# SECURING PRODUCTIVITY
IN THE HYBRID WORKPLACE

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The traditional office setting, where employees commuted to a central office five days per week, was already starting to change before the pandemic. Even then, companies sought to improve workplace satisfaction with perks that were meaningful to employee lifestyles, such as remote working options, reduced commutes, work-life balance, and the ability to prioritize family and personal needs. The pandemic simply accelerated the adoption. Though many believed it would be temporary, companies soon realized that their staff could maintain and even increase, in many cases, their productivity while working remotely. Businesses realized that they could feel comfortable granting these more flexible workplace arrangements as a real benefit to recruit and maintain talent without losing productivity.

Thus, employers are embracing the hybrid workplace, but there is still no playbook for how to implement this massive structural change. Will employees have their own office space, or will they share desks with others? Who will be in the office at any given time? Are there options besides working from home or the central office? How do we protect assets and data, not to mention employees, when office occupants (and attendance levels) change drastically daily, and we manage it all remotely?

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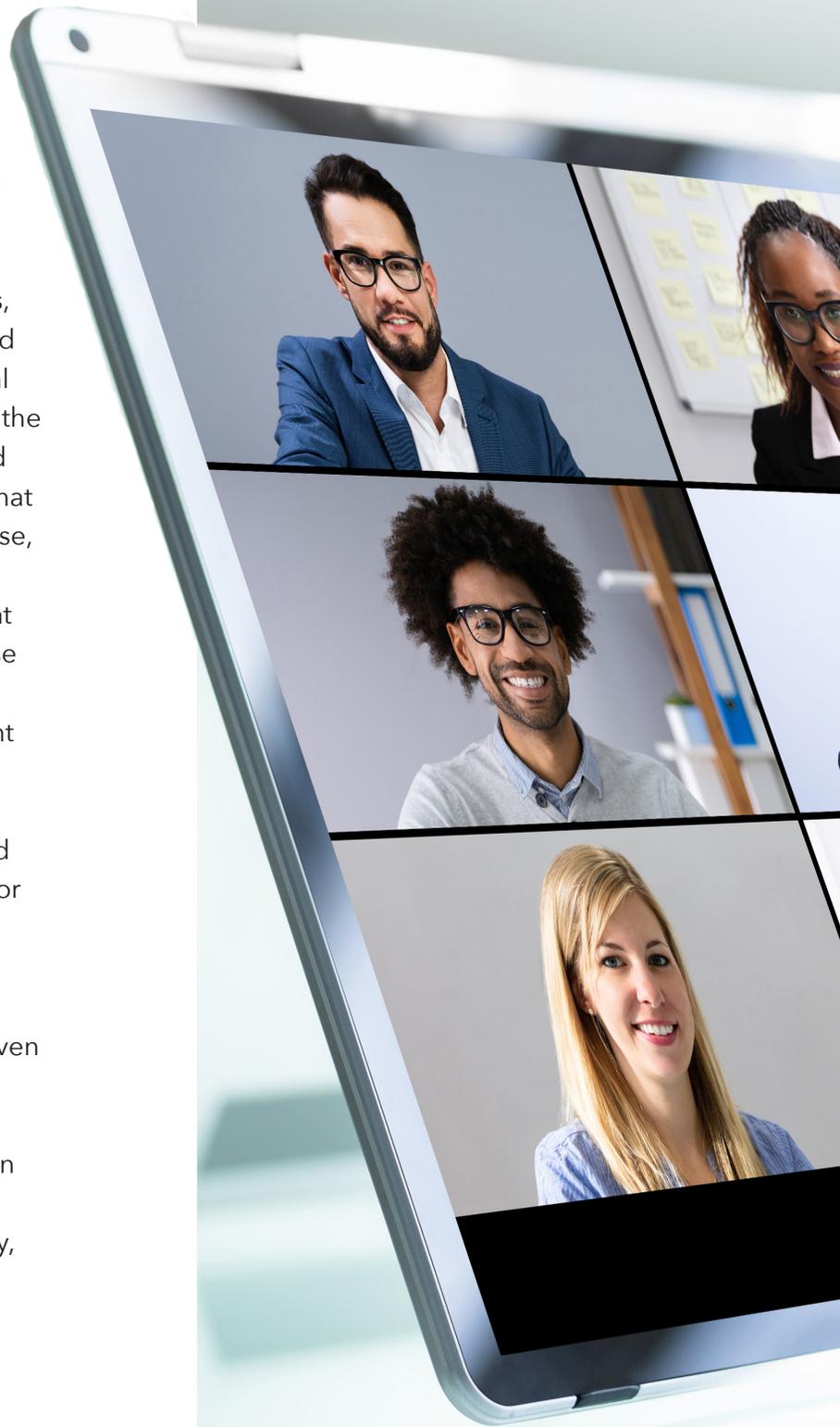
ADVANTAGES
TO GOING HYBRID

Employees perceive many advantages to adopting a hybrid approach to work. The stress of having to commute and be in "on time" has been erased — employees who are working remotely can simply hop online when they are ready to start the workday. Employees save money on gas and transportation, business attire and dry-cleaning, and even meals and coffee. They can choose what days work best for them to be home so they can tend to home and family needs. Simultaneously, employees still benefit from a physical space for teams to gather, collaborate, think creatively, and share ideas.

There are also tangible benefits for businesses, such as the potential of reducing space requirements and lease payments while lowering utility use. Providing the option of remote work also helps retain employees and opens up opportunities to hire better quality workers in distant locations. Research has shown that many remote employees demonstrated higher productivity and happiness when the stressors related to coming into the office were removed. A hybrid situation allows staff to choose either working preference or a mix of both. Companies like Cigna recognized this and already had about 43 percent of their employees working remotely before the pandemic; it plans to grow that to about 60 percent.

The statistics back up these sentiments. According to a survey by CBRE of 10,000 employees, 85 percent of respondents said they want to work virtually at least two or three days a week. Another 87 percent of large companies (over 10,000 employees) are responding to this call for flexibility by adopting hybrid work. Before the pandemic, only 8 percent of surveyed respondents had fully remote jobs, and one-third had a hybrid arrangement; in 2022, 39 percent were fully remote, and 42 percent maintained a hybrid schedule.

And if a company chooses to return to an all-in-person situation? According to Gallup, 53 percent of fully remote individuals and 38 percent of hybrid workers surveyed said they would look for another job. Netflix, a company that remained staunchly pro-in-person, was forced to recognize that the hybrid model was the only way to avoid a wave of resignations and now allows employees to work from home one day a week.

Large and small companies recognize that to retain good talent, flexibility is the best benefit they can provide.

CHALLENGES
OF THE
HYBRID OFFICE

The arrangement of a hybrid working solution, however, varies significantly from company to company. Some businesses might assess which employees really need to be in the office while their colleagues go completely remote. Others might adopt a three-days-in, two-days remote, or two-days in, three-days remote situation. The point is that each case is different and may even change over time, so enabling flexibility is key to success. But even as employers and employees embrace this new approach, the highly dynamic nature of workplace scheduling raises concerns. How will companies know who should be in the office at a particular time? How can businesses provide security for their assets and employees? Will employees be able to access the office spaces anytime they need them? How can employers mitigate the risk of another outbreak of COVID or some new health crisis? There is a wide array of considerations that each company has to evaluate as to which is most appropriate for the staff preferences and those that are most critical for their operational needs.

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DIFFERENT MODELS
OF HYBRID SITUATIONS

While the concept of setting up a hybrid work situation is fast becoming common, the models vary. Here are some of the most commonly referenced.

1. ADAPTIVE RE-USE

The most frequent approach involves merely retaining the original workplace layout or a reduced central office space with the option for staff to work a few days a week remotely. In this case, some employees may share offices and desks in a "hotel" manner, while other shared resources, like conference rooms, are utilized more heavily for collaboration. Both Apple and Microsoft have moved to hybrid situations while retaining existing office spaces and layouts. Pinterest canceled a large lease in its San Francisco office but still manages physical spaces in eight cities in the United States for those who want the option. Slack, similarly, maintains current office locations as an option but is hiring new staff regardless of their geographic location and allowing workers to work remotely or in-office, at hours convenient to them.

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2. SHARED SPACE

This involves partnering with similar businesses (size, equipment needs). The businesses can split expenses and services that will save costs and provide more efficiency in space use.

In a hybrid situation, companies may end up sharing a single office space or desks and come in on different days, effectively only paying rent for the days their staff is in the office.

3. HUB-AND-SPOKE

This is a creative solution that involves breaking up the footprint to include a central headquarters with a mix of saltellite spaces in the outskirts. Thus, employees now can mix up their hybrid week by working a couple of days remotely, in a nearby satellite office, or at the headquarters if there is a big meeting or other reason. Spotify provides employees with a co-working space if they want to work outside their homes but do not live near one of the Spotify satellite offices. In some cases, the satellite offices are set up by needs or job types rather than location. Okta's Dynamic Work model is set up in this manner.

RESULTING
CONCERNS

Many of these scenarios feature sharing spaces on alternate days among individuals, departments, or even different businesses – while all of them involve staff not working in the office daily. In this environment, companies need to find a way to know who is in their offices on any given day but also may need to plan ahead in terms of who will be in the office.

And those are just the employees. What about the visitors or consultants coming into the office to meet with those hybrid-working staff? How can remote working staff schedule a time in the future for non-employees to access the office to meet with them and ensure their access is only allowed temporarily?

Let's also not forget why hybrid work has been so widely adopted so quickly – the mandated work-from-home protocols put in place to avoid contagion. The continued serious concern for office wellness has not gone away, so how can businesses keep future illness out of the office and better perform fast contact tracing if it ever does? Especially when you share spaces over the workweek?

This hybrid work approach includes a lot of complexity and variables to manage and monitor that weren't serious concerns pre-COVID. It's a complex situation that calls for responsive solutions.

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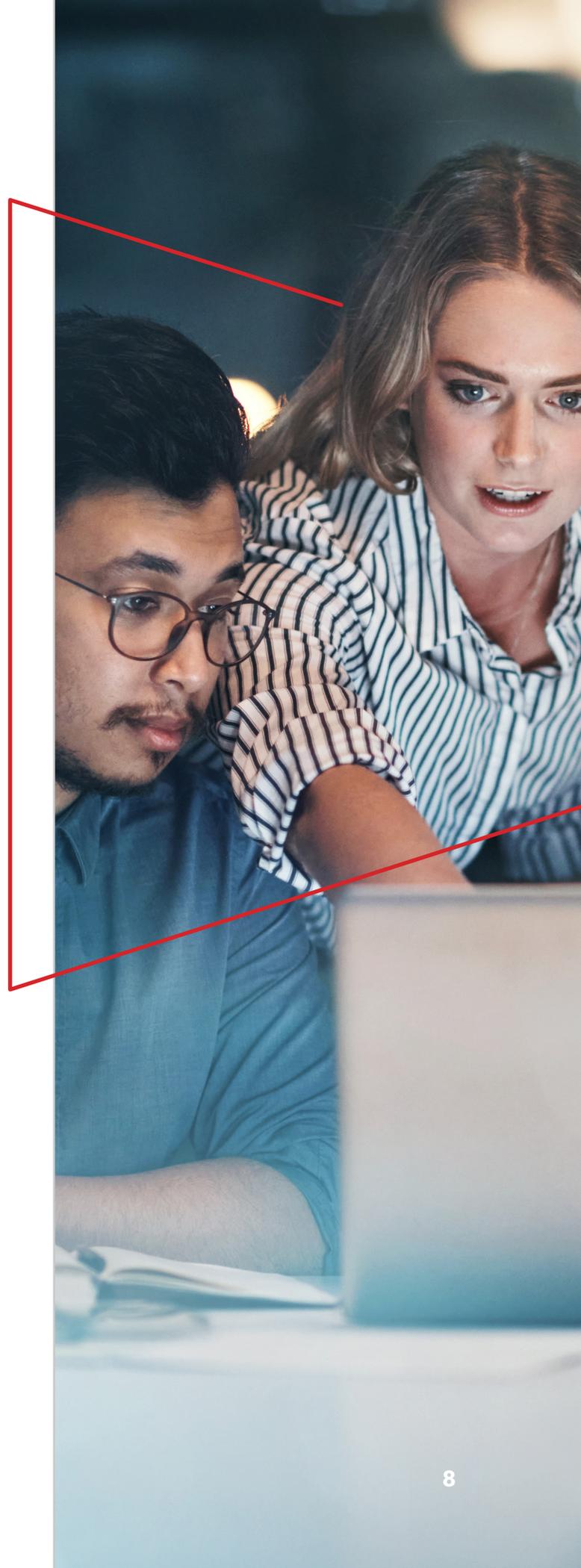
SOLUTIONS FOR DIFFERENT HYBRID SITUATIONS

Because employees are not in the office as regularly as they used to be, several factors concerning safety, public health and accountability may arise. Fortunately, there are innovative technological solutions to alleviate these concerns.

Electronic Office Access

A simple cloud-based office access package with a card reader placed at the front door can record daily entry activity. These readers make attendance data available for easy reporting from anywhere while maintaining control over who can, or cannot, enter your workplace. An electronic door reader, a controller, and access credentials for your staff are all you need. Safer is more accurate and far more convenient than access codes or (gasp) metal keys.

Smart Mobile Office Access (Better!)

For an even smarter office access option, you can easily implement a mobile access solution, where individual access credentials reside on employees' smartphones. There are no keys or cards to lose, forget, or have stolen. The hands-free operation is a real convenience that employees appreciate, and the Bluetooth signal of mobile access is more secure than cards since every signal is individually encrypted. Further, the easy programming of the app enables the flexibility to integrate with future technologies, so your system never gets outdated.

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Cloud-Based Visitor Management

A survey by Entrust found that 96 percent of business leaders and 93 percent of employees want to track visitors who enter and exit the building when employees work in the office. Having a digital visitor management system can help address these concerns and ensure every entry and exit is planned and logged to ensure a safe work environment and protection of valuables and other assets. It can also improve contact tracing should a public health issue arise.

Advanced systems like KastleVisitor® allow staff to register expected visitors by integrating with office calendars like Outlook or Google and providing them with temporary access to the office during a specific window of time. Visitors receive a QR code via email or text message that they scan at entry points to be allowed access to the building or office suite. For unexpected visitors, they can check in at a kiosk upon arrival and create a visitor pass. The visitors are logged in and counted towards total office capacity. This helps track the visitor's time in the office and eliminates staffing for this task.
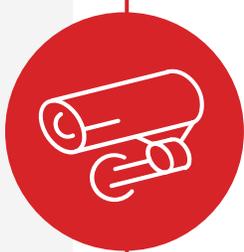
Video Surveillance

Video surveillance provides added security for your employees, particularly those who come to the office during off-hours or on weekends. Cloud-based systems like KastleVideo® enable administrators to remotely view live video streams or quickly search recorded clips of events captured by on-site cameras from a computer or smartphone. These "smart" cameras can be set to alert administrators after hours or working from home to potential intruders or unusual situations. The camera video can also be used to verify access activity, providing a visual record of each entry event occurring at a given access point to ensure the visual identity of an entrant matches the one captured on the credential used. This documents (and deters) any fraudulent entry activity when administrators themselves may be working remotely.

Alternatively, these AI-enabled cameras can also be set to alert Kastle's remote video guarding agents to assess the situation and issue a live audio warning over a loudspeaker to the intruder or quickly call the police if necessary. This provides hybrid-working businesses with live visual protection without the need for on-site staffing security themselves.

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Managing Occupancy Levels

In a hybrid work environment where attendance levels can vary greatly day-to-day, managers should schedule employees strategically to avoid too many in the shared office at one time. For those giving their employees the flexibility to choose their days, having a record of every time a person accesses the office at any point in time can help track occupancy trends.

A cloud-based, remotely managed access system from Kastle allows administrators to monitor the number of employees that enter the office on a particular day. This maintains a running total of entries per day and can alert administrators when they are close to exceeding occupancy levels so they can deny further access to others if necessary, preventing overcrowding of a workspace.

With added readers in shared spaces, such as gyms, or kitchens, a business could configure the mobile access platform to enable employees to check occupancy levels in those spaces before deciding to enter or not to avoid overcrowding.

Further, should a concerning illness be detected, access data history can also aid in fast contact tracing of occupants who may have come into contact with an infected individual.

Kastle's access control data and video surveillance allow managers to see where employees were at any given point. If an individual tests positive in the office, for example, managers can conduct contact tracing by reviewing the video to see with whom that person had interacted and inform them.

Having an updated smart access system helps companies stay ahead of the game and highlights them as forward-thinking and dedicated to employees' safety and well-being. The practice not only retains current employees but is also an attractive feature to potential new recruits who see a company actively embracing the hybrid work model.
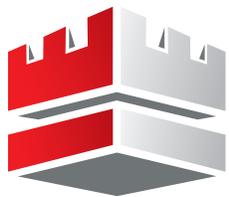
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CONCLUSION

The hybrid office is here to stay. Whether it's in a current office location, a shared co-working space, or a new hub-and-spoke model, employees will be entering the workplace less consistently and less predictably than before the pandemic, so monitoring the identities of on-site occupants at any time will become a more significant challenge. Concerns around securing assets and people, optimizing space use, and managing staff productivity in physical space will surface. Having innovative, smart access or video surveillance solutions provides the visual and data insights necessary to measure and monitor the ongoing transitions between days in and out of the physical office space.

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