



eBook

Back to work

Back to the office: Hybrid working is here to stay

Introduction

Alternating between working in the office and working from home has been the norm in many workplaces in recent years. Organizations have long been familiar with the hybrid work trend, where employees work in the office with flex spaces and alternate between being productive at home and in the office. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this trend and large groups of employees have become accustomed to working remotely for long periods of time. With the relaxation of the measures that had been put in place to combat the pandemic, a new situation is emerging: one fixed 'work from home' day is no longer enough for employees. They expect a greater degree of flexibility and autonomy.

The New World of Work 2.0

Now is the time to follow through and meet employees' needs when it comes to hybrid work, conclude major research and organizational consulting firms such as McKinsey (including in the report, ['It's time for leaders to get real about hybrid'](#)). One question is what 'the new normal' will look like. For example, how many days do employees have to show up at the office? According to McKinsey, the expectations of executives and employees vary. A large proportion of employees say they will look for another job if the employer cannot meet their needs. The question of how many days employees should be in the office is an obvious one, but there are others like it. For example, what types of work are appropriate to perform virtually, remotely? What does effective hybrid conferencing look like? And what are the requirements for the tooling and infrastructure needed to make all this possible?

A growing awareness among employers is that hybrid working is permanent phenomenon and not trend that will blow over. It is therefore wise to look at the concrete design of what we

also call 'The New World of Work 2.0'. Although many companies rushed many of their measures due to the COVID-19 outbreak, now is the time to think about long-term solutions. A workplace that seamlessly combines 'physical' and 'virtual' needs a solid foundation. The U.S. organizational consulting firm Frost & Sullivan lists three pillars for this purpose: the network, cloud-based work, and security.

Effective hybrid working starts with the technical foundation. To facilitate 'Back to Work', it is desirable to take a critical look at the network infrastructure and the other IT resources that must support everything. Consider, for example, the amount of data employees use for applications such as video calls, high-speed connections that enable hybrid working, and the availability of systems. The (corporate) network is the lifeblood of a good hybrid work environment. To be productive in this, employees need access to cloud-based tools that allow them to collaborate and be productive. And last but not least, putting good security measures in place is a prerequisite for ensuring the continuity of all business-critical digital processes.

Considerable challenge for IT and HR

What is the future of work? The fact that many people have been obliged to work from home in recent times has caused them to look differently at what the function of the office means to them. They have also become more critical. [Microsoft's Work Trend Index](#) found that three quarters of employees who have worked from home or hybrid for long periods of time as a result of the lockdown have higher expectations when it comes to flexibility. Four out of every ten employees state they will leave their employer when their manager requires them to return fully to their physical office workplace.

Yet the office also remains important. While international research by real estate consultant CBRE suggests that the majority of companies are trending toward some form of hybrid working, there are also several issues that determine the added value of the office. These are collaboration, employee engagement, and a strong corporate culture. IT and HR will therefore need to work well together to enable employees to work (collaborate) effectively and securely both at home and in the office. Indeed, to make the transition to hybrid working successful, the study calls technology crucial.

Clearly, this is a challenge that involves several departments in an organization. HR looks at the terms of employment, and it's up to IT to set up the digital infrastructure so that everyone can work hybrid satisfactorily. In hybrid working, physical and virtual meeting and conferring take place in combination. Indeed, this is also striking: purely remote working is not the desire of the vast majority of employees.

Working from home offers many advantages, but employees also lack the physical interaction with their colleagues while there. The office is where it all happens: the place where you hear what your colleagues are doing, where you can quickly share ideas, and where achieved successes are immediately visible to everyone. A combination of physical and virtual (collaborative) work is therefore ideal for most employees.



Digital Infrastructure and Hybrid Working

The combination of working from home and from the office places new demands on the digital infrastructure. The use of video applications such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams alone has increased 350 percent since the early 2020s. This is according to research by Frost & Sullivan (report: [‘Look behind the here and now – Plan for long-term hybrid work’](#)). Video has now become the norm and employees expect video meetings of a good quality.

Of course, if all employees communicate in this way, sufficient speed is needed to handle large data volumes. Organizations would do well to consider the flexibility of their network and the ability to upgrade. A well-designed solution takes into account, among other things, peaks in data usage when there are many people in the office on a particular day.

A modern office increasingly facilitates employees in hybrid working. Consider meetings in a variety of spaces, which go by names such as meeting pods, huddle rooms, phone booths, and jump spaces. According to the Frost & Sullivan survey, 36 percent of organizations are investing more in meeting rooms. This is in line with the trend that video conferencing has now become the second-highest IT priority, after cloud migration. Each room has built-in capabilities for virtual collaboration and consultation through video calls. This fully aligns with workflows, which transcend the walls of the office. Employees

work with cloud-based tools that help them to collaborate and be productive. In the process, more and more organizations are using analytics and AI. This includes things like smart cameras and intelligent audio that improve the quality of meetings and measuring user behavior to support (IT) decisions.

All of this would be virtually impossible without reliable and fast internet connections. At the same time, internet access has evolved from ‘need to have’ to ‘must have’. While access to a nationwide fiber optic network is important, the requirements of the average office environment go a lot further in the meantime. This is something every IT department should consider. Desires regarding capacity, but also the products purchased, can change. This must be possible with the party from which an organization purchases services. Think about things like anti-DDoS measures for incoming IP traffic and load sharing, where an organization uses redundant connections simultaneously in a fully redundant configuration (making more capacity available in all scenarios).

Finally, uncontended and non-overbooked access to the internet is essential to have continuous bandwidth. A network must be designed to do this, with reliable and stable connections, so that employees can work efficiently from any office location. By using private peering with the major cloud parties, organizations increase the quality of their internet traffic. This is done through direct connections and the resulting shorter connections and optimized latency with suppliers in the cloud.

Connect directly to the most important clouds

From internet access via an (admittedly lightning-fast) digital infrastructure to more specific requirements, the requirements of a modern organization as a result of hybrid working have changed rapidly. This is especially true for accessing key cloud platforms, which is usually done over the public internet. As cloud services have become more critical, the need for reliable, fast, scalable, and secure connectivity to the cloud has grown.

One phenomenon that any organization with a heavy reliance on the internet must consider is overbooking. This happens when access to the internet, and therefore bandwidth, is shared with several other clients. The result is that individual customers no longer have the entirety of their access capacity at peak times.



Dedicated access is a must-have in that area, to ensure that customer locations are directly connected via dedicated fiber optic access, to the nearest Point of Presence (PoP) on the internet backbone. This dedicated access is then ‘uncontended’ (and not overbooked), providing the best connectivity solution, with high capacity and low latency to the public internet.

Yet, it is also true that the internet in itself is an open network that all users use at the same time. It is therefore advisable to estimate the performance of ISPs based on their SLAs, customer references, and, for example, the capacity table as drawn up by the ACM.

It’s also important to assess the consequences of a failed connection. And to determine, based on that assessment, whether it is wise to set up a redundant connection and thereby assure the organization of high availability of important functions.

Critical to hybrid working, of course, remains accessibility to the cloud platforms, preferably through ISPs that have direct fiber optic connections with the data centers of the providers of the major public cloud platforms. The direct connection ensures stable bandwidths and manageable connection quality. It also ensures that internet access is even more secure. Since data traffic doesn’t detour through the internet on its way to the cloud, it is less susceptible to cyber threats such as DDoS attacks.



Security and connections for multi-site companies

Speed, security, and reliability are all important aspects of the digital infrastructure in hybrid working. Data must remain protected, and it is even more important to ensure the full privacy of users. How do you protect data when employees work outside the company network? It is important to set up and manage security properly for remote employees working from home or elsewhere.

SD-WAN is also a possible solution for companies with multiple locations, whereby the various applications can also be set up optimally in addition to the (encrypted) security of data traffic. With Eurofiber SD-WAN, it is possible to route the most important applications via a fast private network. Data traffic therefore does not go through the public

internet, which has no guarantees about speeds and security levels. However, security and latency are virtually guaranteed through private connections. And when it comes to data communication with an external IP address, like that of a public cloud platform, it can be routed over the internet from the site already. This solution combines the internet and a private network. Finally, SD-WAN enables real-time anticipation of changes in network usage, such as a new application being set up.

It is possible to go one step further for organizations that need maximum data security. This can be done with a full connection over a private network. That connection is completely separate from the public internet and set up with redundant connections. It is a solution for organizations that work with a high amount of privacy-sensitive information, for example.

Hybrid working with Eurofiber

Reliable online business, always accessible at high internet speeds. Eurofiber business internet offers fast and reliable internet via the fiber optic infrastructure. This is a network managed by Eurofiber itself, covering the whole of the Netherlands and Belgium, as well as parts of France and Germany. From efficient browsing and emailing to video calling and working with cloud applications, such as CRM, office, or financial software; everything is done at a high level of security and speed. In addition, the solution is ideal to make your software, platforms, or infrastructure accessible for customers and partners.

Eurofiber internet solutions range from a standard connection to a complex redundant variant for business-critical purposes.

Business internet is available in a variety of standard configurations, bandwidths, and redundancy options. The speeds of the standard internet service range from 50 Mb/s to 10 Gb/s. The connection is up to 10 Gb/s symmetrical, which means that the upload speed is equal to the download speed. So long loading times, buffering, and slow downloads are a thing of the past.

Employees can send files quickly using several devices and work with online applications at the same time. Even if some of the employees work from home. In addition to (lightning) fast internet, numerous additional services are possible, such as anti-DDoS scrubbing for incoming IP traffic, the possibility to share traffic intelligently over redundant connections (load sharing) and to reroute traffic as quickly as possible to a backup link (fast convergence).

Want to know more?

Hybrid working requires networks that are secure and reliable. With a high-quality fiber optic network, Eurofiber is helping numerous organizations to work safely and flexibly (together) in the cloud over fast connections which are future-proof and secure. Interested in learning more about our extensive range of services? Then visit our [website](#) or contact us directly via info@eurofiber.be.