



2021 Remote Work Statistics: The State of Remote Work



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Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a pressing need for organizations to give their employees the chance to work remotely. This move was imperative for the health and safety of employees around the world and sparked a societal shift in the way we view the workplace.

Remote and hybrid work are becoming the norm. Understanding how to best serve remote and hybrid employees is necessary for not just their individual success, but for the overarching success of your organization. Remote work is no longer a niche opportunity some companies give, but a necessary way people work around the globe.



The Growth of Remote Work

Before COVID-19

Remote work isn't a new concept—some organizations offered this flexibility even before the pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic, it was estimated that [37 percent of all jobs in the U.S. could be done entirely remote](#).¹ However, only a small percentage of the workforce leveraged this work environment, as only [7 percent of employees](#) worked completely remote prior to COVID-19.² Most employers encouraged their employees to report to the office or another on-site location every day.

During COVID-19

Throughout the pandemic, a [majority of employees](#) were working remotely at least some of the time.³ In order to comply with public health orders, organizations found ways for their employees to work at home. This remote work shift happened on a scale and pace not seen in recent history.

Now and in the Future

In the first half of 2021, the number of fully remote employees has been steadily decreasing while the number of on-site and hybrid employees has been increasing. As we navigate through the vaccination phase of the pandemic, many organizations are encouraging their employees to come back to the office.

Some employees have shifted back to the workplace, while others choose to remain remote or hybrid. The percentage of remote and hybrid employees is much larger than it was pre-pandemic—as of June 2021,

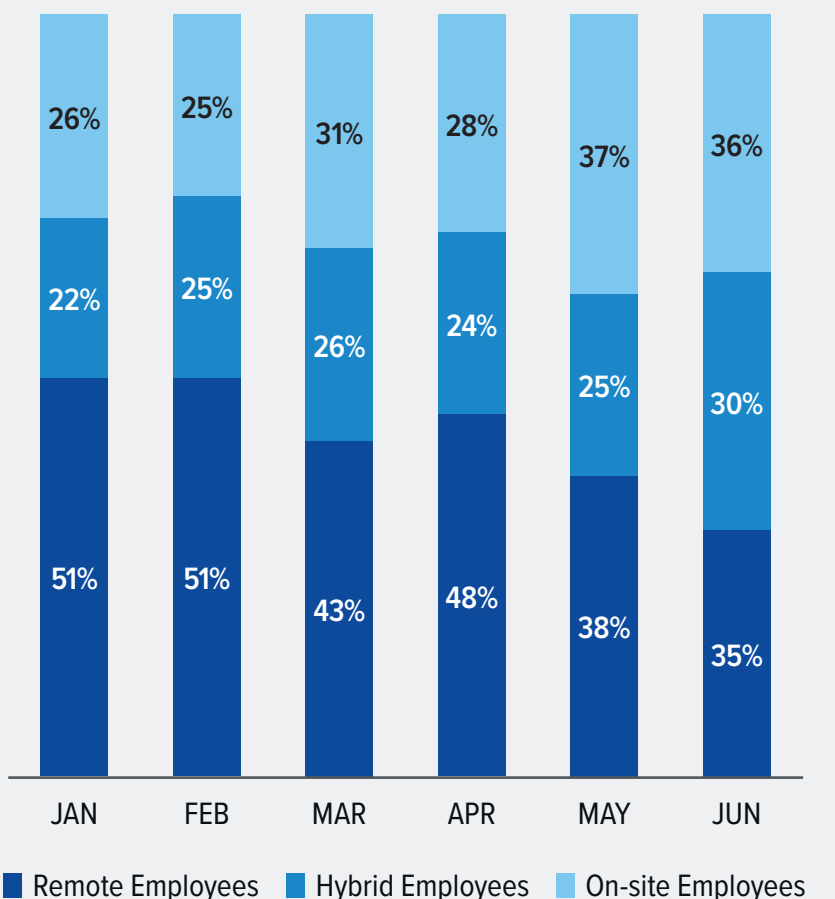
30 percent of employees considered themselves hybrid employees, and 35 percent of employees reported working remotely.

Many employees and organizations shifted their perceptions of working at home, citing both the challenges and triumphs of remote work during the pandemic.

1. *How Many Jobs Can be Done at Home?*, Becker Friedman Institute
 2. *Before the coronavirus, telework was an optional benefit, mostly for the affluent few*, Pew Research Center
 3. *Seven in 10 US White-Collar Workers Still Working Remotely*, Gallup

Percentage of Remote Employees in 2021

Remote work levels have fallen while hybrid levels remain stable in the first half of 2021



5 Common Remote Work Myths (and the Realities)

Many employees and organizational leaders have strong opinions about remote and hybrid work. These opinions have shaped into some misconceptions about remote and hybrid working situations. However, the massive increase in remote work has provided some insightful data to help debunk many of these myths and misconceptions.

Myth:

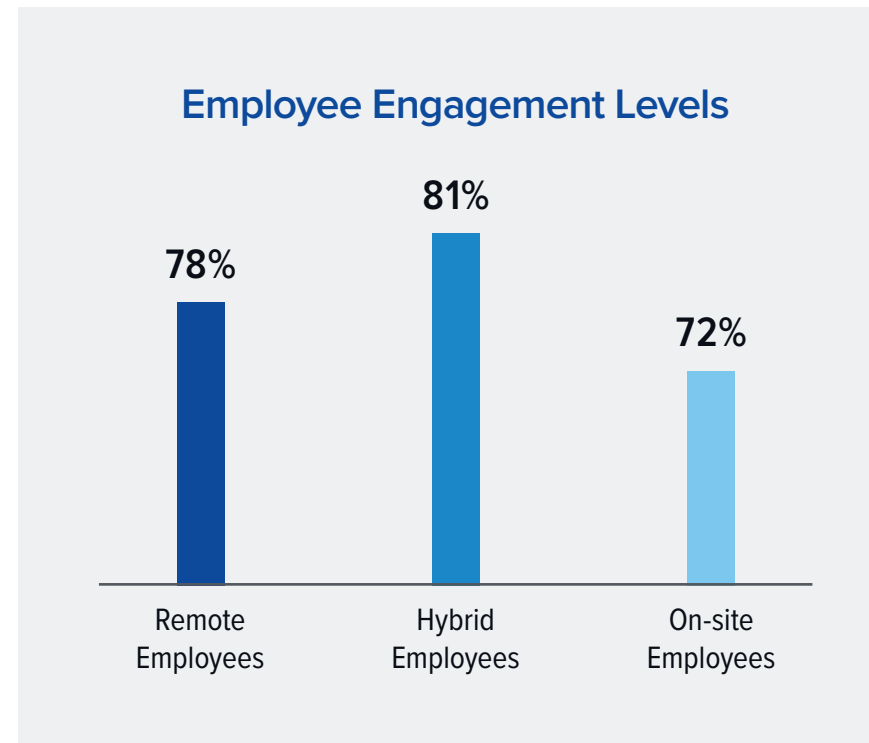
The only way to collaborate is in the physical workplace.

Reality:

Remote employees actually say they feel quite supported when it comes to collaboration. In the past decade, online collaboration technology has improved and proliferated across organizations and industries allowing for better synchronous and asynchronous communication and collaboration.

82 percent of remote employees agree that they have the technology needed to stay connected to their manager and team when working remotely.

When provided the right resources and equipment, remote employees can stay connected to collaborate with their team members.



Myth:

Engagement levels suffer with remote and hybrid work.

Reality:

During the past 18 months, hybrid employees have been engaged at the highest rates with 81 percent of them reporting high engagement. 78 percent of remote employees say they were highly engaged followed by only 72 percent of on-site employees. Though these

trends might shift as more employees return to the workplace, hybrid and remote employees report having the highest engagement levels.

Myth:

Remote and hybrid work has a negative impact on productivity.

Reality:

Remote and hybrid employees are just as productive as their on-site counterparts. In fact, 79 percent of employees say working remotely had little effect on their day-to-day performance. Organizational leaders tend to agree.

According to a [PwC](#) survey,¹ 83 percent of employers now say the shift to remote work has been successful for their company. In addition, the [Federal Reserve Economic Data \(FRED\)](#)² found that labor productivity has actually increased during the pandemic.

1. US Remote Work Survey, PwC

2. Has the Pandemic Boosted Labor Productivity?, Federal Reserve Economic Data

Myth:

The opinions and contributions made by remote and hybrid employees aren't as recognized as those of on-site employees.

Reality:

Remote and hybrid employees are more likely to say their opinions count at work. In fact, 85 and 84 percent of hybrid and remote employees report that their opinions count at work, followed by only 74 percent of on-site employees.

Myth:

Remote and hybrid work will die out when the pandemic disappears.

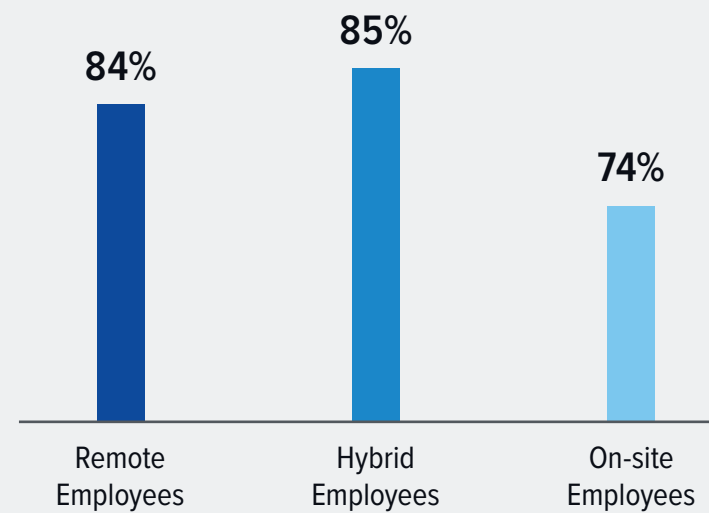
Reality:

While the volume of remote employees has decreased in the first half of 2021, hybrid levels remain stable with 30 percent of employees continuing to be hybrid.

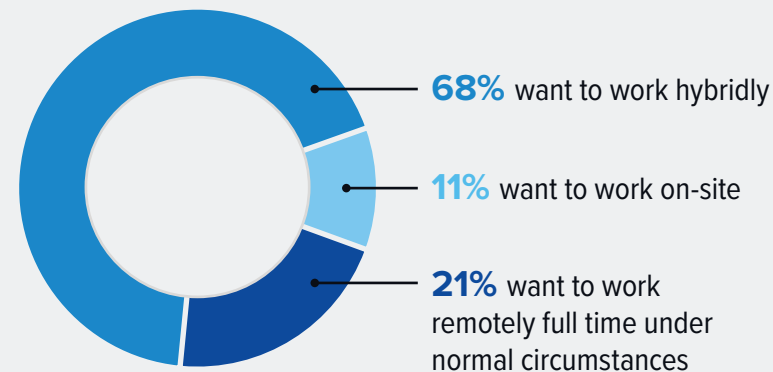
According to our research, 21 percent of employees during the pandemic said that they wanted to work remotely full time under normal circumstances, while 68 percent wanted a hybrid environment and only 11 percent wanted to be on-site full time. This indicates that many employees prefer to work remotely or hybrid.

Employees' Opinions Count at Work

"My opinions count at work."



What Employees Want Moving Forward



Challenges of Remote Work

In any given work environment, there are advantages and disadvantages. Although many negative myths regarding remote work can be debunked, challenges that affect remote and hybrid employees still exist.

1. Goal collaboration and communication.

There is a fear among organizations that less in-person, social connection will lead to less collaboration among employees, making it difficult to accomplish team goals. But individuals who collaboratively set clear and meaningful goals will be more intrinsically motivated to carry out those goals. According to [our research](#),¹ when goals and accountabilities are clear, employees are 2.8 times more likely to be engaged. If employees collaboratively set clear goals, the positive outcomes are more likely to come to the surface.

2. Overwork and burnout.

Remote and hybrid employees are more likely to report working over 50 hours a week compared to their on-site co-workers.

Additionally, employees who report working overtime risk feeling like they are “always on” which can lead to burnout. Remote and hybrid work environments often make designating specific work times difficult, which can lead to overwork.

3. Organizational culture.

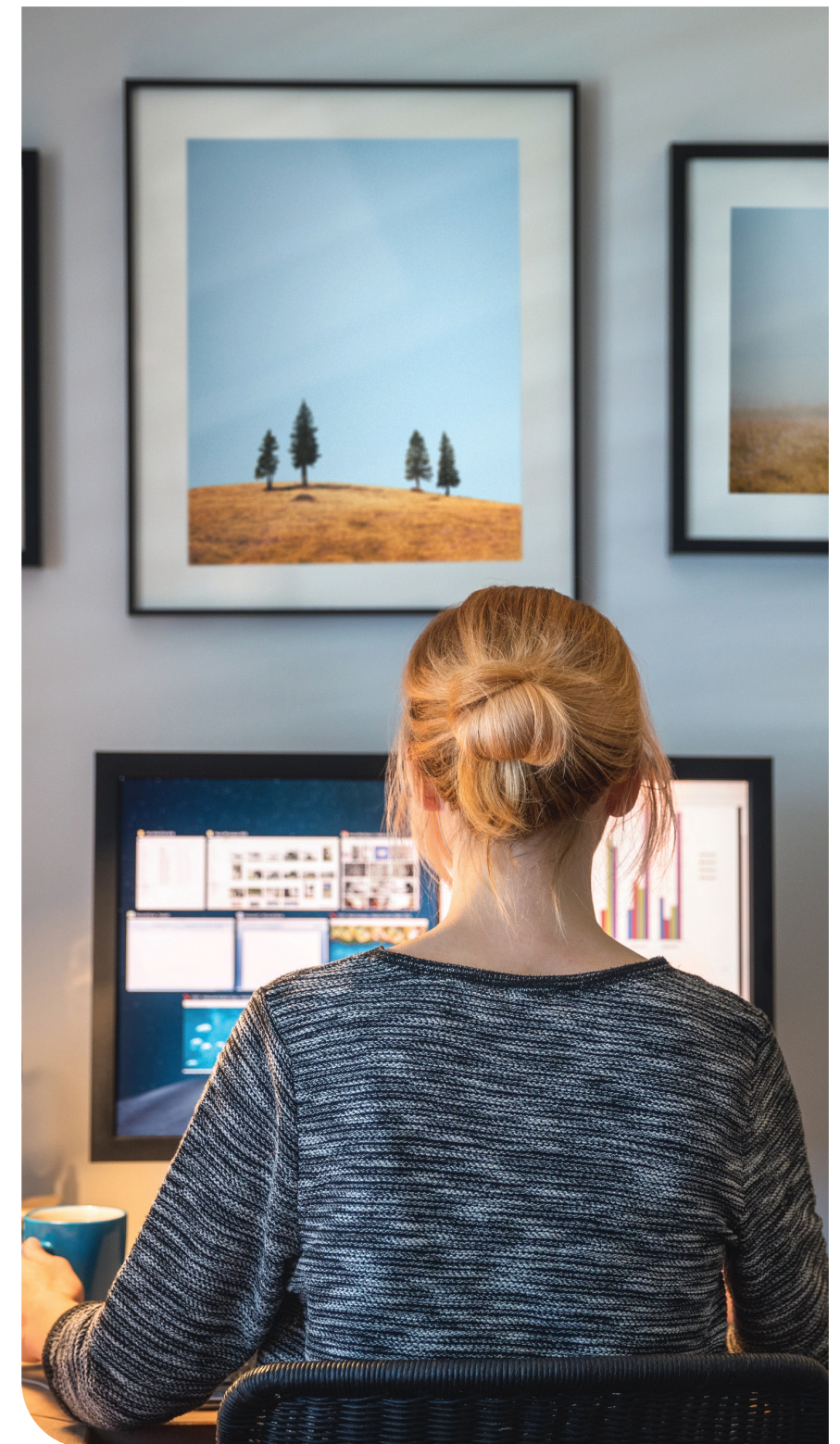
Many companies have struggled to translate their company culture in a digital space, which impacts connectivity between employees and their work. In fact, when HR leaders were asked what the top 3 challenges to creating a strong organizational culture were, 23 percent said a rapid pace of change in their work environment and 14 percent cited a lack of change management skills. The influx of remote and hybrid work environments prompted a lot of change for organizations and posed the need for them to safeguard their cultures.

HR consulting firm, [Mercer](#),² found that more than 40 percent of businesses experienced a moderate to high impact on how their infrastructure handled the culture and workplace change to working virtually, but many employers prefer their employees to come into the office occasionally. According to [PwC](#),³ 68 percent of executives say a typical employee should come into the office 3 days a week to maintain a distinct company culture.

1. 2020 Employee Engagement Report, Quantum Workplace

2. In the United States, how are companies adapting to the COVID-19 business and workforce environment?, Mercer

3. US Remote Work Survey, PwC



Benefits of Remote Work

Despite the various challenges of remote work, organizations reap many benefits. While keeping challenges and solutions in mind, it's also important to understand how remote work benefits your business.

1. Increased productivity and engagement.

When given the right technology and equipment, [productivity and engagement](#) is highest among remote and hybrid employees.

77 percent of remote employees report increased productivity.

In addition, when remote employees agree that they have the materials and technology to work from home, they are 2 times more likely to be engaged. Eighty-one percent of hybrid employees are highly engaged followed by 78 percent of remote employees. Only 72 percent of on-site employees report high engagement levels.

2. Diversified talent pool.

Due to the proliferation of remote work, the potential talent pool is no longer limited by geography. Organizations have the opportunity to recruit employees from around the globe. This allows for a greater amount of diversity of thought, age, race, and abilities because organizations are no longer limited to local talent.

Ridding your organization of any limitations to talent diversity is important—a lack of cognitive diversity can be extremely restricting to an organization's capabilities and successes.

In fact, 75 percent of employees believe that [more diversity is needed in at least one area](#)¹ including ways of thinking (55 percent), race and ethnicity (44 percent), gender (33 percent), age (29 percent), and educational background (27 percent).

[Harvard Business Review](#)² found that in some jobs, applicants who live over 5 to 6 miles away are given one-third fewer call-backs. Leveraging remote work to take away location bias boosts diversity within your organization. The caveat to this is possible [inclusion issues](#),³ as managers often give on-site employees bigger promotions and higher raises.

3. Reduced costs.

Organizations can save a substantial amount of money on office space by employing remote and hybrid employees. But, in order to save on office space, organizations may have to spend more on technology to ensure their employees have the right tools to remain productive at home.

89 percent of remote and hybrid employees say they have the technology needed to perform effectively at their homes.

Ensure this is the case at your organization by providing necessary technology to your employees.

4. Enhanced talent attraction and retention.

Our [research](#)⁴ shows that the 2nd highest driver of employee turnover is employees' needs being unmet. This includes mental well-being issues and a lack of work-life balance. Employees want a job that allows flexibility to effectively balance their responsibilities outside of work.

According to a [Gallup](#)⁵ study, 54 percent of employees would leave their job for one that offers more flexible time. Organizations can better attract top talent when the option to work remotely is on the table. Giving employees the opportunity to choose where they work is a relatively “free” benefit to offer—aside from technology costs.

Many employees have grown accustomed to the realities of remote work and don't want to go back to the office. Catering to these preferences serves as a benefit to your employees and your business.

1. *Diversity and Inclusion, Quantum Workplace*

2. *Research: Hiring Managers Are Biased Against People with Longer Commutes, Harvard Business Review*

3. *The Uneven Odds for Promotions With Hybrid Work, Wall Street Journal*

4. *The Top 5 Predictors of Employee Turnover, Quantum Workplace*

5. *Is Working Remotely Effective? Gallup Research Says Yes, Gallup*

Developing Managers for Remote Work

[Our research](#)¹ shows that 2 in 3 managers said they didn't receive any training when they entered a management role—and over half of managers said they were unprepared to be a people manager when they first became one.

Effective management is at the center of a successful organization that prioritizes employee engagement and performance. The onset of remote work brought about a multitude of changes in the workplace, including the management process.

Train leaders to effectively manage remote and hybrid employees.

Managers need to be equipped to manage remote and hybrid teams. The rate that remote work is being scaled strains technology and managers especially—because there hasn't been a history of remote principles on [managing employees](#).

A 2020 [study](#)² conducted by Harvard Business Review Analytic Services in association with Quantum Workplace found that 46 percent of organizations have changed their performance management processes and systems in the past year. This poses a lot of change and uncertainty for managers to navigate—ensure managers are trained to prioritize flexibility to effectively adapt to the realities of remote work.

Provide support on all levels of the hierarchy.

Giving support to all employees within your organization is imperative to success.

89 percent of remote and hybrid employees say their manager will support their decision whether they return to the workplace or stay at home. With employees feeling supported in their roles, engagement levels and outcomes will naturally be better, and talent will be retained at higher levels.

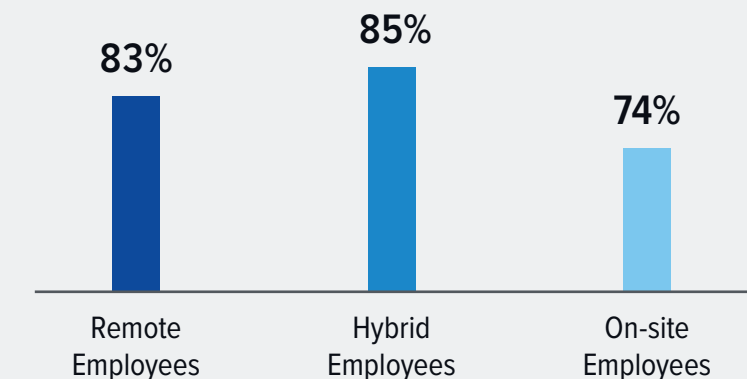
A recent survey conducted by [Aetna International](#)³ found that 40 percent of employers say they're concerned that a lack of social interaction among colleagues will have a long term negative impact on some employees' mental health. Ensure that employees have an outlet to discuss their mental health to feel supported.

Build relationships between remote team members.

Regardless of how difficult it may seem to build relationships with remote employees, it is of high importance. 83 percent of remote employees say the senior leaders at their organization value people as their most valuable asset.

Perceptions of Value Differ Among Remote, Hybrid, and On-Site Employees

"The senior leaders of the organization value people as their most important resource."



85 percent of hybrid employees agree, followed by 74 percent of on-site employees. Ensure all employees feel supported by leadership by making a continuous effort to build upon relationships and recognize employees for their work.

- ¹ Employee Development, Quantum Workplace
- ² A Winning Approach to Employee Success, Harvard Business Review in association with Quantum Workplace
- ³ Global Employee Health Study Data, Aetna International

The Impact of Remote Work on Engagement and Performance

While effective or ineffective management impacts employee engagement and performance, remote work environments have an effect too. Leverage these tips to navigate the impact remote work has on employees to boost employee success.

Avoid the always-on mentality.

17 percent of hybrid employees work over 50 hours a week, followed by 11 percent of remote employees and only 8 percent of on-site employees. Organizations should prevent employees from overworking themselves to avoid burnout and maintain their engagement levels. Encourage employees to prioritize a healthy work-life balance to drive the best results.

87 percent of remote employees say their job gives them the flexibility to balance their work and personal life. 88 percent of hybrid employees agree, along with 78 percent of on-site employees. When employees are able to effectively balance their responsibilities, their stress and anxiety are reduced. This allows them to shift their focus to their performance to drive business outcomes.

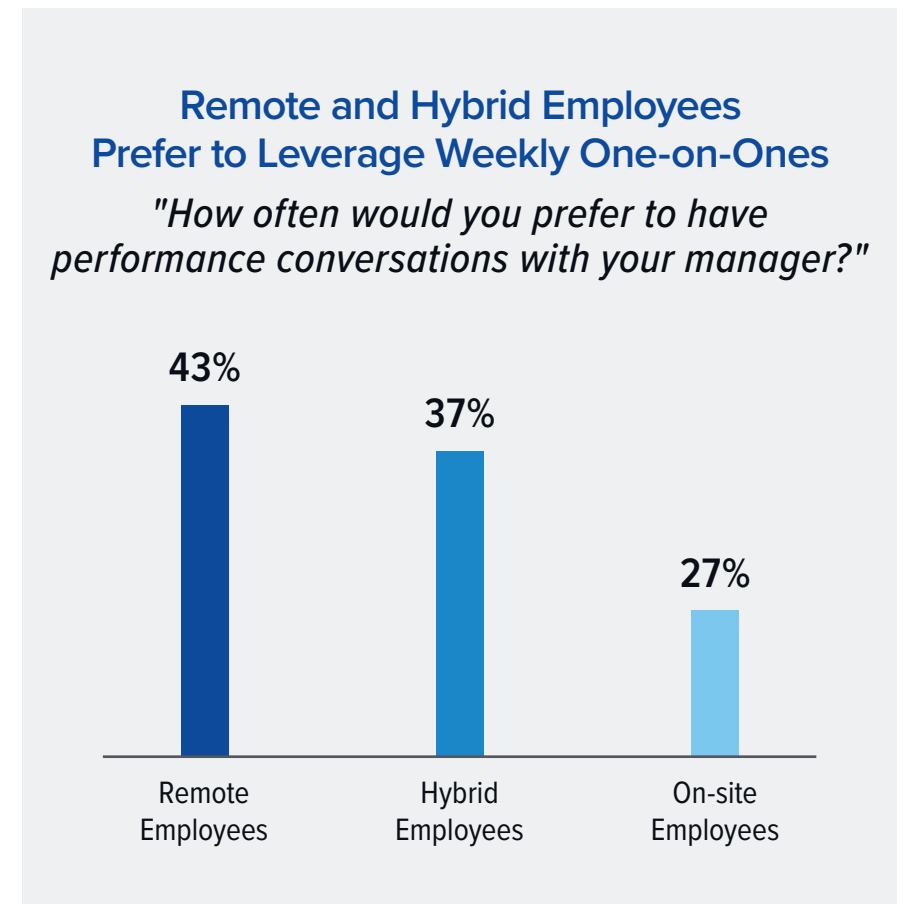
Evaluate performance fairly in a modern work environment.

It's often easy to assume that on-site employees are working harder and longer, because you see them in the office, daily, pushing outcomes and working diligently. Hybrid and remote employees need fair assessments of their work because they also produce positive outcomes.

Managers can no longer measure [performance of their employees](#) by the amount of time spent in the office. Outcomes produced at home are just as valuable as those produced in the workplace. This is apparent among employees as 79 percent of remote employees agreed that working remotely had little effect on their day-to-day performance.

Utilize frequent one-on-ones.

Hybrid and remote employees have more frequent one-on-ones with their managers, and they prefer it that way. 45 percent of remote employees and 43 percent of hybrid employees have weekly one-on-ones with their managers. Only 24 percent on-site employees leverage weekly one-on-ones.



43 percent of remote employees say they prefer weekly performance conversations, followed by 37 percent of hybrid employees and 27 percent of on-site employees. Frequent check-ins help teams stay connected and on the same page while in differing environments.

Use the right tools.

In order for organizations to succeed in a remote work environment, they need the right tools and technology to help support a range of hybrid, remote, and on-site employees. According to [research](#)¹ from Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, in partnership with Quantum Workplace, only 45 percent of respondents say their organizations use consistent tools across their business.

Many people leaders assumed productivity and performance would plummet as employees worked remotely. But using effective tools and systems can help safeguard against any negative effects that remote work has on engagement and performance.

1. A Winning Approach to Employee Success, Quantum Workplace



Leveraging People Analytics to Optimize Remote Work

When workforces were dispersed, organizations realized that they needed tools to help them gather feedback from employees. Employee surveys can help you acquire feedback to better understand and serve your employees. Understand what affects their performance, flight risk, and perceptions with software that tracks employee trends in an ever-changing work environment.

Understand the flight risk of remote and hybrid employees.

Hybrid employees are slightly more likely to report wanting to stay at their current organization in comparison to on-site and remote employees. 72 percent of hybrid employees say that it would take them a lot to leave their organization, followed by 68 percent of on-site and remote employees. In addition, only 73 percent of remote employees say they are going to be at their organization one year from now.

Pro Tip: [Reduce turnover](#) by understanding what employee experiences are prompting retention loss. Leverage software that allows you to connect employee engagement data with turnover data to gain insight into keeping top talent within your business.

Use text analytics to assess survey data.

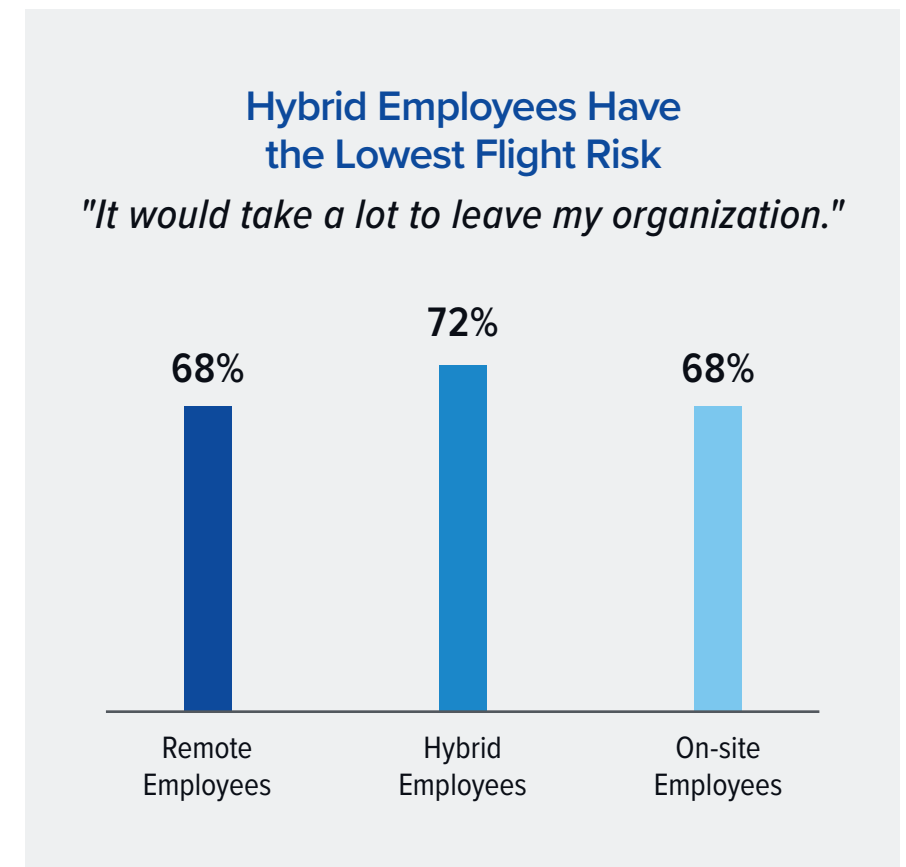
[Surveys](#) are a powerful tool that help you gain insight into the thoughts and perceptions of your employees. With less frequent in-person encounters, it is difficult to be aware of the feelings of employees, making it impossible to know when changes should be made.

Pro Tip: Utilizing surveys helps you get the answers you need. [Text analytics](#) uncovers themes within survey comments to understand how to act on your data to best cater to your employees to improve employee and business performance.

Actively uncover insights.

With an ever-changing work environment, uncovering data trends and insights quickly within your organization is imperative to producing the best outcomes.

Pro Tip: Leverage a [people analytics platform](#) to assess business and employee data. This helps your organization get the context needed to make decisions and changes to improve business outcomes.



Conclusion

The widespread shift to remote work prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way many view the workplace. The pandemic has shifted mindsets about the productivity and engagement of remote employees, making remote and hybrid work better accepted around the globe.

Remote work caters to the needs of many employees, boosting work-life balance, employee engagement, and performance levels. The popularity of remote work is likely to remain apparent, well after the pandemic. Adjusting to this reality is imperative to have a high-performing organization that continues to grow and succeed.

Methodology

Over the past 20 years, Quantum Workplace has been collecting and studying millions of data points about the employee experience. In that time, we've partnered with thousands of companies that successfully attract, engage, and retain top talent.

The research from this report was derived from the Best Places to Work contest. This nationally recognized contest—powered by Quantum Workplace—measures the workplace experiences of over 1 million voices from the most successful companies in the United States.

From this large workforce respondent pool, we also study trends and topics important to the future of work in the Quantum Workplace Research Panel. The panel is a quarterly, online employee survey sample of over 32,000 individuals who elect to participate in independent research about the workplace.

From this unique vantage point, our research and insights enable us to understand workplace trends that matter and supply insights to help other organizations succeed.

