**Sprout Solutions conducted a survey on:**

| 485 HR Admins & Managers | 96 WFO | 389 Hybrid/Remote |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 8,194 Employees | 724 WFO | 7,470 Hybrid/Remote |

We included questions about their current work setup, what communication tools they use, the challenges they foresee in adopting a hybrid setup, and their preferred work models.

# Key Findings

## HR teams need support adopting a hybrid setup.

**64.6%** of HR admins and managers need help to understand how to make a hybrid setup work. During the early days of the pandemic, HR leaders had to assess which members of their team could adjust and shift to a remote setting.

But as the workplace landscape adjusts to the hybrid future, HR teams need to reevaluate and redefine current roles — rather than to simply cherry-pick which roles can be done remotely. To get off on the right foot, they can centralize support functions and make output-based work the primary guiding principle of their organization.

## HR teams need support adopting a hybrid setup.

**70.71%** of remote employees love their current remote setup but only 43.54% feel engaged. At first glance, this may seem counterintuitive, but it's possible that this sentiment could be stemming from a love of work and the flexibility to work on one's own terms — but the lack of support to make it sustainable in the long term.

Virtual teams are no longer able to have conversations with fellow teammates in the break room or in their shared office space. As employees work remotely, they need to put forth a more concentrated effort to engage with others. And when these needs aren't met, working from home could lead to isolation, feelings of unhappiness, and a diminishing of passion towards company goals. WFH leaders are expected to meet their virtual teams halfway, by considering activities that could contribute to team building and relationship development.

# Key Findings

## On-site managers & employees are planning to change.

When on-site workers are asked about their views for the post-pandemic future, **47%** of HR admins and managers share that they plan to adopt a remote or hybrid model. In a similar vein, 65.6% of employees say that they're open to a hybrid model.

These insights show us that worker behavior is starting to change as people realize the benefits of remote work. Based on the findings of this research, the current trends are clear: office workers want a hybrid model, but they also don't want to lose out on the opportunity to connect and collaborate. In particular, WFO teams want to embrace change because the home environment empowers people to be flexible and to manage their day autonomously.

## The future of work is hybrid.

**64.2%** of HR admins who are currently working in the office foresee the future of work as remote or hybrid, even after the pandemic is under control. These figures share that time spent at the office may end up being more productive, deliberate, and collaborative.

Based on the results of our research, the primary reasons for on-site and remote workers wanting to return to the office are collaboration and team-building. It shows us that the core purpose of the office still persists: being face-to-face is still the best way to communicate and collaborate.

Human connection is lost and perhaps more necessary than we thought. Walking to the next meeting room, to the water-cooler, or to the restroom in an office setting allows people to notice each other, what they're doing, and to provide necessary human feedback. This is more difficult (albeit perhaps not impossible) in a fully remote work setup. And it goes to show that hybrid setups are getting the best of what either type of workplace has to offer.

# People Working from the Office

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# About WFO Teams

## On-site workers want "the best of both worlds."

On-site workers have it tough, especially since their remote counterparts have been working from home for over 18 months. They've been forced to report for in-office work despite the pandemic, and they're realizing that they want something better, something similar to what a WFH setup has to give. As WFO employees reevaluate their personal lives and work obligations, it seems as if a hybrid setup is ideal because it offers "the best of both worlds."

There's no denying that on-site workers value the physical office. After all, it gives the opportunity to connect, collaborate, and socialize. But at the same time, working from home offers safety from COVID-19, a greater degree of flexibility, better work-life integration, and better emotional and mental well-being.

Based on our findings, the patchwork of the "great return" is stitched together with some version of remote work post-pandemic, while the rest of the fabric is hybrid.

To narrow things down, WFO leaders want to maximize productivity at all costs. Even though optimizing team efficiency doesn't solely translate to a hybrid office, they acknowledge that remote work is here to stay. Meanwhile, WFO employees value their safety above all else. They want their managers to be involved in keeping them motivated, and prefer hybrid work from their current setup.

## Key insights at a glance:

**47%** of WFO managers want to adopt the hybrid model
**62.2%** of WFO leaders see hybrid or remote work as the future
**42.96%** on-site employees feel enthusiastic about adopting a hybrid model
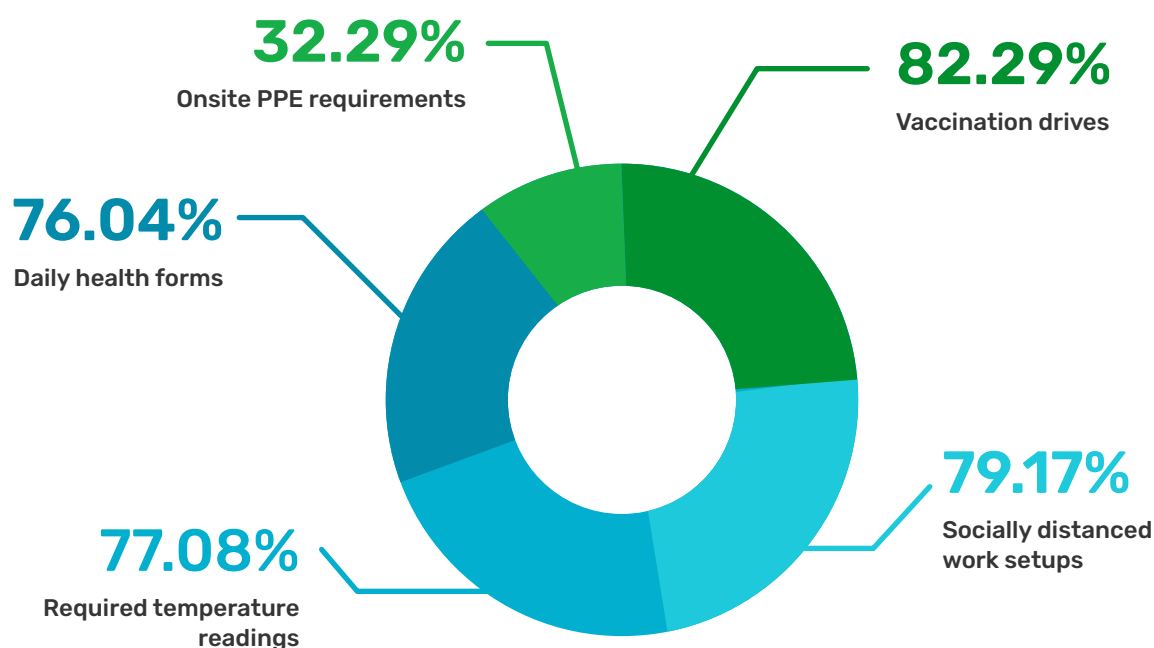
# Admins & Managers Working at the Office

The shift to a "hybrid" model is still in its infancy stage. What works best — especially for at-office teams — will ultimately depend on sector, size, and structure. If anything, most companies are on the same page when it comes to making the post-pandemic office as flexible and less burnout-prone as possible. And it's all thanks to recent discussions about work-life balance and mental health.

As WFO teams navigate these uncertain tides and shift to a hybrid model, they face the challenge of reimagining their current office and reaching a consensus with their employees on what the future of work will look like.

## Employee safety comes first.

COVID-19 has created new challenges for WFO employees as they adjust to the new reality. Our findings show that measures designed to prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 through vaccine drives, social distancing, temperature checks, daily health forms, and on-site personal protective equipment (PPE) remain the top priority for WFO executives.

### WFO Leaders on Employee Safety Measures

**32.29%**
Onsite PPE requirements

**82.29%**
Vaccination drives

**76.04%**
Daily health forms

**79.17%**
Socially distanced work setups

**77.08%**
Required temperature readings

That said, mandatory vaccinations and strict enforcement of social distancing measures can help make the office safer, especially for WFO employees that may need to work in close proximity or directly with customers. As per Labor Advisory no. 03-21, all private establishments are encouraged to have their workers vaccinated, though it isn't mandatory. Still, companies are responsible for creating an immunization program to prevent and mitigate COVID-19-related risks.

## Do you require vaccinations?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes, we do/will require vaccinations, subject to religious and/or medical reasons. | **73.91%** |
| We're still undecided. | **17.39%** |
| No, we don't/won't require vaccinations at all. | **8.70%** |

0%    20%    40%    60%    80%
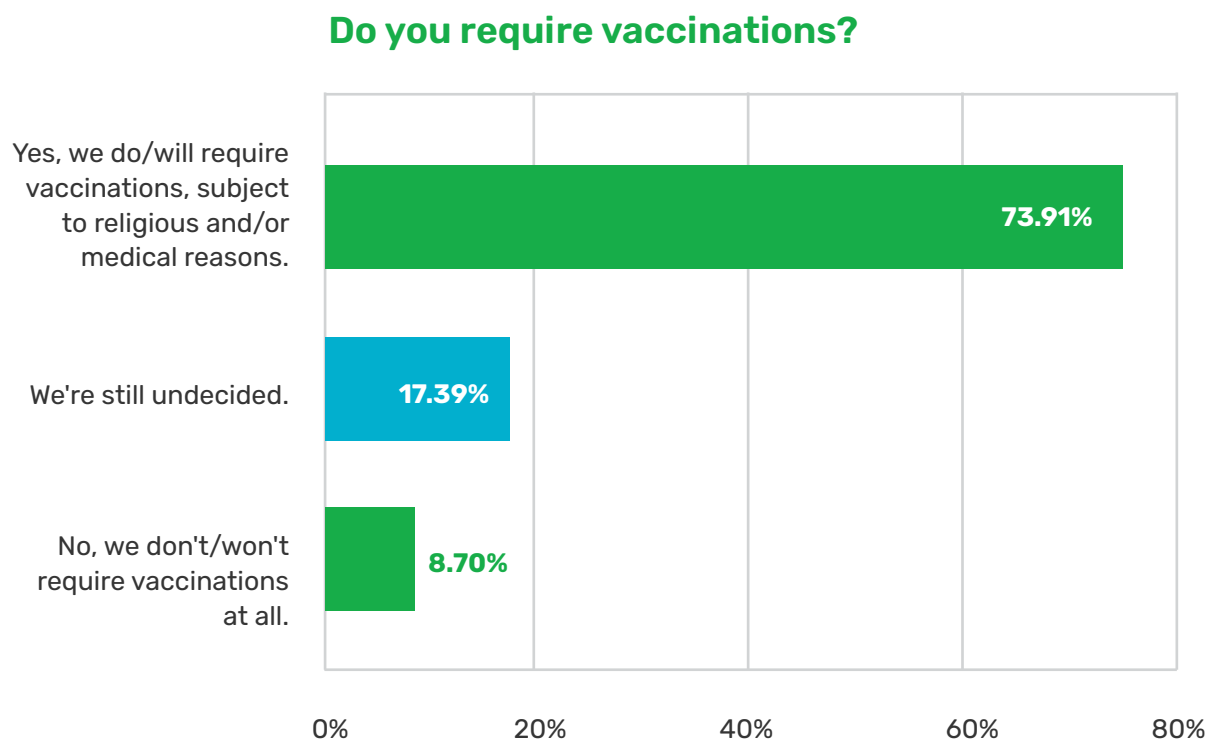
Of our respondents, 74% of on-site admins and managers are currently requiring or will make it mandatory for their employees to get vaccinated to go to the office.

But on top of that, WFO executives have the responsibility to stay in the know about employee concerns related to health and safety because workers who feel safe have less reason to be unnecessarily absent.

## Rolling out targeted incentives is no longer an option, it's a must.

The current COVID-19 crisis has prompted WFO employees to demand more benefits because of their increased risk of exposure to COVID-19. Every worker deserves to be kept safe on the job while the pandemic is in full swing. This entails providing the proper compensation and benefits that make WFO much easier to bear, i.e., free PPEs, transportation allowance, hazard pay, free parking, and free COVID-19 tests.

To ease these apprehensions, more than half of our respondents (58.9%) share that they provide targeted incentives for WFO employees. And these benefits extend beyond protection from COVID-19.

### WFO Leaders, When Asked If They Provide Targeted Incentives

**41.1%**
No, we don't.

**58.9%**
Yes, we do.
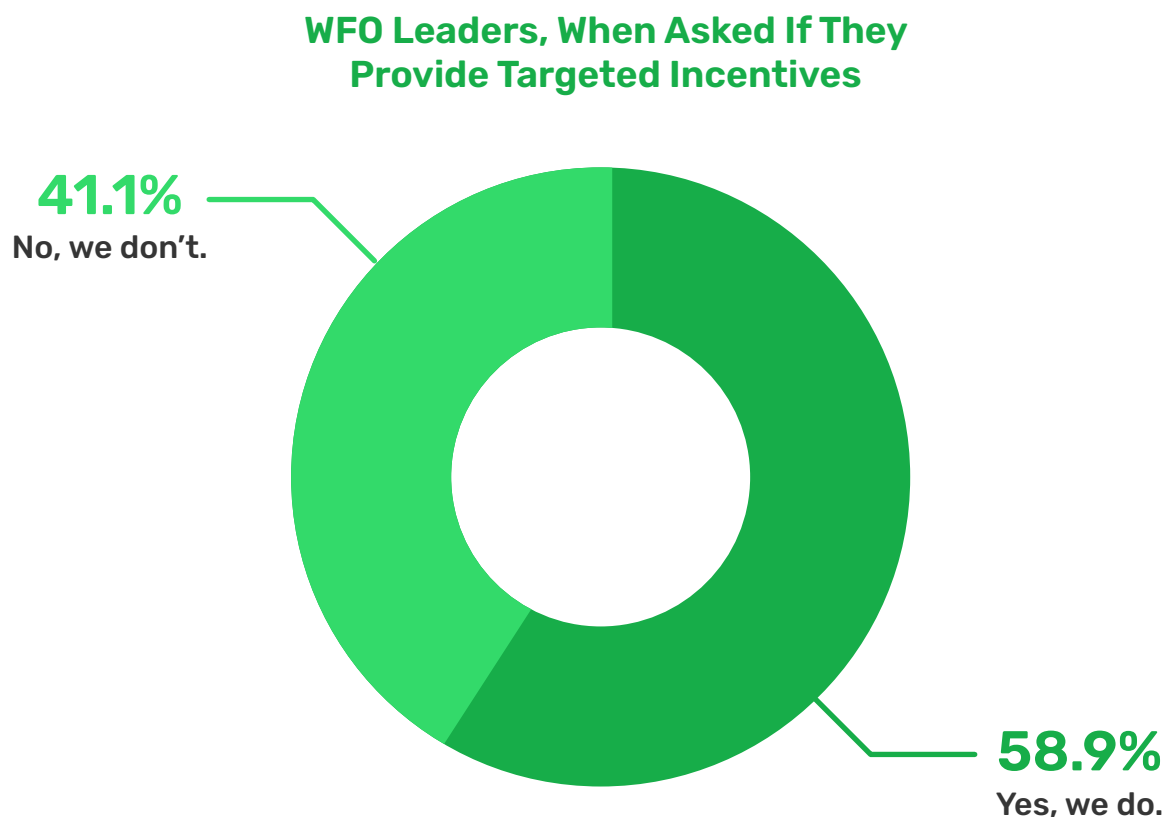
Consider how poor mental health during the pandemic could undercut job performance and lead to workplace burnout. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention share that pandemic-related stress can cause feelings of fear, anger, and frustration. Moreover, it could affect concentration and impair a person's ability to make informed decisions.

To paint an even clearer picture of the current mental state of employees working in the office, high infection rates brought on by the spread of the Delta variant and employment security are the top stressors for these people. Since on-site employees have more "hands-on" exposure to COVID-19, it's imperative that managers provide the proper mental health support to assuage feelings of isolation and anxiety.

Thankfully, the need for better emotional support and well-being hasn't fallen on deaf ears: our survey findings report that 75% of companies provide mental health support during the pandemic.

## WFO Leaders, When Asked If They Provide Mental Health Support

**24.66%**
**No, we don't.**

**75.34%**
**Yes, we do.**
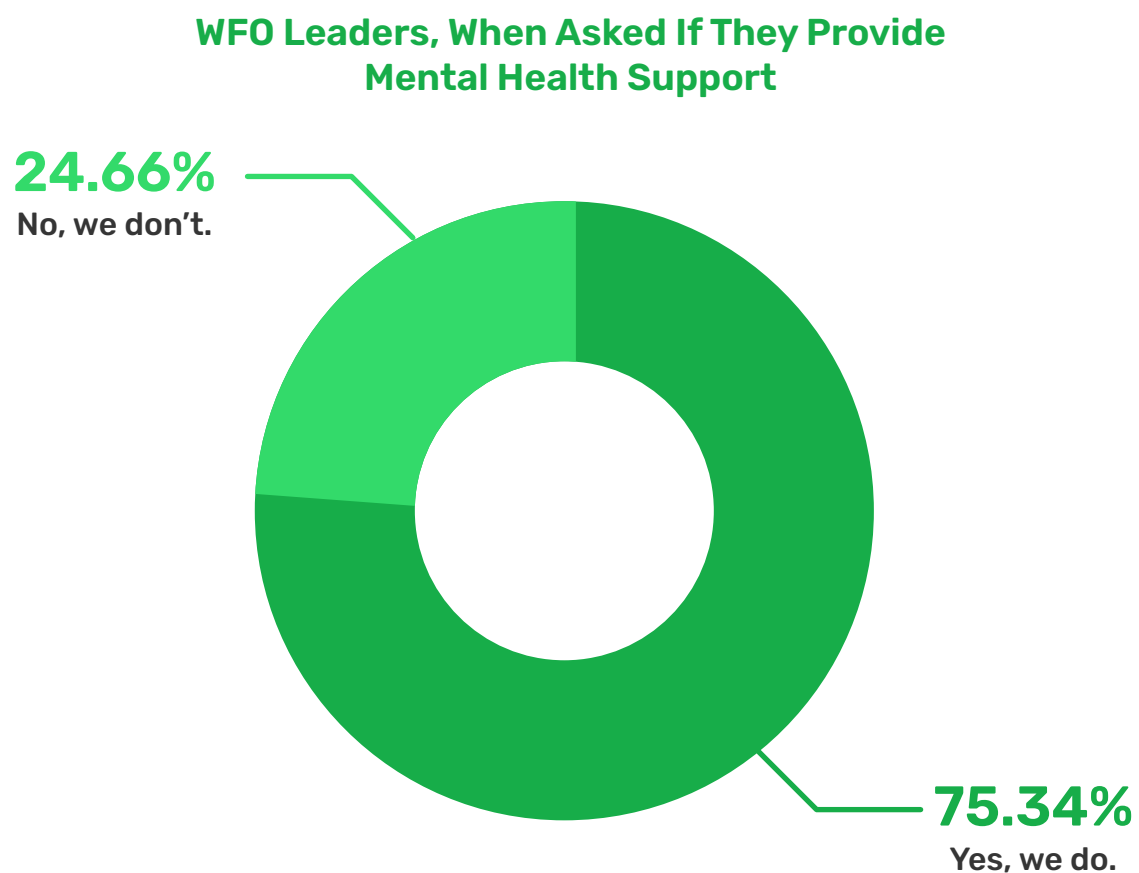
After all, offering support for mental health needs can go a long way in helping WFO employees build resilience and prevent on-site work stress.

# Employees Working at the Office

The current WFO environment needs to change to meet the demands of the new workplace. Now is the ideal time to review key technologies and benefits that can help promote a comfortable, productive, and safe office environment.

Given how a significant fraction of the global workforce is currently WFH, on-site employees aren't keen about reporting for on-site work. They aren't looking forward to returning to the traditional workplace, and their supervisors need to come up with a policy that offers a balance between remote and on-site work if they want to attract and retain talent.

## WFO employees feel safe but want to feel safer.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, WFO leaders have needed to be especially aware of what their teams require to feel safe at work. After all, creating a safer work environment contributes to higher staff retention and recruitment.
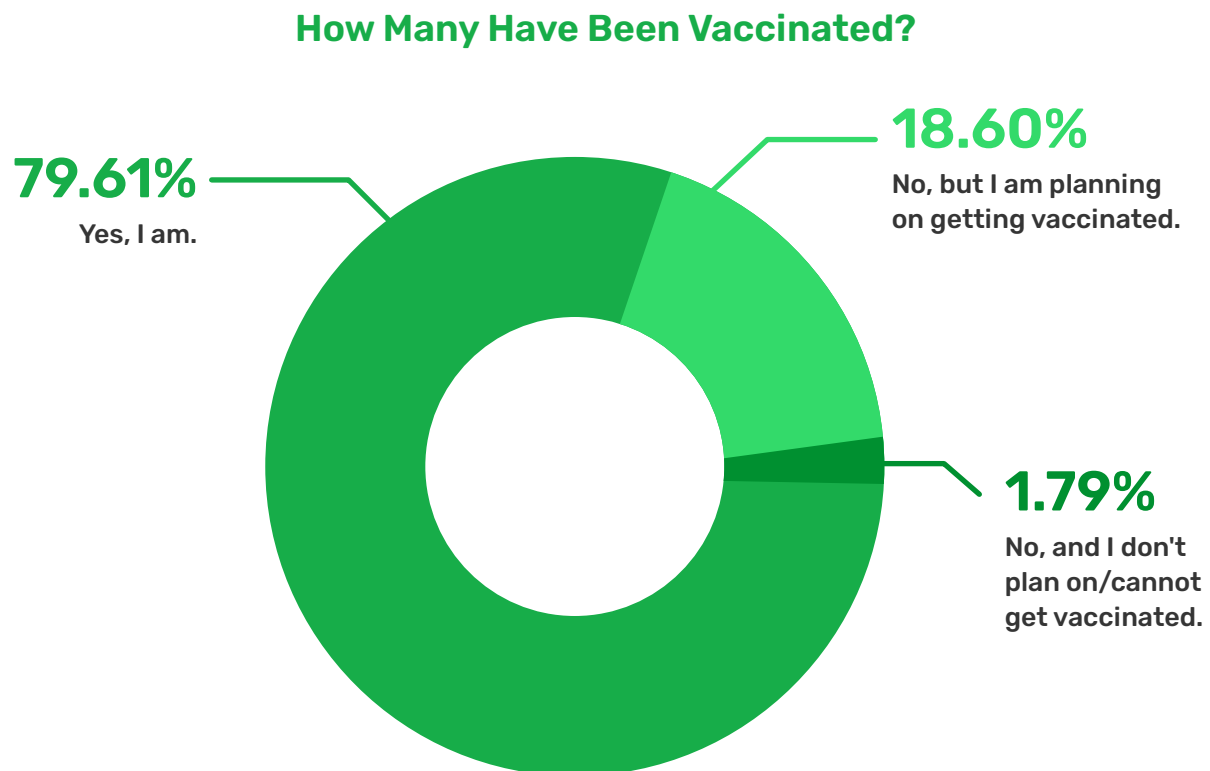
When asked how they feel about being WFO, respondents share a general sentiment: they feel like their companies are keenly attuned to their need for safety when working during the pandemic (95%).

### Do WFO Employees Feel Safe?

**5.2%**
I don't
feel safe

**95%**
I feel safe!

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In fact, they cite increased safety measures as what they like the most about WFO. This is in line with how they feel that senior leadership value their safety during COVID-19.

Of the WFO employees included in the survey, 79.6% shared that they've been vaccinated.

## How Many Have Been Vaccinated?

**18.60%**
No, but I am planning on getting vaccinated.

**79.61%**
Yes, I am.

**1.79%**
No, and I don't plan on/cannot get vaccinated.

Moving forward, companies may need to change their approach to the vaccination of their workforce. This would entail planning ahead for continued vaccination support, like booster shots for upcoming COVID-19 variants. Beyond that, employers might want to consider shifting to a future hybrid setup.

However, WFO employees assert that there's still room for improvement to ensure their safety at work. For example, they suggest sending COVID-19 care kit packages, offering transportation services, and imposing stricter sanctions on health protocol violators.

Apart from requiring employees to get vaccinated and offering targeted incentives, rolling out simple future-proof safety measures can go a long way in helping employees feel safer. In particular, companies can reduce workplace occupancy, automate health verification processes, promote proactive building security management, and invest in touchless tech.
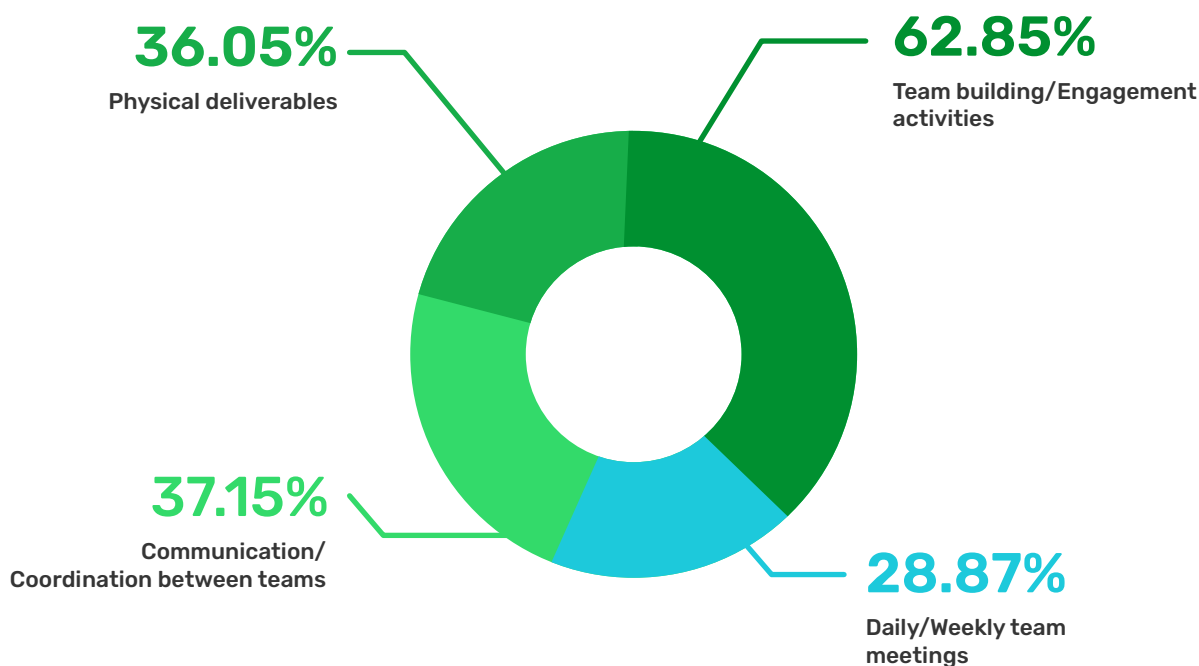
## WFO employees prefer a hands-on approach, where leaders are more proactive & visible.

Transitioning into the new normal has affected overall communication and productivity. The impact of the new workplace landscape runs deep, affecting more than just employee productivity. Our survey responses show that it extends to every facet of how people work, changing the way teams communicate and stay motivated.

When asked about what companies can do to improve productivity, respondents shared that they want more ways to stay motivated. WFO employees want a more streamlined approach to workplace productivity, where managers play a more hands-on role in keeping them motivated. They showed preference towards weekly one-on-ones, financial incentives, and team-building programs.

It's affected especially overall engagement activities (62.9%) and team comms (37.2%) the most.

### What Areas of On-site Work Have Been Affected the Most?

**36.05%**
Physical deliverables

**62.85%**
Team building/Engagement activities

**37.15%**
Communication/
Coordination between teams

**28.87%**
Daily/Weekly team meetings

Given how the workforce feels about the current landscape, WFO leaders need to explore new ways to make their teams feel engaged and connected.

## Emotional & mental well-being are front and center.

Workplace well-being extends beyond physical health. Getting proper nutrition, exercise, sleep, and mental health support are factors that admins and managers need to consider when supporting mental health needs in the office. Based on our findings, 74.4% share that they receive mental health support from their employers.

### WFO Employees on Receiving Mental Health Support

**24%**
No, we aren't.

**74.4%**
We're receiving mental health support
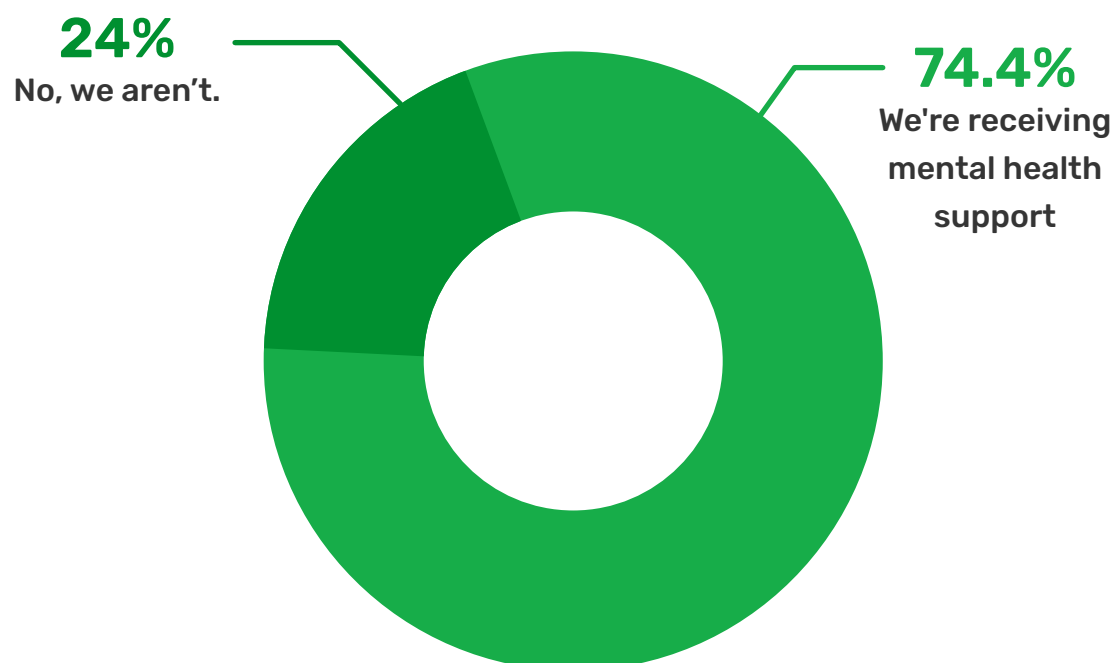
WFO teams have access to a broad scope of mental health programs that support mental & emotional health. These include wellness webinars, yoga and meditation sessions, and psychiatric consultations.

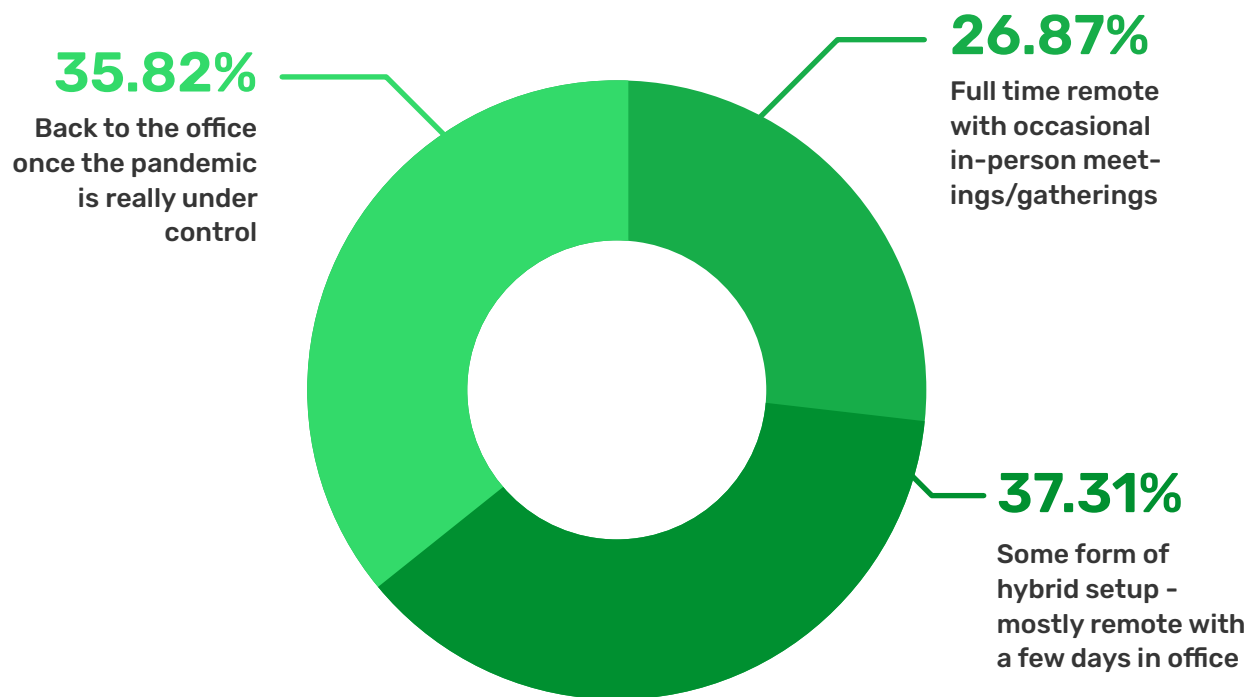### WFO Employees on the Type of Mental Health Support they Receive

✓ Employee assistance programs

✓ MindNation

✓ Psychiatric consultations

✓ Yoga & meditation sessions

✓ Wellness webinars

✓ Team building activities (Kahoot, e-games, etc)

✓ COVID-19 kit reimbursements

## In summary, employees feel enthused about hybrid work, and WFO leaders want to meet them halfway.

In the pre-pandemic world, executives might have dismissed hybrid work as a setup that isolated employees and made teams harder to supervise. But despite being currently WFO, team leaders are starting to recognize that flexible working arrangements are emerging as a vital cog in the productivity-engagement wheel. Our survey results show that 62.2% of WFO leaders see hybrid or remote work as the future. And that means hybrid offices will play an irrevocable role in keeping organizations adaptable and future-proof.

## How WFO Leaders Feel about the Future of Work

**35.82%**
Back to the office once the pandemic is really under control

**26.87%**
Full time remote with occasional in-person meetings/gatherings

**37.31%**
Some form of hybrid setup - mostly remote with a few days in office

Meanwhile, WFO employees feel equally enthusiastic about the prospective hybrid future (43%), and even prefer it over their current WFO setup (34.4%).

## WFO Employees on Adopting a Hybrid Model

**42.96%**
That would be great!

**22.61%**
I don't really mind.

**34.43%**
I prefer this setup.

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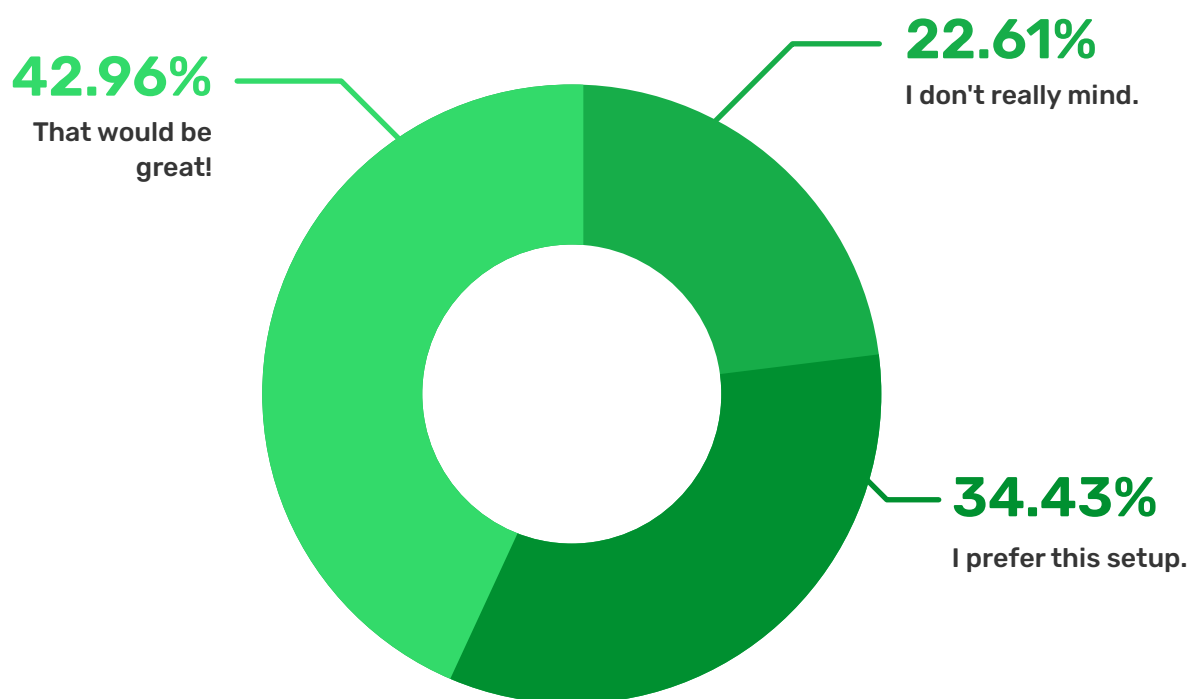
# Survey Results

# People Working at Home

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# About WFO Teams

## WFH performance proves that hybrid offices are sustainable.

As organizations set their sights forward to focus on the post-pandemic future, a majority are planning to adopt a hybrid work model that balances a remote setup with time spent at the office. And it only makes sense that the hybrid office is the future of work: there have been demonstrable productivity improvements among virtual teams during the pandemic.

A caveat: remote teams report feelings of burnout and poor mental health. Unless employers sit down and address sources of anxiety and stress, a hybrid office may prove to be unsustainable in the long run.

We've uncovered that people working from home want one thing with absolute certainty: a flexible working arrangement. And they don't necessarily want any remote-relevant specifics i.e., detailed policies, guidelines, or expectations right now. Rather, they simply want a promise that they won't lose out on the flexibility and freedom that their current setup provides. And that entails fostering a culture of communication: whether it's to share what's already set in stone or what remains uncertain.

Remote leaders are resolute in making sure their WFH setup works smoothly. They offer targeted incentives for their WFH workforce and expect the future of work to be hybrid. Remote employees are happy to be working from home but report feelings of low engagement. Still, they have seen the advantages of their current setup andthey expect the future of work to be fully remote, if not hybrid.

## Key insights at a glance:

**64.6%** of remote leaders share that they need support to make the hybrid model work

**50.8%** of WFO managers foresee a post-pandemic workplace that's pre-dominantly remote

**70.7%** of remote employees love their current remote setup but only 43.5% feel engaged

**44.6%** of WFH workers foresee a fully remote future workplace
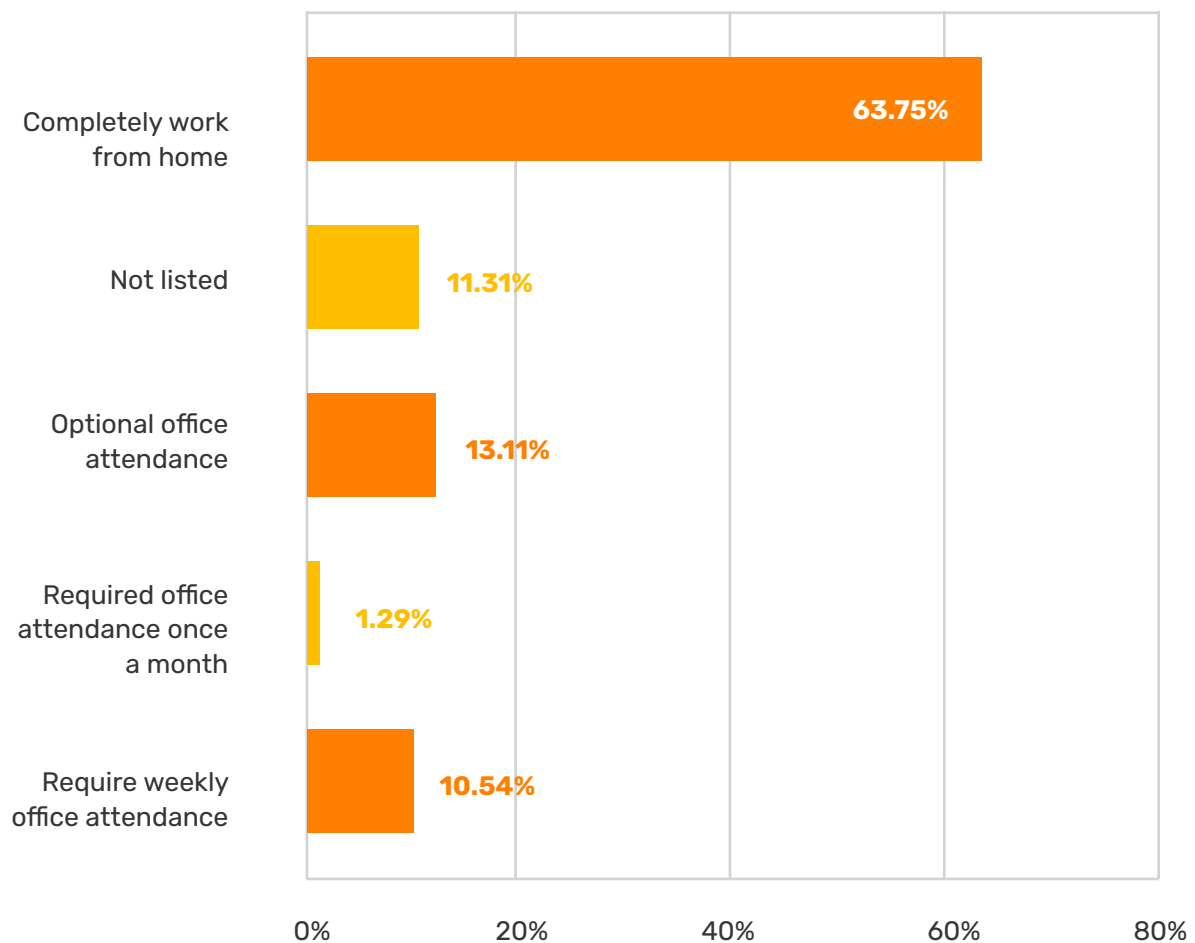
# Admins & Managers Working from Home

As organizational leaders chart the post-pandemic path toward the future of work, it calls for the responsibility to communicate more frequently with their remote teams. To make a hybrid office work, WFH executives need to embrace proactive communication and work towards being present to their teams in a non-tangible way. For example, simply providing moral support can go a long way in improving overall employee well-being and productivity.

WFH Admins & Managers have the responsibility to step up and prioritize high-level communication. But it's crucial that they don't simply communicate, but make their remote teams feel as if they're included in these more detailed forms of communication. And this could well be the key that drives performance outcomes today and tomorrow.

## Remote leaders feel like work & personal life aren't at odds.

The COVID-19 pandemic has cast a spotlight on flexible working arrangements, where WFH is front and center. Remote work is now the new normal, and 64% report being in a completely WFH setup, while another 26% are working in a hybrid fashion

## Current Work Setups of WFH Leaders

| Setup | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Completely work from home | 63.75% |
| Not listed | 11.31% |
| Optional office attendance | 13.11% |
| Required office attendance once a month | 1.29% |
| Require weekly office attendance | 10.54% |

Since remote workers tend to exert more autonomy over their work, it allows them to be more productive in the long term. This proves that WFH can be great for companies because they can focus on what really matters — performance.

## Performance+

Look for Performance+, a performance and learning management solution in the Sprout ecosystem.

Apart from significant productivity gains, WFH leaders share that they want to continue working remotely in the foreseeable future. Interestingly enough, this trend says a lot since WFH supervisors have only been working remotely for over a year. And if it's indicative of anything, it's that hybrid work is shaping up to be a long-term working model.

When asked about the benefits of working from home, our respondents cite greater cost savings (54.2%) and better work-life integration (52.1%), among other things.
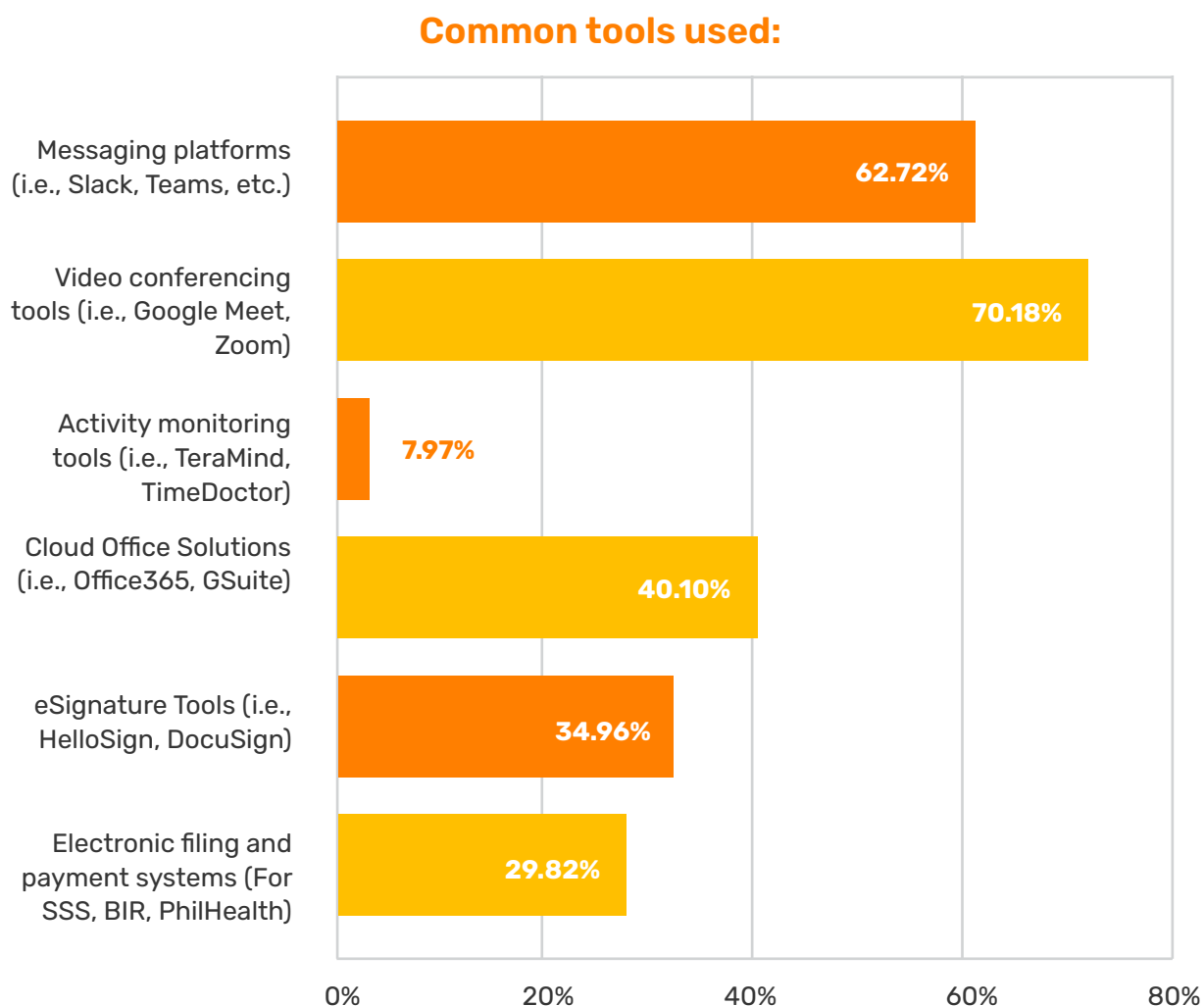
### How WFH Benefits Senior Leadership

| | |
|---|---|
| Better work-life integration | **52.19%** |
| Better mental health | **34.45%** |
| Better physical health | **39.85%** |
| Productivity gains | **39.85%** |
| Lower attrition | **22.37%** |
| Cost Savings | **54.24%** |
| Freedom to hire candidates from anywhere in the Philippines | **26.22%** |
| Freedom to hire candidates from anywhere in the world | **11.57%** |

## WFH team leaders need to recalibrate their tech stack & benefits portfolio.

Tech plays a significant role in making a hybrid setup work. With the right remote work tech stack, admins and managers can track employee productivity and performance better. The type, amount, and category that companies will use will depend on their size, industry, and budget. A successful remote work setup should consider having communication, remote collaboration, cloud storage, remote work management, and workflow management tools at their disposal.

More particularly, remote managers tend to use tools that facilitate better comms. Apart from Sprout's product suite, other common tools used by WFH leaders include messaging (62.7%) and video conferencing tools (70.2%).

### Common tools used:

| Tool | Percentage |
|------|-----------|
| Messaging platforms (i.e., Slack, Teams, etc.) | 62.72% |
| Video conferencing tools (i.e., Google Meet, Zoom) | 70.18% |
| Activity monitoring tools (i.e., TeraMind, TimeDoctor) | 7.97% |
| Cloud Office Solutions (i.e., Office365, GSuite) | 40.10% |
| eSignature Tools (i.e., HelloSign, DocuSign) | 34.96% |
| Electronic filing and payment systems (For SSS, BIR, PhilHealth) | 29.82% |

But even though comms tools are at the head of the pack, they're just the tip of the iceberg. Companies will need to address much larger issues, i.e., switching from on-premise tools to cloud-based apps and exploring further tool integrations.

Consider this: Just because employees have the freedom to organize all the aspects of their lives more flexibly doesn't mean they require nothing else to work more productively. That said, when asked about additional benefits, almost 70% of our respondents share that they offer incentives for their WFH teams.

## Have WFH Leaders Been Offering Additional Benefits?

**30.4%**
No, we don't

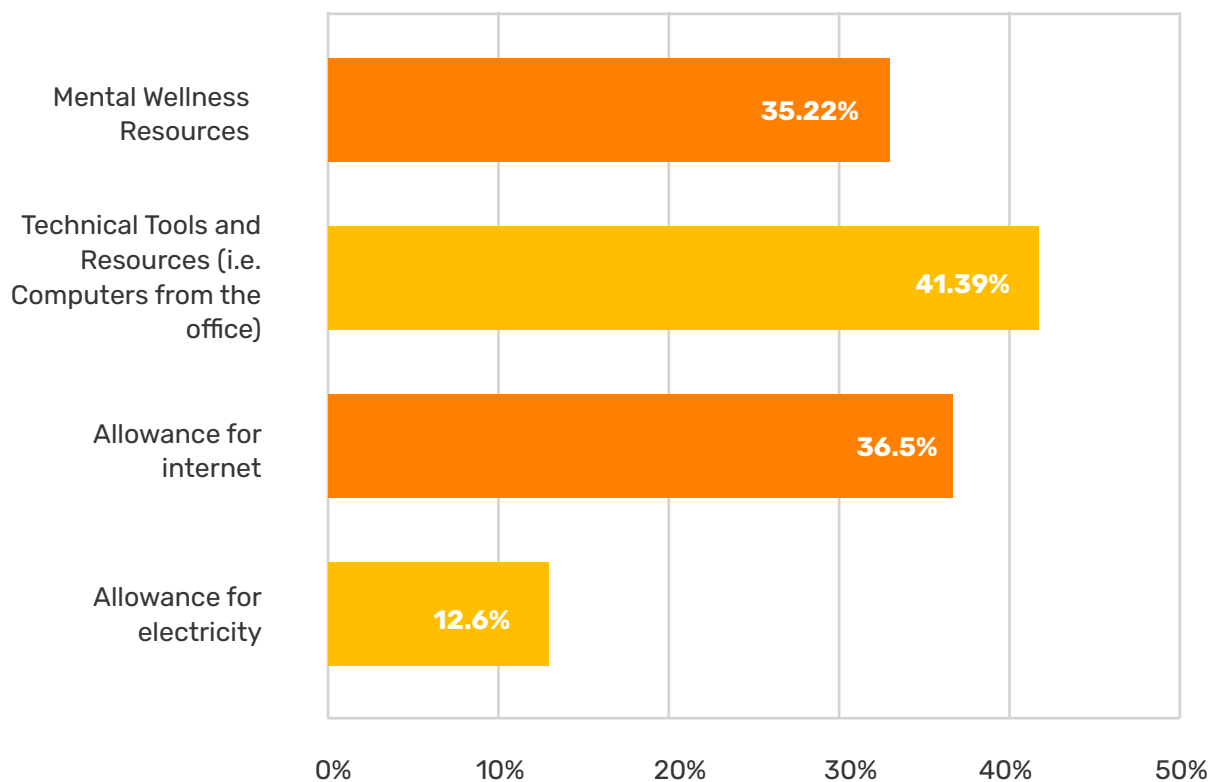**66.6%**
Yes, we offer
additional benefits
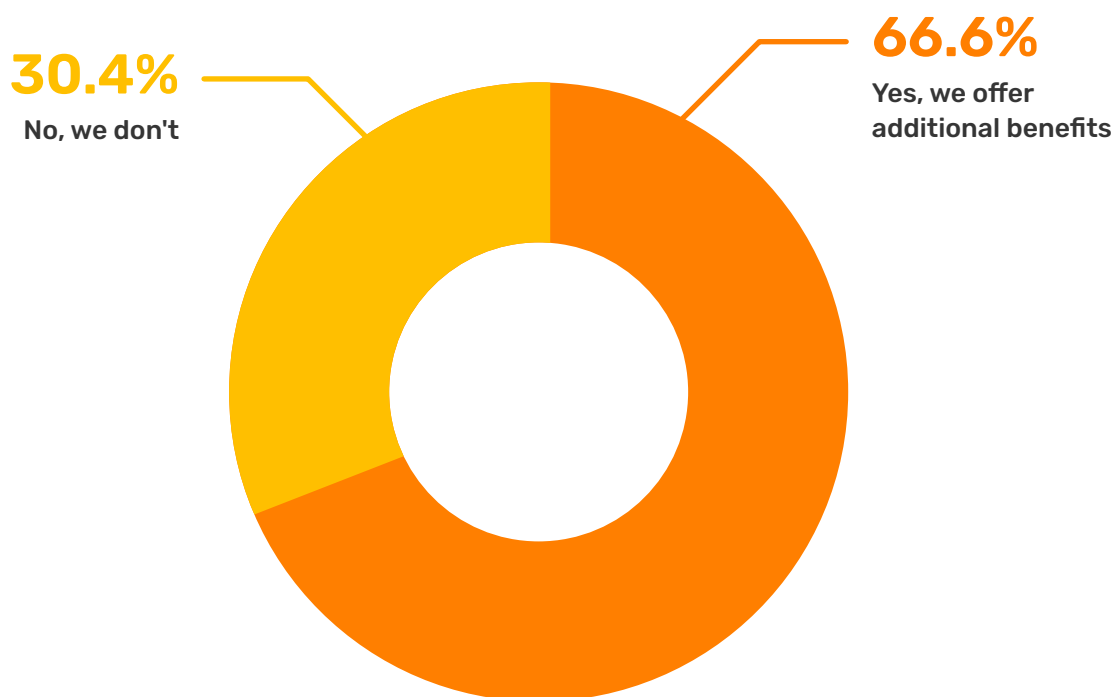
With the dramatic shift to WFH setups, team leaders should consider changing their benefits portfolio to accommodate their remote workforce. For example, if they used to offer free lunches on certain days of the week, they could replace this incentive so that it's more relevant to remote workers. Some options to consider include child care assistance, digital wellness support, and home office allowances.

Some of the largest US-based companies have responded to the pandemic by boosting their mental health benefit offerings for employees. For example, Starbucks is giving its employees (and family members) 20 free counseling sessions a year, while Target has provided access to free online mental health resources. On a similar vein, some Sprout clients have offered mental health sessions to their workers and their dependents.

Based on our survey respondents, there also seems to be a unique focus on providing employees with mental wellness resources (35.2%). Other benefits offered by remote managers include tech tools  (41.4%), internet allowance (36.5%), and resources for mental health (35.2%).

## Targeted Incentives Offered

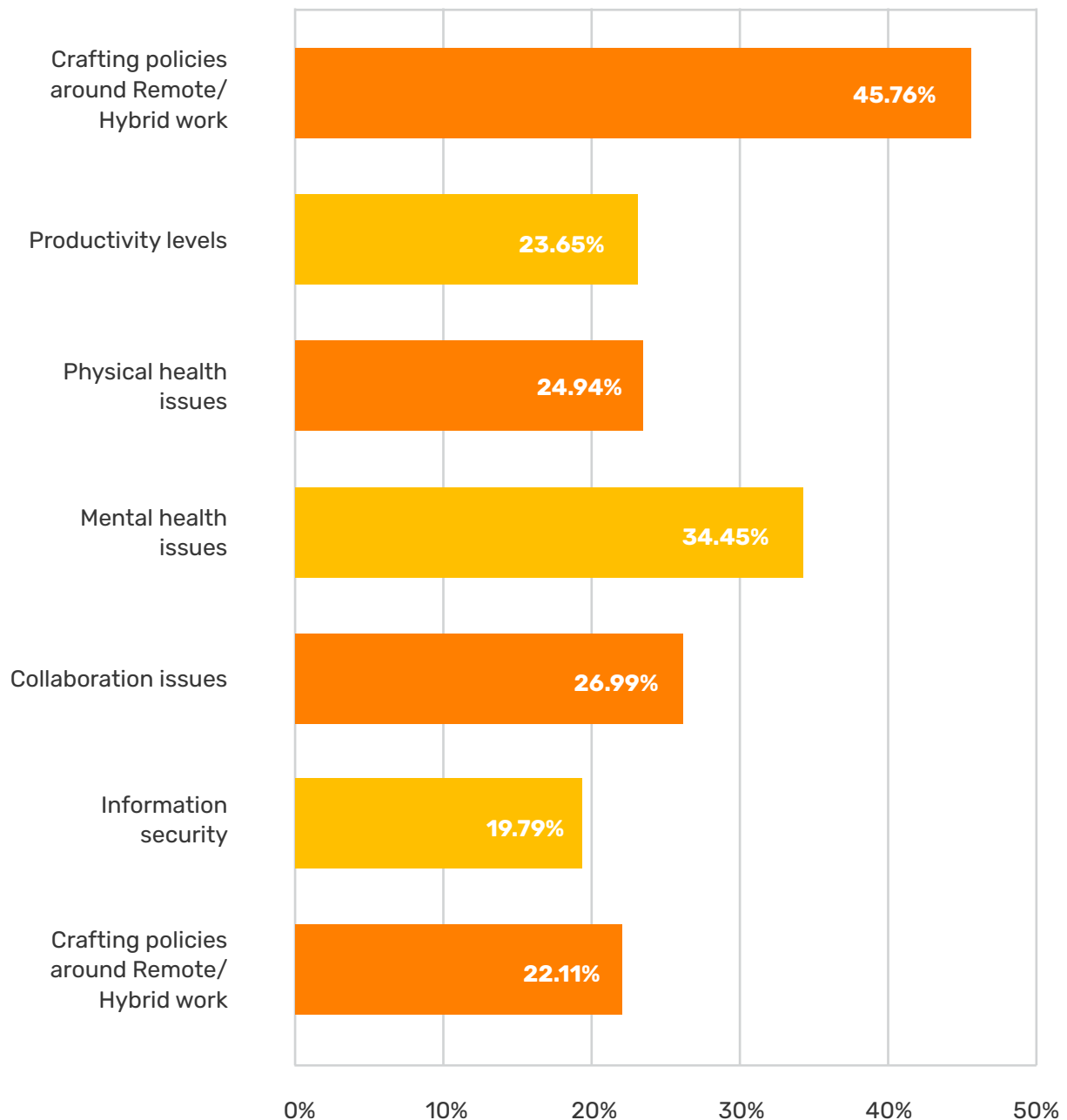| Incentive | Percentage |
|-----------|-----------|
| Mental Wellness Resources | 35.22% |
| Technical Tools and Resources (i.e. Computers from the office) | 41.39% |
| Allowance for internet | 36.5% |
| Allowance for electricity | 12.6% |

However, a small fraction of our respondents share that financial restraints are holding them back from offering targeted WFH incentives.

# Remote HR leads need help to make their hybrid setup work.

Some of the biggest challenges faced by remote leaders boil down to employee engagement (45.8%) and mental and emotional well-being (34.5%).

## Biggest Challenges faced by employers:

| Challenge | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Crafting policies around Remote/Hybrid work | 45.76% |
| Productivity levels | 23.65% |
| Physical health issues | 24.94% |
| Mental health issues | 34.45% |
| Collaboration issues | 26.99% |
| Information security | 19.79% |
| Crafting policies around Remote/Hybrid work | 22.11% |

These figures are food for thought for WFH leaders. Ultimately, their leadership, initiatives, and focus can truly drive results and determine whether a remote setup is good or bad for employee engagement. Team leaders should rise to the occasion by being more present to their teams and paying attention to employee needs. To start, they may conduct regular, structured check-ins, and acknowledge that social distancing doesn't equate to emotional distancing.

The staggering demand for flexible working arrangements is something that all leaders need to consider if they want to retain and attract their talent moving forward. But it seems that WFH managers aren't fully prepared to adopt this change forever: 64.6% share that they need support to understand how to make a hybrid office work.

## Do WFH Leaders Need Help for their Hybrid Setup?

**35.4%**
**No, we don't**

**64.6%**
**Yes, we need
help**

If anything, it calls for an ongoing dialogue as company leaders settle into the new workplace norm. Leaders need to break free from in-person surveillance and focus on outcomes to make remote work enjoyable and sustainable. Plus, it can't simply be addressed with a remote work policy change — company leaders will need to consider if changing the way they work is worth the effort and attrition, and whether it will benefit their organization in the long run.

Still, about half of WFH leaders expect a hybrid workplace in the near future. Despite the challenges and the fact that hybrid offices are still somewhat new, 50.8% of remote managers foresee a post-pandemic workplace that's predominantly remote with only a few days in the office. Meanwhile, 30.4% expect a full-time WFH set-up with regular on-site meetings.

### What WFH Leaders Expect from the Post-pandemic Workplace
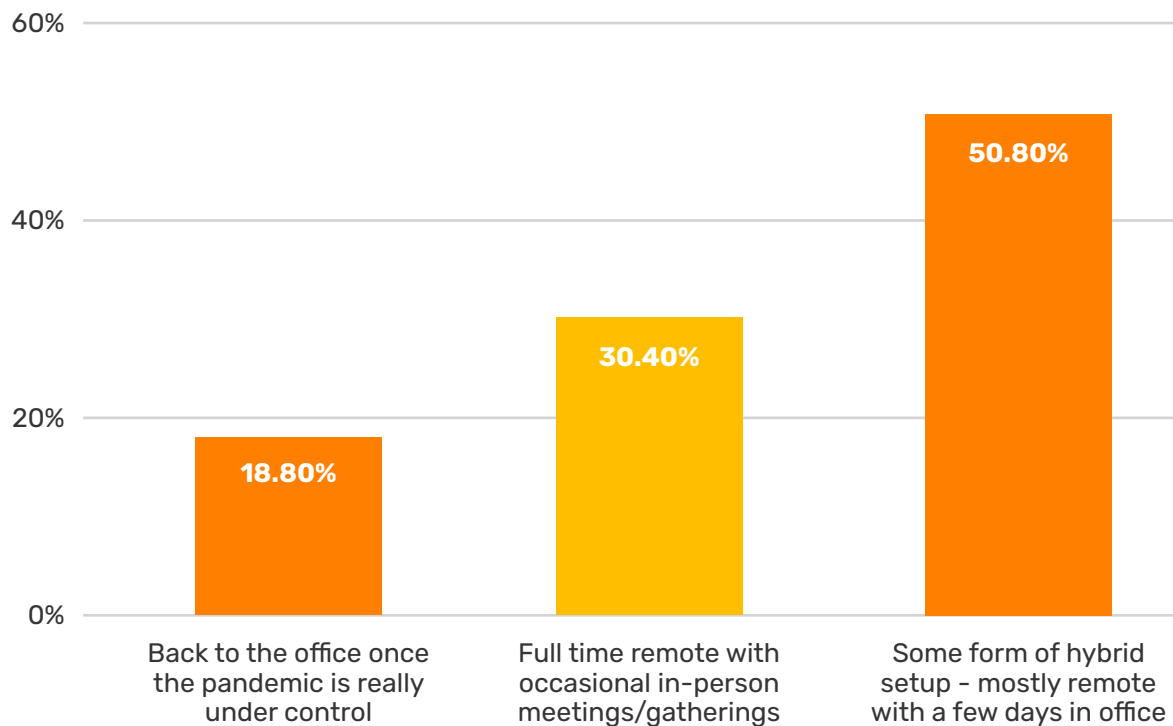


As WFH leaders transition into the new hybrid setup, they'll need to address an important question: Is the culture they once had (and want to preserve) the right culture to foster in this new hybrid working environment?

# Employees Working from Home

Organizations worldwide are adopting a remote setup, triggering significant shifts to the talent landscape. Remote work has created new job opportunities, but it has also made teams more siloed than ever. In particular, virtual employees are more prone to serious concerns like digital exhaustion and burnout.

More importantly, the current remote setup has revealed an unpleasant truth: high productivity is coming at the expense of an exhausted workforce. As a result, leaders need to act fast to keep in touch with their teams, and provide support to inspire employee productivity and engagement.

## WFH employees claim to "love" their new setup.

A majority of remote workers (70.7%) love their current setup. It's not hard to see why: the "breathing room" that WFH life offers is exactly why it appeals to employees so much. After all, WFH employees are free to take a quick work break to water their plants or go out for a grocery run without it being a huge deal.

### How WFH Employees Feel About Working Remotely

**1.42%**
I can't wait to go back.

**23.87%**
It's okay.

**4%**
It's bearable.

**70.71%**
I love it!
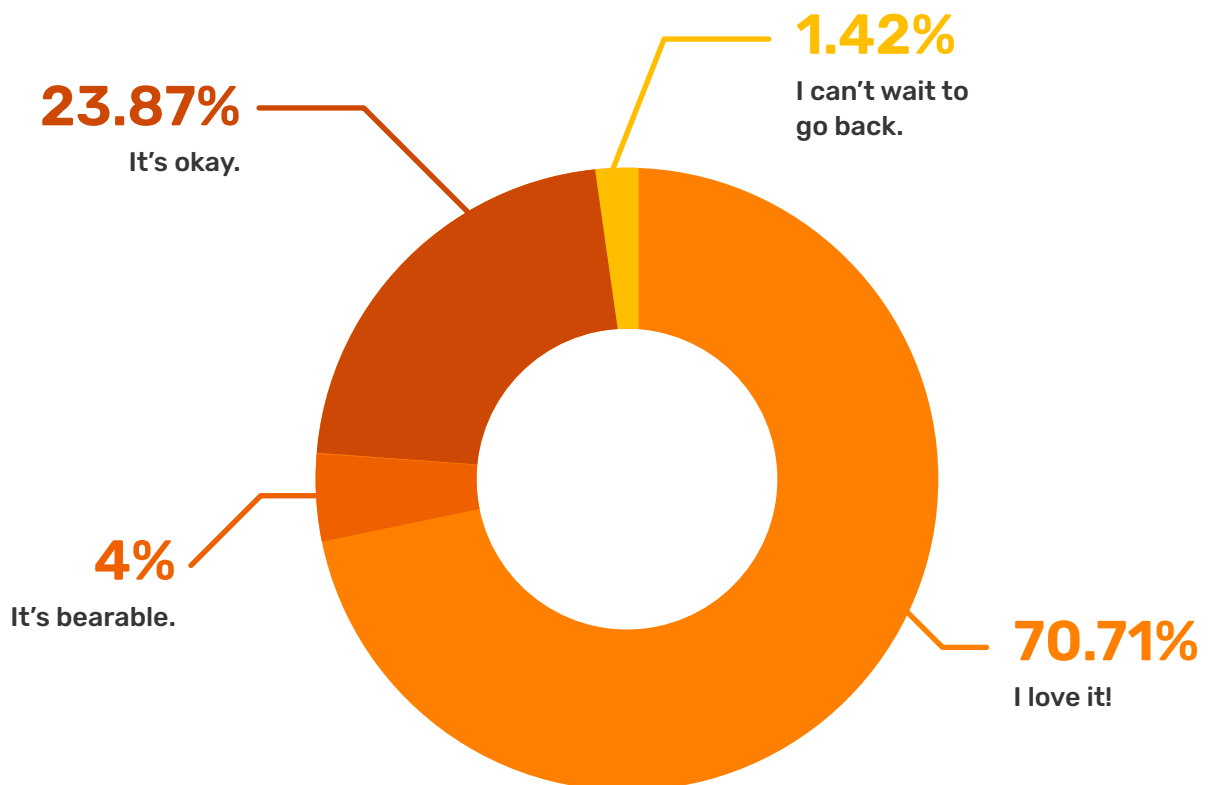
When asked what they like the most about WFH, the responses of remote employees also echo the sentiments of leaders: 83% cited cost savings and 64% cited better work-life integration among the things they like about working remotely.

## What Employees Like the Most About WFH

| | |
|---|---|
| Better work-life integration | **64.36%** |
| Flexible working hours | **49.38%** |
| Saving time and money on commute/travel | **82.69%** |
| Saving money on other expenses | **72.17%** |
| Better physical health | **52.97%** |
| Better mental health | **48.57%** |
| More time with family | **72.21%** |

But even though a significant number of remote employees are happy to work from home, their responses are varied when it comes to returning to the office.

## How WFH Employees Feel about Returning to the Office

**31.36%**
I am not sure.

**36.58%**
Yes, I do.

**32.07%**
No, I don't.
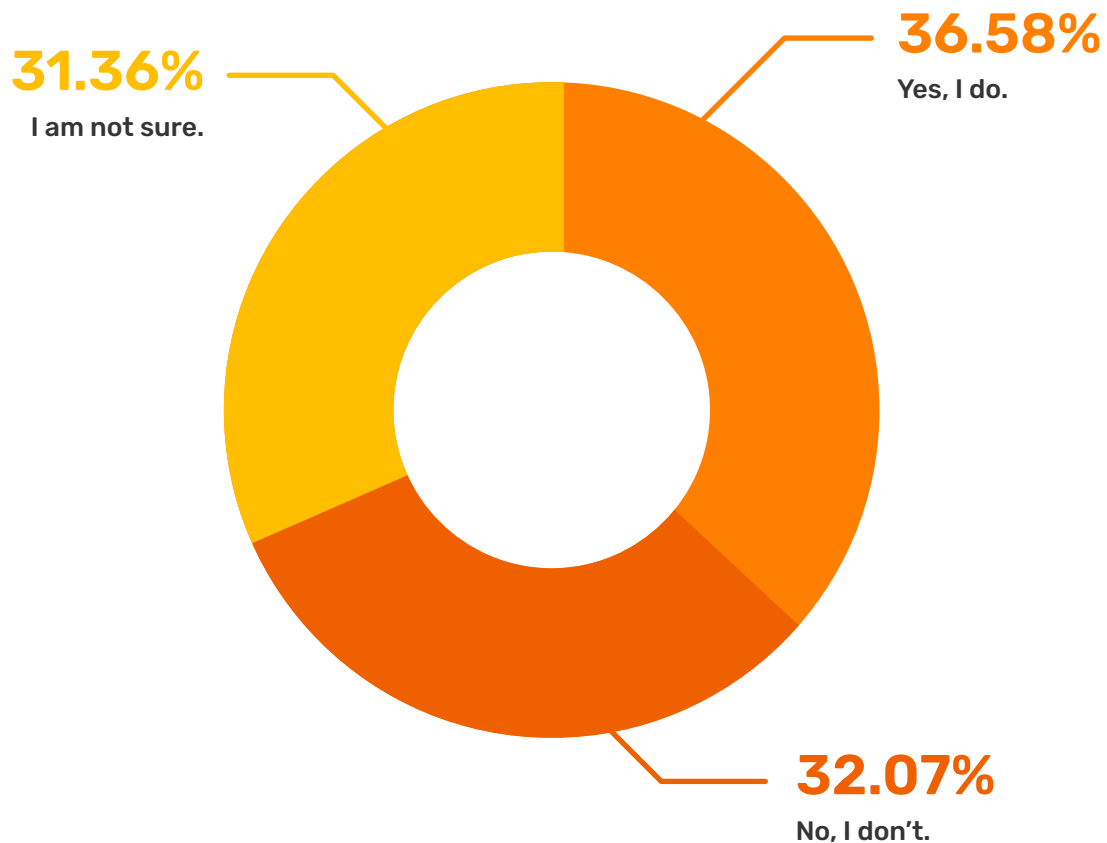
As seen in the graph, 36.6% feel excited, 32.1% are apathetic, while 31.4% are unsure about where they stand. It's possible that virtual teams are missing the social connection and mentorship they're more likely to get when they're in the office.
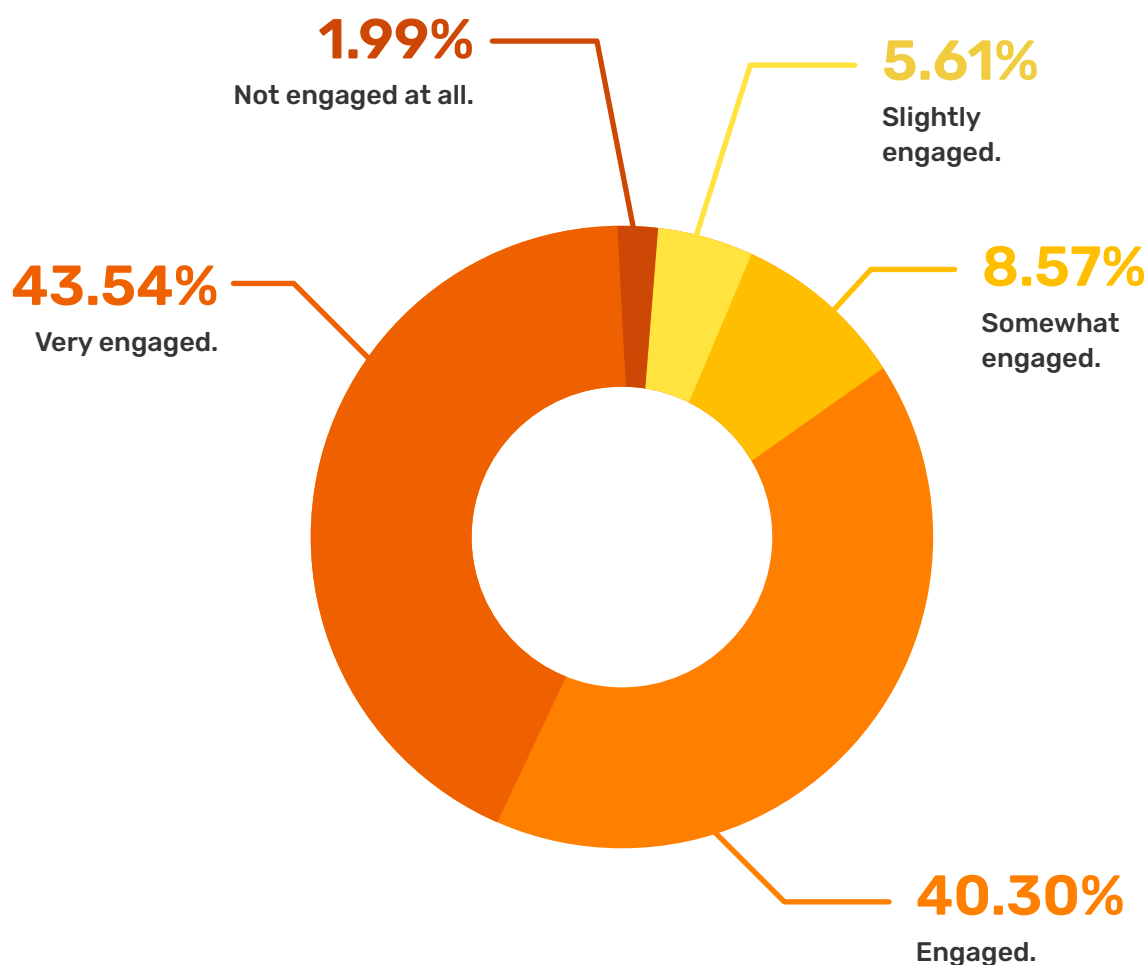
Considering that 70.7% of WFH employees love their current remote work setup, it begs the question: do WFH teams really prefer to work remotely, or are they simply acknowledging it as an alternative means to work when they can't report to the office?

That being said, companies will need to adjust the evolving needs of their WFH teams if they truly want to attract and retain talent moving forward.

## Despite being happy with the remote setup, employees don't feel as engaged as they should be.

As previously mentioned, 70.7% of WFH employees love their current remote work setup. But when asked about how engaged they feel when working remotely, our survey findings reveal that only 43.5% and 40.3% report feeling very engaged and engaged respectively.

### Do WFH Employees Feel That They're Engaged at Work?

**1.99%**
Not engaged at all.

**5.61%**
Slightly engaged.

**8.57%**
Somewhat engaged.

**43.54%**
Very engaged.

**40.30%**
Engaged.

At first glance, it may seem as if remote offices are a viable work setup despite the premature transition into a new kind of office environment. But consider the 70.7% of respondents that claim to "love" their current remote setup: if the data teaches us anything, it's that there's a lot of room for improvement in how senior leaders can make their hybrid teams feel more connected with the work they do.

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A good way to push up engagement levels could be a hybrid setup wherein employees still retain most of their flexibility, but also get opportunities for face-to-face interaction, and other engagement activities regularly.

Still, our respondents share that they like how they're spending less on transportation. They cite reduced commuting expenses as the best reason for being WFH, followed by more time spent with loved ones and better work-life integration.

### What Employees Like the Most About WFH

| | |
|---|---|
| Better work-life integration | 64.36% |
| Flexible working hours | 49.38% |
| Saving time and money on commute/travel | 82.69% |
| Saving money on other expenses | 72.17% |
| Better physical health | 52.97% |
| Better mental health | 48.57% |
| More time with family | 72.21% |

Challenges still abound, however: since remote work relies heavily on a stable internet connection, our respondents cite poor/unstable connectivity (40.96%) as the primary obstacle to work, and the struggle to collaborate with colleagues (20.4%) close behind.

## WFH employees want team-building activities that contribute to talent & personal development.

Our respondents suggest more engagement activities that contribute to talent/personal development and offer good incentives. Some engagement activities they want to participate in include bingo, art contests, and online challenges. In particular, they cite virtual trivia games as their most preferred team-building activity. Others want to participate in e-sports events, while 29.1% share that they want to join in-person activities.
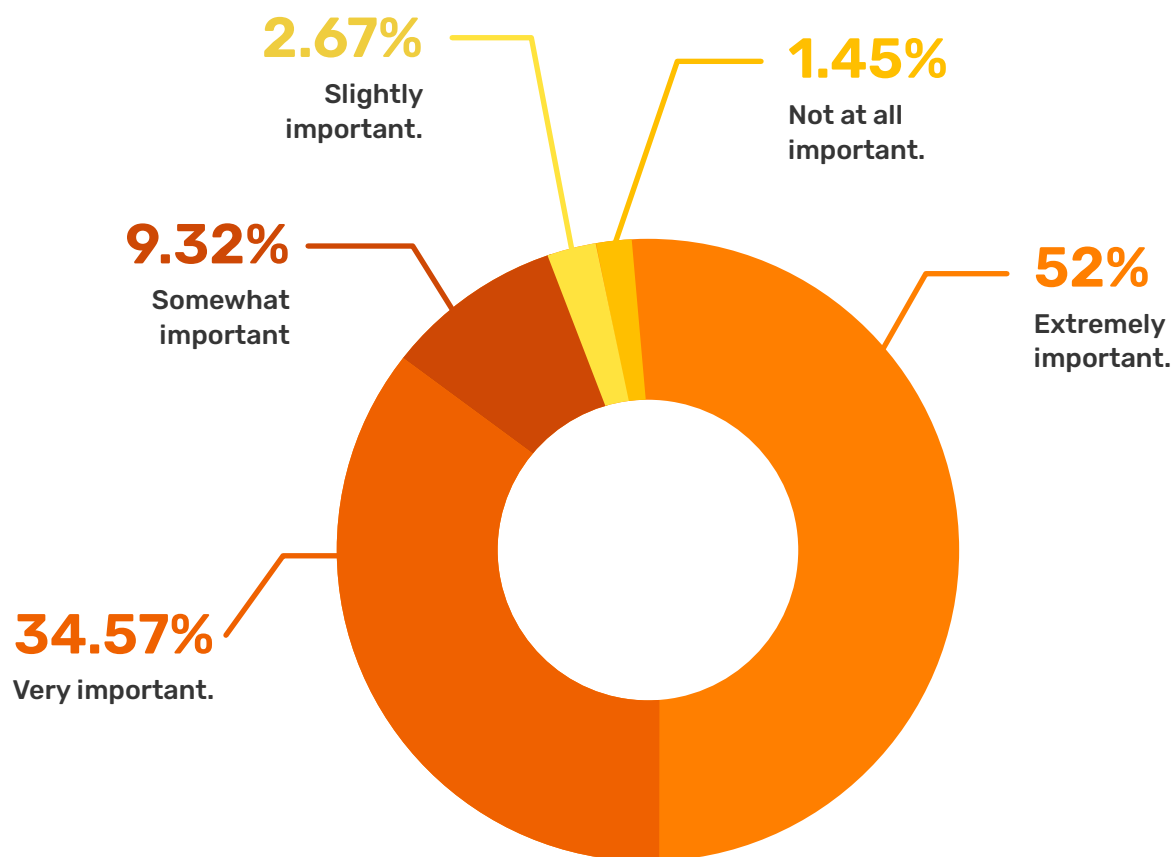
### Preferred Engagement Activities of WFH Employees

| Activity | Percentage |
|---|---|
| eSports tournaments | 37.88% |
| Biggest loser challenges (weight loss and fitness contests) | 28.01% |
| In-person events (subject to necessary health & safety protocols) | 29.05% |
| Trivia games | 53.56% |
| Online singing contests | 13.91% |

These suggestions could go a long way in informing how Admins shape their team-building programs by incorporating personal growth and talent development. Some ideas to consider include celebrating personal wins, starting a learning club, and promoting perks that contribute to mental and physical well-being.

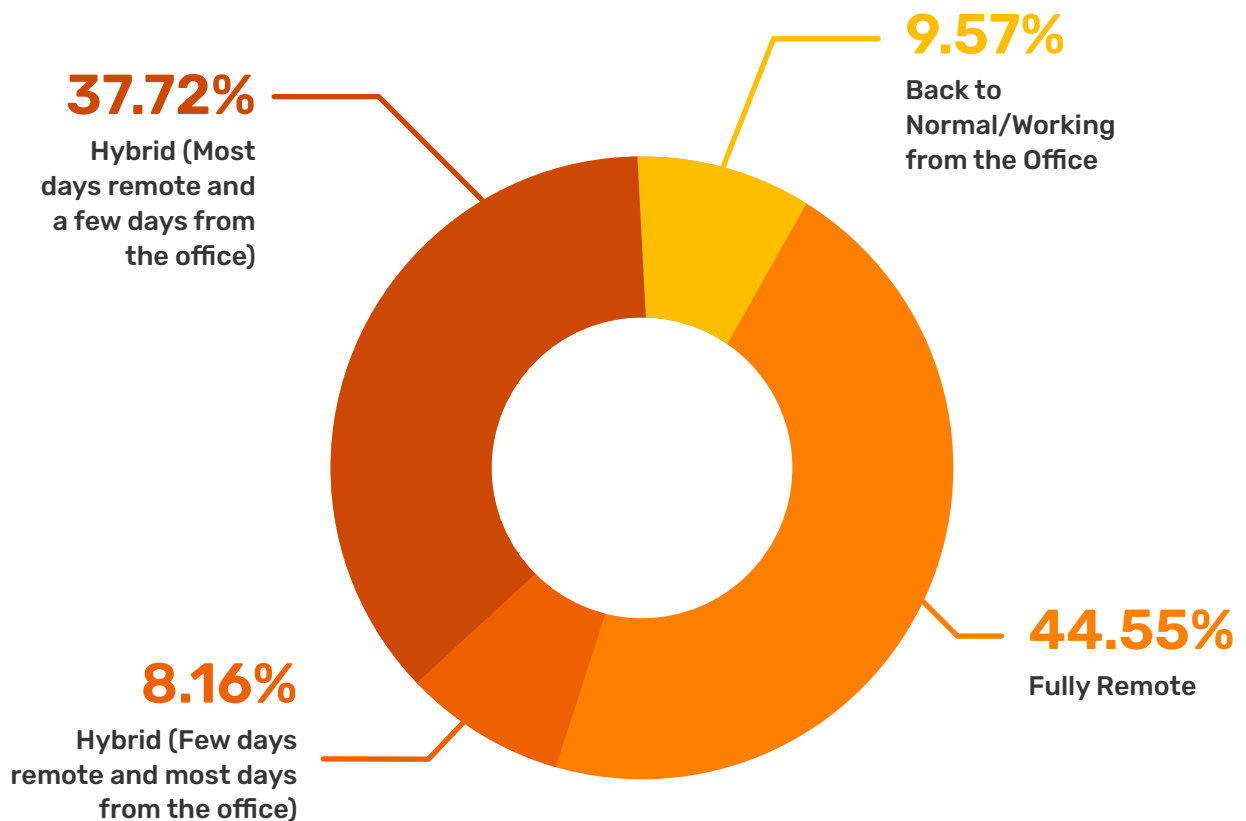## In summary: WFH employees want a hybrid future, and their leaders agree.

Remote workers consider hybrid work "extremely important." Now that employees have experienced the benefits and flexibility that a remote setup offers, they want their leaders to make it a priority. In fact, more than half of our respondents (52%) consider it extremely important.

### WFH Employees on the Importance of Hybrid Work

**2.67%**
Slightly important.

**1.45%**
Not at all important.

**9.32%**
Somewhat important

**52%**
Extremely important.
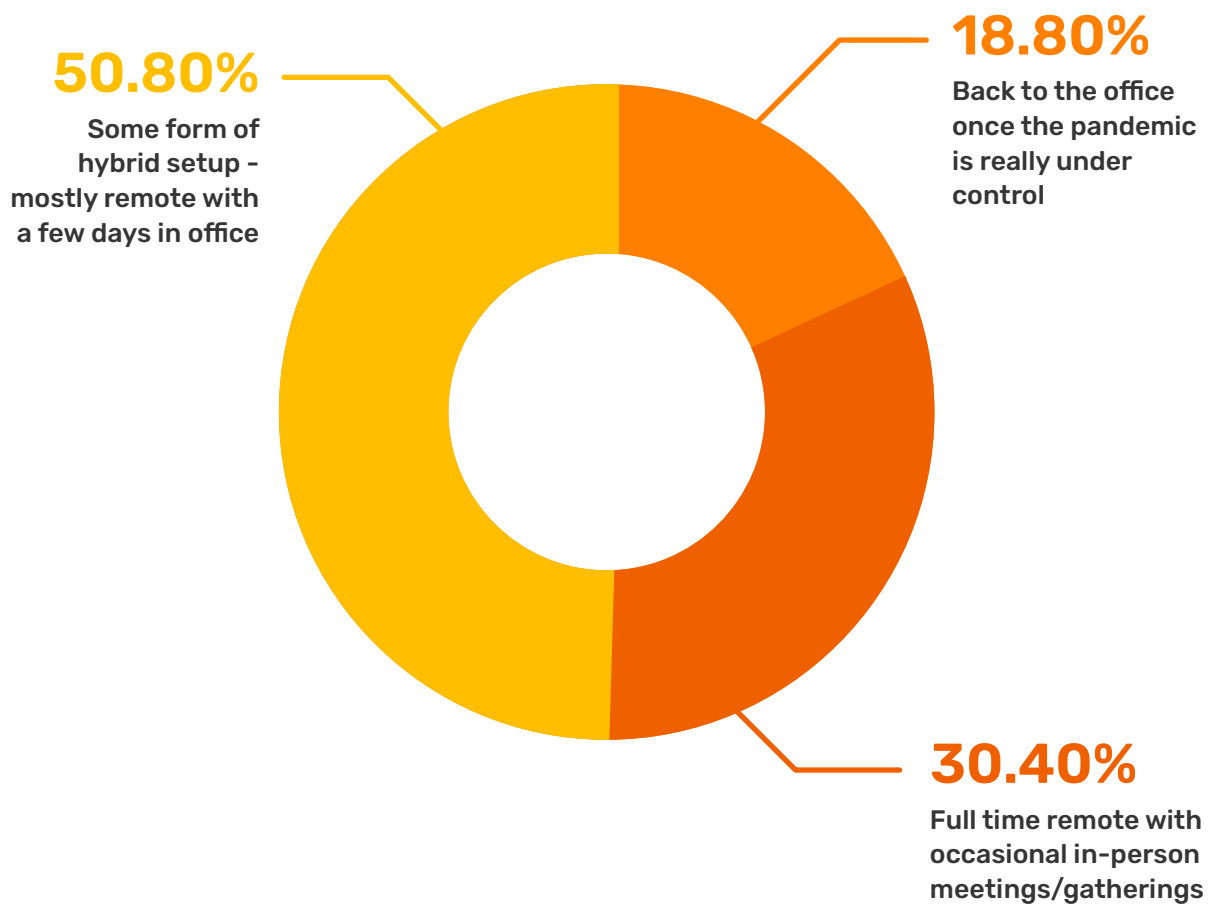
**34.57%**
Very important.

Remote workers foresee a fully remote workplace. Even after the COVID-19 pandemic, 44.6% of our respondents envision working full-time in a remote setup. Meanwhile, 37.7% prefer a hybrid setup where they'd still have to report to work for a few days in the office.

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## WFH Employees on the Ideal Post-pandemic Workplace

**9.57%**

Back to Normal/Working from the Office

**37.72%**

Hybrid (Most days remote and a few days from the office)

**44.55%**

Fully Remote

**8.16%**

Hybrid (Few days remote and most days from the office)

Their leaders are on the same page, as 50.8% of remote managers foresee a post-pandemic workplace that's predominantly remote with only a few days in the office. Meanwhile, 30.4% expect a full-time WFH set-up with regular on-site meetings.

## WFH Leaders on the Ideal Post-pandemic Workplace

**18.80%**

Back to the office once the pandemic is really under control

**50.80%**

Some form of hybrid setup – mostly remote with a few days in office

**30.40%**

Full time remote with occasional in-person meetings/gatherings

At the end of the day, this translates into a setup where more people are free to work on their own terms. As a result, people and workers alike can expect "job autonomy" to function as a new, integral piece of the future of intergenerational work.

# Recommendations

## 1 Eliminate remote work biases and train leadership to focus on outcomes instead of individual actions

One of the biggest challenges faced by companies shifting to remote revolves around trust. Since employees are not in the office, the relationships between rank-and-file and management change.

The most successful companies engage in a dialogue about this. People Operations actively engage leaders to understand their concerns around performance, output, and employee discipline. As a topic with such a huge scope, it deserves its own research.

But when it comes to establishing the fundamentals, organizations that plan to shift to remote need their People Ops team to actively engage stakeholders and proactively coach leaders on how to do it the right way. Each company setup is different, but People Ops professionals should always be at the forefront of guiding leadership to focus on the right things to make remote offices work for each organization.

# 2 Recalibrate employee engagement activities so that they're more digital-oriented

One of the areas affected the most by remote or hybrid work is employee engagement. This rings even more true for companies that had previously invested in nice office spaces, and a culture that hinged on in-person interactions i.e., regular Town Hall meetings, focus group discussions, or even basic leisure activities i.e., water-cooler or lunch-hour banter.

Engagement translates into involvement and inclusion. It could be as simple as greeting a receptionist hello, or acknowledging the brand values and core mission of a company that hangs on the walls.

When transitioning into the hybrid office, HR teams need to recalibrate your core values for the digital experience. If you're facing challenges here, you have to rethink from the ground up, all the way back to company core values if necessary, and rework the employee engagement experience so that it's more digital-oriented.

# 3 Don't underestimate communication. Ensure regular one-on-one checkpoints and proactive communication

Drilling down on communication may seem somewhat strange, especially since remote workers are bewailing the frequency of meetings. Most feel as if there are too many meetings going on, but then they're also complaining about the lack of communication with their senior leadership.

Take a step back and ask yourself: how does your team feel about communication? Engage your workforce and ask them directly. It's possible that you need to change the frequency of your communication or set the right kind of meetings so everyone feels included.

Leaders can also help build a more inclusive culture by encouraging participation in virtual engagement activities. Infuse a sense of purpose into these activities by promoting initiatives that contribute to talent or personal development.

# 4 Create a **tech-focused strategic plan** and provide your workforce with the **proper tools**

Technology is crucial to any sustainable hybrid setup. Get off on the right foot by identifying gaps in your tech stack and arming your employees with the right tools. But to make this work, you'll need to conduct a ground-up analysis and assess whether you have the right tools.

There are significant opportunities for you to innovate and fill technology gaps as you make the hybrid work transition. Ask yourself: what will a hybrid work environment look like in your new environment? Will in-office employees prefer dialing in from their own video conferencing account when attending meetings? Regardless of the answer, new tech is needed to fill in these gaps. And the way you use tech will have a significant impact on team culture and collaboration.
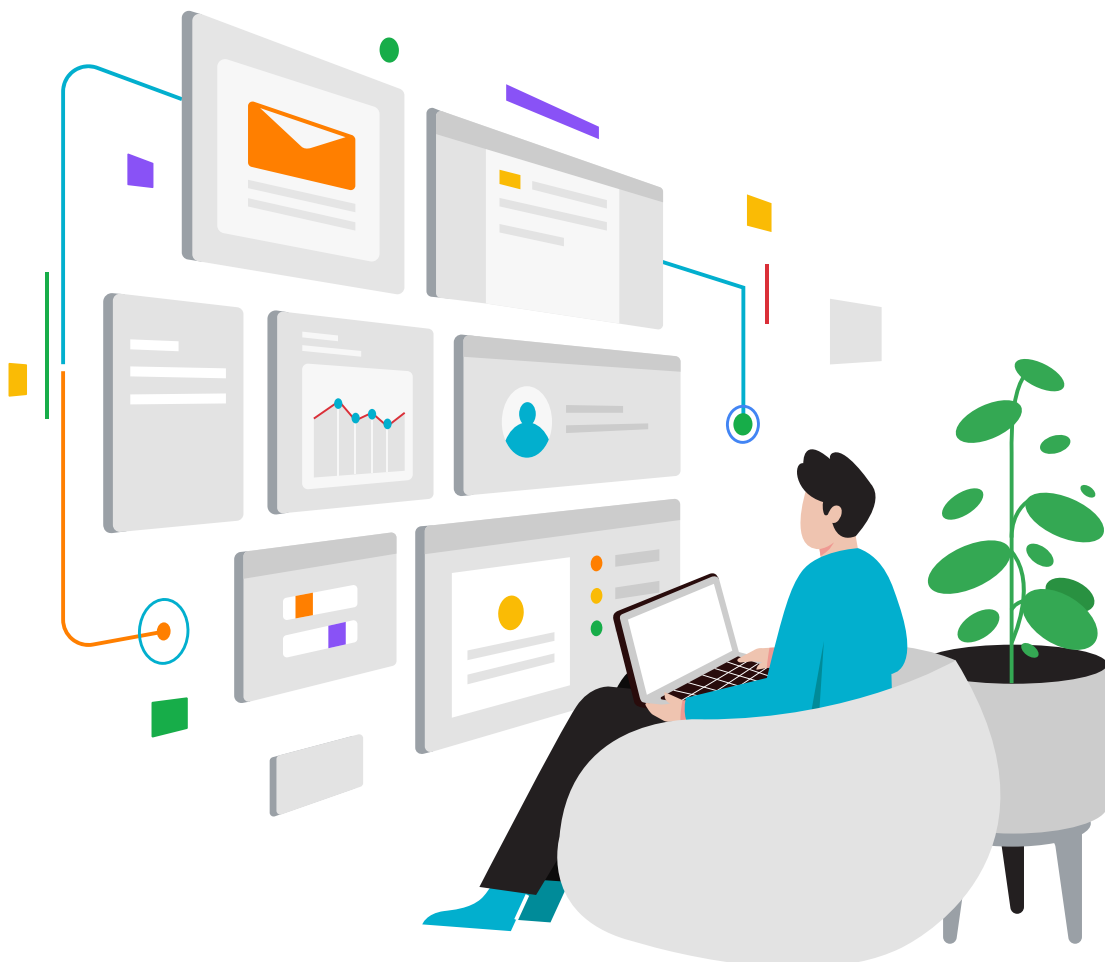
# 5 Offer mental health support programs to reduce work-related stress

Since the hybrid future is imminent, there's no better time for adjustment than now. Part of that entails creating a cohesive wellness strategy that benefits your employees, whatever their location. Make wellness a priority by promoting a culture that values open communication. Ask your team members what works best for them and embrace different ways of working. Your culture should encourage simple wellness activities, i.e., taking regular time off, engaging in self-care, and setting work boundaries.

More importantly, build an inclusive environment. Know where your employees stand when it comes to how the pandemic and general state of the world affect their mental health. Train your leadership to identify when a person is in distress, and commit to reducing any mental health-related stigma or discrimination. Consider offering mental wellness programs to build resilience and fortitude during these trying times.

# 6 Provide additional benefits/targeted incentives that keep employees safe when reporting for onsite work, like hazard pay & transportation allowance

Hybrid workspaces blend on-site and remote working, and this calls for more win-win situations for people working from home and at the office. Implement a healthy and safe hybrid work arrangement by offering a strong benefits program. For example, provide targeted incentives (like hazard pay and transportation allowance) for members of your work-force that will report for on-site work.

Keep in mind that happy workers are productive workers. Show empathy and let employees know that you care about their well-being — and mean it. Additional benefits could, after all, lessen the likelihood of isolation and help with domestic issues.

# 7 Ensure your teams feel safe by implementing COVID-19 countermeasures

A myriad of options are available at our disposal to prevent the spread and transmission of the COVID-19 virus. From temperature-detecting biometric devices to alcohol dispensers, there are countless ways to enhance everyone's safety.

Make sure you implement the proper COVID-19 safety guidelines, like wearing PPEs, limiting in-person meetings, following social distancing protocols, and using break or meeting spaces. More importantly, ensure compliance by imposing sanctions on employees that violate these countermeasures.

# Build an inclusive hybrid culture made to last.

Adopting a hybrid setup is a must for organizations that value productivity and engagement. Make the most of your agile workforce and provide support where it matters the most.

Improve retention and give your employees the holistic care they deserve with Sprout's end-to-end employee experience platform. Get access to a cutting-edge, world-class suite of HR solutions and create a future-proof hybrid workplace.

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