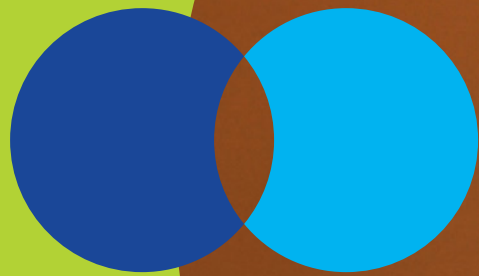


**The Conference
Board of Canada**



Workplaces for the Future

A Playbook for Municipal Leaders on Exploring
Remote, Hybrid, and On-Site Models



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Key Findings

- We interviewed officials in all ten municipalities that make up York Region about their remote work experiences during the pandemic and about their plans for a post-pandemic workplace. Currently, municipalities are reviewing job functions and organizational needs to map out the best way forward, though all of them plan to offer some level of flexible work arrangements to their employees.
- Municipalities are unique in that they operate various lines of business, making it impossible to provide all employees with the same type of remote work options. There are plans to find innovative ways to incorporate flexible work options for all employee groups, including those whose job functions require them to be fully on-site.
- Municipalities used the pandemic as an opportunity to digitize many of their customer service processes, allowing greater accessibility and convenience. Many have started this process and are continuing to focus on leveraging technology to provide the optimal customer experience.
- Change management is vital to build trust with the public and council, as municipalities begin to integrate a new workplace model. Municipalities will need to ensure that all stakeholders are involved in the transition by communicating all of the benefits and considerations for the preferred workplace model.
- The top human resources (HR) impact for a hybrid workplace model is in maintaining and building workplace culture. It is important for municipalities to preserve and continue building their organizational culture in a hybrid or remote environment. To do so, many municipalities are taking measures to encourage social connection and collaboration.
- In a remote or hybrid work environment, developing a modernized performance management strategy that aligns with these work arrangements is key. Performance management focuses on measuring results and assessing accountability rather than compensating employees for the amount of time that they work.
- There is no one-size-fits-all approach for adopting a new workplace model. Organizations should customize the proposed recommendations in this playbook to best suit the unique needs of their employees and business strategies.

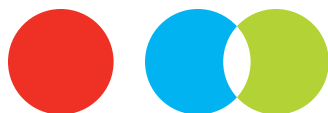


Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented employers with a unique opportunity to reinvent the workplace. For most organizations, the future workplace will likely involve a blend of remote and on-site work.

This impact paper examines the benefits and challenges of fully on-site, fully remote, and hybrid workplace models for the Regional Municipality of York. As most municipalities indicated that they are moving toward a permanent hybrid approach, the impact paper also explores the operational impacts, required policies and procedures, and recommendations that are applicable to a hybrid model.

York Region is made up of nine local municipalities, which are unique and diverse in their geography, economic development, and population. In total, the municipalities employ approximately 14,500 full-time and part-time employees who provide services such as:¹



York Region

- children's services
- court services
- economic development
- forestry
- housing services
- long-term care
- paramedic services
- planning
- police services
- public health
- regional roads
- social assistance
- transit
- waste management
- water

Local Municipalities

- fire
- recreation
- libraries
- business licensing
- bylaw enforcement
- planning
- building
- permits
- local roads
- water distribution
- wastewater collection
- waste collection

Officials of the Region and each of the nine local municipalities were interviewed to learn about their experiences with remote work during the pandemic and to explore their post-pandemic workplace plans. Several of the municipal leaders have undertaken a rigorous process to determine which job functions can be performed effectively in a hybrid or remote work arrangement. All municipalities reported increased employee productivity during the pandemic and noted the potential for enhanced service levels, enabled by technology, for their residents.

The insights in this playbook, although geared primarily to a municipal audience, can benefit all organizations that are planning their next workplace model.

¹ Regional Municipality of York, *2019 to 2023 Strategic Plan: From Vision to Results*, 7.

York Region's Pandemic Shift

Prior to the pandemic, most of York Region's municipal employees worked in a traditional office environment. With the onset of the pandemic, municipalities quickly transitioned many office-based positions to remote work arrangements to adhere to public health orders, while adjusting management styles and strategies to accommodate this change.

Over the past year, municipalities have surveyed their workforce to better understand staff preferences for workplace arrangements moving forward, while ensuring that optimal customer service will be maintained. Table 1 shows the planned distribution of future workplace models adopted for York Region municipalities, based on positions that are eligible for hybrid/remote work.

Positions Conducive to Remote Work

Municipalities recognize that many operational and essential roles still need to be performed on-site. Many leaders have taken steps to assess the level of in-person interaction required for each position to determine which activities could be completed fully or partially remotely.

A commonly cited example of a role that requires an on-site presence is a customer-facing service position. In this case, adjustments could be made to allow staff to rotate on a daily or weekly basis, at management's discretion. In this way, only a portion of the team would be required to be on-site to perform certain aspects of the role that cannot be done remotely, such as receiving mail and serving customers.

Table 1
Projected Employee Breakdown for Future Workplace Plans

York Region municipality	Total number of employees	Per cent hybrid	Per cent remote	Per cent on-site
City of Markham	1,275	45	10	45
City of Richmond Hill	1,770	40	n.a.	60
City of Vaughan	1,322	38*	12*	50*
Regional Municipality of York	4,750	66	n.a.	34
Town of Aurora	340	26	34	40
Town of East Gwillimbury	250	80	n.a.	20
Town of Georgina	300	TBD	TBD	TBD
Town of Newmarket	600	48	3	49
Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville	375	28	40	32
Township of King	185	80	TBD	20

Notes: Employee numbers are estimates from interviews. Town of Georgina's November 2020 employee survey did not ask about workplace models. They have since re-surveyed employees and are waiting for results. Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville had not yet surveyed employees; above data based on current plans.

*breakdown includes 8 per cent TBD

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

Flexibility is a prevalent theme for all municipal positions. Municipalities are looking to provide flexibility even for those positions that require fully on-site performance. For example, a grass-cutting crew may choose to work four 10-hour days rather than five 8-hour days.

The Town of Aurora plans to examine leadership positions of on-site workers, determining that they will have to be seen on-site to carry out a portion of their role. The Town of Aurora CAO, Doug Nadorozny, noted that “directors need to be physically in the building for some degree of the time.”

All municipalities are working to determine the optimal number of days that employees in different roles are required to be on-site; municipalities are considering the implications of different workplace models for customer service, efficiency, and potential cost savings. On average, hybrid employees are expected to be on-site three days per week, with the longest span ranging from three to five days per month on-site.

Future Workplace Models

This playbook considers three different workplace models and presents the benefits and challenges of each from a public sector lens. The workplace models explored are the following:

1. fully on-site workplace model
2. fully remote workplace model
3. hybrid workplace model

There are distinct benefits and challenges associated with each of the three potential workplace models from a multi-stakeholder perspective. The perspective of the municipal employer and its employees is the primary focus of this playbook, with a secondary focus on the perspective of taxpayers.

The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of the Town of Aurora, Doug Nadorozny, stressed that “there may be an opportunity to redefine how the job gets done. They are open to rethinking the way they do their job, not just where they do it from.”

Fully On-Site Workplace Model

Benefits of a Fully On-Site Workplace Model

Please note that many benefits of a fully on-site workplace also apply to a hybrid workplace model.

Team collaboration: Traditional office environments encourage the highest degree of team collaboration. Many of the best decisions and insights come from spontaneous hallway and cafeteria discussions, seeing colleagues in action, and in-person team meetings, which cannot be replicated perfectly in a remote work environment.²

Simpler for management: Scheduling and coordination occur more naturally when all members of a team are working under the same roof. Often, working on-site may also allow employees to connect more quickly with IT support when issues arise, resulting in less down time.³

² Kane and others, “Redesigning the Post-Pandemic Workplace.”

³ Fleig, “Choosing The Correct Working Model Part 1.”

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Employee development opportunities: Working together in person provides employees with opportunities to collaborate with different colleagues and leaders on projects. It also allows senior leaders to have a hands-on approach to skills development and succession planning for those reporting directly to them, leading to increased levels of trust and better performance.

Fostering social connections: On-site workplace models strengthen relationships at a deeper level, which may cause an increase in overall team performance. When all employees are on-site, it is easier to read body language and understand the culture and team dynamics at play, which is particularly critical for new hires who are trying to meet colleagues and understand the workplace culture.



Challenges of a Fully On-site Workplace Model

Retention of top talent: Many employees have grown accustomed to remote work and are looking for flexible workplace arrangements going forward. Municipalities that choose to pursue a fully on-site model, and not offer flexibility, could risk losing out on top talent that will likely be looking to join more progressive organizations.

A Robert Half survey, conducted in March 2021, showed that 63 per cent of Canadian employees would only accept a role that offered flexibility with remote work.⁴

The Deputy Chief Administrative Officer of the Town of Georgina, Ryan Cronsberry, spoke to this and said that “If we don’t stay current and the municipalities around us do, then we stand to lose our staff to those municipalities.”

Reverse digital progress: Municipalities have made significant progress in digitizing their processes and services, an advance that may be diminished if staff return to a fully on-site work arrangement.

4 Wilson, “Wanted: Hybrid Work Model.”

Fully Remote Workplace Model

Please note that many benefits of a fully remote workplace also apply to a hybrid workplace model.

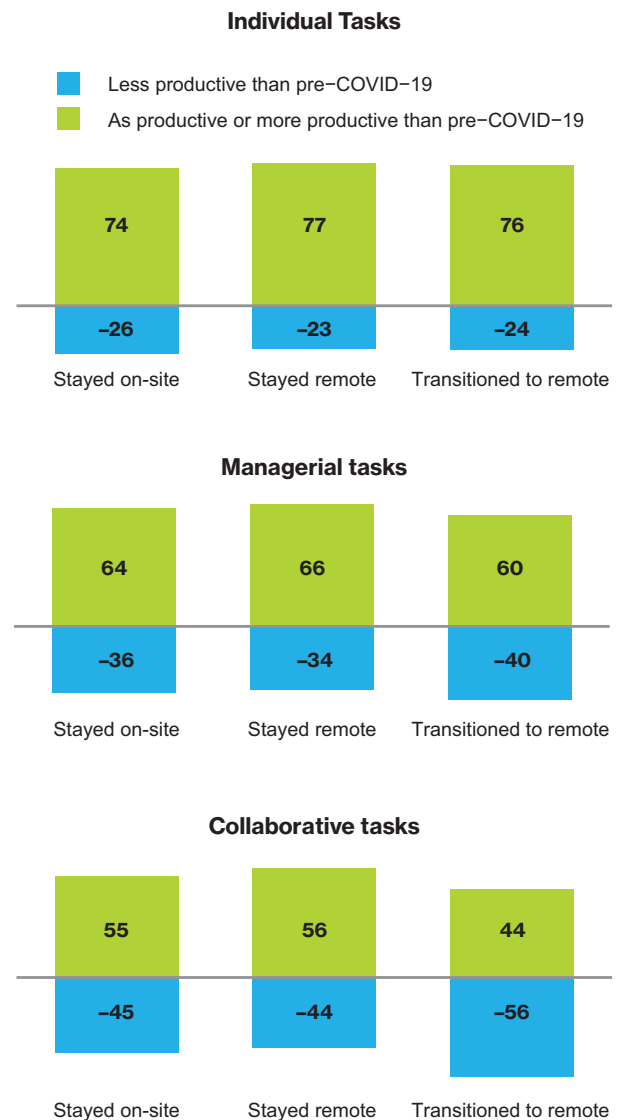
Benefits of a Fully Remote Workplace Model

Increased employee productivity: Remote work allows employees to focus more, as there are fewer interruptions and distractions from colleagues. Employees also save time when they do not have to commute or walk to and from meeting locations, which gives them more time and energy to action out deliverables.

According to a Statistics Canada report, 75 per cent of newly remote employees believe that they have been able to maintain or improve productivity levels for individual tasks, including analyzing data, writing, and carrying out administrative work.⁵ The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) also surveyed newly remote employees on their productivity levels and saw similar results. However, the BCG did note a slight decrease in productivity with managerial tasks and an even greater decrease in productivity with collaborative tasks. (See Chart 1.)

Many York Region municipalities noted an increase in employee productivity levels with remote work. For example, the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville recorded a 50 per cent increase in productivity levels based on services with the same staffing complement.

Chart 1
Productivity Levels Increase With Individual Tasks in a Remote Work Environment
(per cent)



Source: Boston Consulting Group.

5 Statistics Canada, "Working from Home."

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Another success story highlighting increased productivity in a remote working environment was shared by the CAO of the Town of Newmarket, Ian McDougall. During the pandemic, the town's fully remote workforce collaborated with the Council to purchase a large piece of property that will be used to create a central park. This project is the largest capital expenditure ever made by the Town of Newmarket.

Future cost savings: CAOs in York Region's municipalities have echoed the potential for future cost savings with the permanent adoption of remote work, but it is too early to project what the total cost savings would be. The CAOs anticipate that remote work will save costs through reduced real estate, less office maintenance, and a decrease in road work and construction costs due to fewer people commuting.

Improved job satisfaction: Offering employees some level of flexibility with a hybrid or remote workplace model has a positive correlation with perceived autonomy. By offering remote work options, employers will likely see an improvement in the overall employee job satisfaction in their organization.⁶

Better work-life balance: Many municipal leaders highlighted the benefit of being able to attend family appointments or other urgent personal engagements and still have the flexibility to join a virtual meeting or to work altered hours, if needed. With traditional on-site work, employees would expect to take half a day off to fulfill their personal responsibilities.

Expanded talent and diversity in recruitment

pools: Employers who adopt hybrid or remote work arrangements will have the opportunity to expand their talent pool geographically, which is helpful for accessing in-demand skills that may be in short supply within the current hiring radius.

Employers have a responsibility to provide an accessible workplace, whether on-site or remote. The implementation of a remote work arrangement may make employment opportunities more accessible for persons with disabilities and shine a spotlight on what employees with disabilities can do rather than how they fit into a traditional workplace.⁷

Offering some type of remote work opportunities can potentially increase the applicant pools, making it more possible for employers to hire workers with disabilities. Please note that this option may be limited to working within the province due to WSIB and legal implications.

Challenges of a Fully Remote Workplace Model

Not all employees thrive: Procrastination tendencies can be exacerbated in a remote work environment, as poor performers may not have the discipline to self-direct their work.⁸ The City of Richmond Hill is in the process of rolling out a refined performance management system to better support a remote workplace model.

6 Dahik and others, "What 12,000 Employees Have to Say About the Future of Remote Work."

7 Schur, Ameri, and Kruse, "Telework After COVID: A 'Silver Lining' for Workers With Disabilities?"

8 Wang and others, "Achieving Effective Remote Working During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Work Design Perspective."

Trust and relationships can weaken:

Regular in-person interactions can strengthen commitment, support, and cooperation among team members. The limited body language visible in virtual meetings may trigger misinterpretation and diminish trust levels.

New hires experience a longer learning curve:

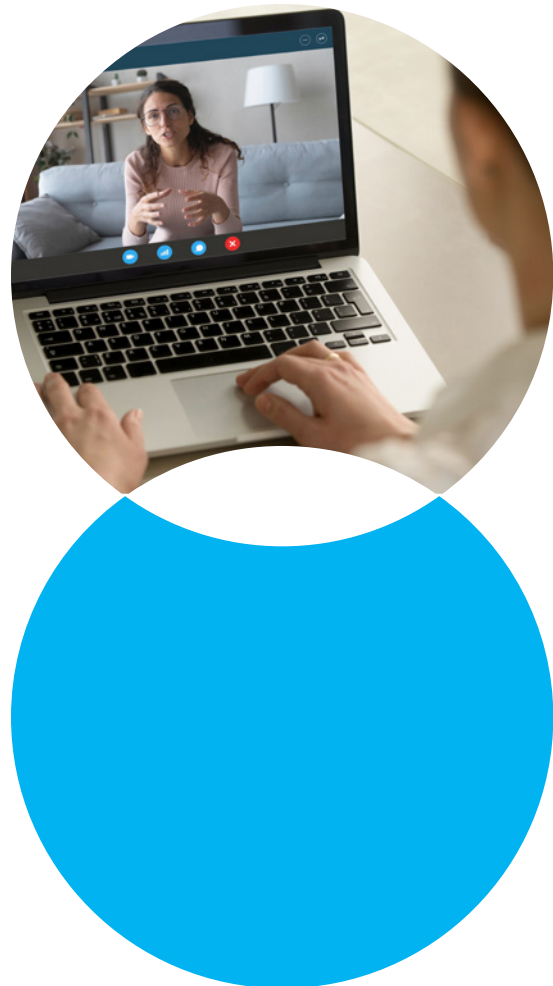
New hires who were brought on board remotely during the pandemic experienced a greater organizational learning curve⁹ as they are not able to ask questions to nearby colleagues. Any questions have to be asked by email or text, which may result in increased response time.

Long-term implications for career

development: For less experienced talent, on-site work arrangements are particularly important for mentoring, coaching, and skills development. Over time, junior employees may be negatively impacted by working fully remotely, as they will have fewer opportunities to be considered in succession planning and to participate in professional development.

Social isolation: Virtual meetings tend to be more task-focused than relationship-focused, which can cause employees to feel less connected to their colleagues.¹⁰ The social isolation associated with remote work can lead to loneliness and higher stress levels, which may have implications for relationship building at work and which can diminish employees' mental health.

Maintaining work–life boundaries: In a remote work environment, many struggle to separate work and their personal lives. Many employees cannot physically distance themselves from their workspace, and some feel pressure to be always available, which can lead to exhaustion and burnout. To help manage employee expectations, leaders could provide clarity on expected response times and allow flexible work hours.



9 Dhawan, "How to Adapt Your Workplace Habits to the Era of Hybrid Work."

10 Wang and others, "Achieving Effective Remote Working During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Work Design Perspective."

**“Be bold. Be progressive.
Seize the opportunity in front of us.”**

Rob Adams, CAO, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville



Hybrid Workplace Model

A hybrid workplace model is defined as a flexible workplace arrangement that includes both in-office and remote work. Many of the advantages of a fully remote workplace model, listed above, also apply to a hybrid model. Below are the benefits and challenges that are specific to hybrid work arrangements.

Benefits of a Hybrid Workplace Model

Acceleration of technology: The pandemic served as a catalyst for the greater use of technology and the digitization of many processes. Municipalities see this digital transformation as an opportunity to move more services online in order to enhance service quality, increase accessibility for the public, and provide more flexibility to their customer-focused strategy.

The City of Richmond Hill has digitized 39 services since the start of the pandemic. The City of Vaughan has also begun digitizing some of its offerings; for example, citizens can now order blue bins online with curbside delivery. The CAO of the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, Rob Adams, noted the town's plans to launch a new online application that will provide the public with direct information on services, including booking recreational space, reporting potholes, or making payments.

Additionally, all municipalities have seen an increase in public attendance at council meetings due to virtual offerings.

Shared workspaces: Hybrid work models commonly use shared workspaces, which are desks that are shared by many people at different times. Essentially, the workstation is static, and the occupants are dynamic, but no one has an assigned office or seat. Shared office layouts can be designed to facilitate unstructured collaboration and communication within and across teams. For this structure to work efficiently, organizations must plan for different cohorts of employees to work in the office on different days so that there is sufficient seating for everyone.

Social connection: Combining on-site and off-site work arrangements will help combat virtual meeting fatigue while reducing the loneliness and isolation that many experience while working remotely. A hybrid workplace model may support mental health and wellness for employees as they are able to socialize on-site without losing workplace flexibility.

Reduction of office space: With the implementation of a hybrid work model, organizations can revisit the layout of their office and reduce office space. This could save an average of 30 per cent of real estate costs due to less space and therefore less maintenance needed.¹¹

The City of Richmond Hill has already redesigned its office building, reconfiguring the ground floor for a customer service area, adding a place to rent out to office workers from other organizations as well as shared spaces. This redesign has freed up two floors, providing the City of Richmond Hill with an opportunity to rent out space and bring in operational cost savings.

11 de Lucas Ancillo, del Val Núñez, and Gavrila, "Workplace Change Within the COVID-19 Context: A Grounded Theory Approach."

Another example of cost savings due to reduced office space is the City of Toronto, which has officially announced that it is moving to a permanent hybrid workplace model. Currently, the city spends nearly \$116 million annually on office space. This cost is anticipated to drop to \$85 million per year once the transition is complete.¹²

Challenges of a Hybrid Workplace Model

Scheduling and coordination: Hybrid workplace models can be more challenging in terms of scheduling and coordination of team members. For example, managing schedules for customer-facing job functions will require additional planning within and across teams.

Employee inclusivity: For hybrid workplaces, leaders will need to be mindful about including remote team members when holding on-site meetings by ensuring that all employees, whether working on-site or remotely, have the opportunity to speak and engage.

One best practice to be more inclusive and promote participation in hybrid workplace meetings is to have all participating employees, even those on-site, dial into the call individually through Microsoft Teams or another platform. Another tool to support employee engagement between two work settings is “Stormboard,” an online whiteboard and team-collaboration software that helps maximize virtual teamwork.

The Hybrid Work Model Is a Leading Trend

Many of York Region’s municipalities are considering the adoption of a permanent hybrid workplace model, primarily as a means of optimizing service delivery. This section will explore key operational impacts associated with this change, presenting suggested policies and procedures, stakeholder considerations, and recommendations to help facilitate the transition to this model.

Top Human Resources Responsibilities of a Hybrid Workplace Model

Human resources departments (HR) have played a critical role in setting employees up for success in a remote work environment. They will continue to be a vital piece, as many municipalities plan to transition into a hybrid workplace model.

From a human capital perspective, the following are the Regional Municipality of York’s top anticipated responsibilities of a hybrid workplace model.

Protecting and Evolving the Workplace Culture

The preservation of workplace culture was the top responsibility of a hybrid workplace model. Historically, workplace culture has been strengthened through on-site observations such as office design, dress code, visual art, and norms around culture expectations that are informally communicated on-site.

¹² Dunne, “City of Toronto Pivoting to Permanent Hybrid Work Model.”

Municipalities have a strong desire to maintain their close-knit culture while being open to evolving their culture in a hybrid lens. Many anticipate that a new type of culture will emerge by combining elements from the original on-site culture and adding new features that come with remote work. These elements include the following:

- weaving culture through organizational communication;
- senior leaders emphasizing the importance of culture and articulating its values;
- building an employer brand that highlights the reasons that employees choose to work at the organization;
- tapping into employees' passions and interests through launching programs like diversity-based resource groups, corporate volunteer initiatives, and wellness programs.¹³

The Chief Administrative Officer at the Township of King, Daniel Kostopoulos, stated that “if you take care of your employees, the more likely they will take care of our citizens and create a healthy workplace culture.”

Even in a hybrid work environment, there are initiatives that can be implemented to build and strengthen workplace culture. The City of Richmond Hill has organized virtual town halls for their remote workers to allow colleagues to get to know each other better. Activities include the following:

- asking their colleagues interesting questions to gain a better understanding of who they are outside of work hours;
- staff members sharing photos of their remote workspace and having their colleagues attempt to match each workspace to the correct person.

Reimagining Performance Management and Leadership Skills

Performance reviews in a hybrid work environment are well-suited to ongoing communication and key performance indicators (KPIs) with dashboards. HR leaders also plan to offer management training for leaders in a virtual work environment.



13 Baskin, “Preserving Culture in a Hybrid Work Environment.”

Evolving Leadership Capability

Municipalities emphasized the need to support evolving leadership skills because the “command and control” traditional leadership model will not lend itself well to a hybrid workplace model. The City of Markham’s Chief Administrative Officer, Andy Taylor, noted that “if employees feel they need to be seen on-site by their managers to develop in the organization, then a hybrid workplace model will never work.”

An effective management style in a hybrid workplace model is to utilize leadership potential within the team and distribute responsibilities and ownership of projects. A manager who can delegate and create roadmaps to achieving goals will motivate the team and create a sense of equality and ownership for individual team members.¹⁴

Trust Is a Critical Leadership Quality

Municipal leaders believe that trust is key to a successful hybrid workplace arrangement, as it creates psychological safety, accountability, and a feeling of equity.¹⁵ Managers can build trust by communicating openly, using motivating and positive language, and focusing on sharing information rather than micromanaging. Leaders in a hybrid workplace model need to break down the “digital divide” that remote work often creates by reaching out to employees on a regular basis to check in.

The Executive Director of Human Resources for the Regional Municipality of York, Sharon Kennedy, highlighted the fact that “with remote and hybrid work comes accountability; it is not an entitlement. The ways that we work collegially and across departments will need to be maintained.”

It is key that municipalities train their leaders to encourage emotional engagement in a virtual environment. Opportunities to engage employees remotely can be created through micro connections. Reaching out to colleagues for informal quick check-ins, remote coaching, or virtual development sessions can play a role in building trust and rapport.

Proactive Outreach and Ongoing Communication

Proactive outreach and ongoing communication will be necessary for a successful long-term hybrid workplace model. Proactive outreach involves seeking opportunities for social connection by informally communicating in a remote work setting.

Many employees have experienced a tremendous spike in email during the pandemic. Management can act as technology enablers to encourage expectations around the use of virtual meetings, text, email, and other channels to improve communication. Managers can also introduce innovative ways to deliver information and optimize communication through various communication channels including Slack, Asana, and Microsoft Teams Chat.

14 Dirani and others, “Leadership Competencies and the Essential Role of Human Resource Development in Times of Crisis: A Response to Covid-19 Pandemic.”

15 Julka, “In the Workplace: Trust Will Be Imperative in Hybrid Work Models.”

New Talent Management Practices

Hybrid workplaces present fewer unplanned opportunities for coaching and mentoring compared with on-site work. If employees do not receive regular feedback and coaching to develop their skills, this can negatively affect their skill development and growth, which may have negative impacts for talent management in the long term.

The importance of offering flexible workplace models for recruitment and retention of top talent was also emphasized by all municipalities. The CAO of the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, Rob Adams, noticed that strong candidates have started to ask for flexible work arrangements before accepting an employment offer, with most declining offers that did not provide flexibility.

Mental Health and Employee Wellness

With an increased proportion of the workforce working remotely, mental health and wellness has become a top priority for York Region's municipalities. Some initiatives that municipalities have implemented include the following:

- The City of Richmond Hill plans to launch a new wellness platform in October 2021 that will seek to improve the mental health and wellness of both on-site and remote workers.
- The Town of Georgina has introduced a new application called Better U, which includes a monthly bulletin for staff with resources on mental health and wellness, links to the town's insurance plan, and its employment assistance program.
- The Town of Georgina offers virtual yoga once per week for all staff and their family members.

Operational Impacts of a Hybrid Model

Chief administrative officers across York Region's municipalities have indicated that information technology and cybersecurity, real estate space requirements, potential cost savings, transportation and greenhouse gas reduction, and productivity implications are the top-of-mind operational impacts associated with moving to a hybrid work arrangement.

Digital Transformation

Municipalities have seen significant improvements in their customer services due to the digitization of their services. This digital transformation has had a positive operational impact, as the enhanced service delivery has optimized the customer experience. As municipalities continue to transform processes driven by technology, it will be important to identify service-level expectations and communicate them to staff, council, and the public.

Change Management

To transition to a hybrid workplace model successfully, municipal employees, council members, and the general community must buy into the plan and recognize its effectiveness. To achieve this, it is important for each municipality to communicate the value that it brings for taxpayer dollars, provide regular productivity metrics, and demonstrate increased quality of community services with all stakeholders on a regular basis.

Office Layout

In a hybrid environment, organizations are encouraged to redesign their office space to optimize the number of employee interactions that take place.¹⁶ Some of York Region's municipalities have transformed their city/town hall to provide public-facing services, while others envision the city/town hall as a meeting space for the community. One municipality is realigning its offices to create "departmental neighbourhoods," which will maintain a sense of community among the branches and teams that work there without providing assigned workspaces.

Reduction of Carbon Gases

The Town of Aurora saw a significant decrease in road traffic and a notable reduction in carbon gas emissions with the increase in remote work. From 2019–2020, the town reported the following transportation-related metrics:

- cycling travel increased by 91 per cent;
- bus travel decreased by 44 per cent;
- passenger vehicle travel decreased by 35 per cent;
- walking travel increased by 39 per cent.¹⁷

Policies and Procedures

Many municipalities are revisiting their policies and processes using a hybrid workplace lens. Research has suggested that many employers are re-examining the workplace policies on the following:

- vaccines
- flexible work arrangements
- home office expense reimbursement
- performance management
- total rewards
- IT
- sick days

Revision of IT Policies

Municipalities should re-examine their IT policies to ensure that borrowed equipment, including laptops and phones, is being used safely and appropriately in a remote environment.



¹⁶ Galea, "Who Is Most Desperate to Return to the Office? Age Plays a Major Factor."

¹⁷ The data come from the Town of Aurora from Google's EIE (Environmental Insights Explorer). EIE is based primarily on the same underlying information that is made available in Google Maps. The data in EIE are anonymous, highly aggregated, and combined with other data sources to create useful environmental insights. The data sources include, for example: aggregated location history data, building outlines and types, and overhead imagery. All these sources are used primarily to help users find and discover the world in Google Maps, but they also contain useful information for taking action toward a low-carbon future when aggregated on a city scale.

To maximize cyber safety and better prevent potential cyber attacks, it is in the employers' best interest to provide their staff with IT equipment instead of expecting staff to use personal equipment.

Policies for Home Office Expense Reimbursement

Municipalities seek to take a clear position on what qualifies for home office expense reimbursement. The Canadian *Income Tax Act* allows a taxpayer to deduct the cost of office supplies and a portion of the costs related to home office equipment, provided that the following rules are observed:

- supplies are used for work purposes;
- the employee maintains a home office workspace and pays their own office expenses;
- home office expenses are not reimbursed by their employer;
- no home office allowance was provided.¹⁸



Policies for Flexible Work Arrangements

Several municipalities have developed flexible work arrangement policies to boost employee engagement. Over the course of the pandemic, many have adjusted their policies to allow flexibility for all positions that have the capacity to work from home.

Flexible work arrangement policies will need to clearly outline what equipment will be provided by the municipality (to be returned at the end of employment), such as laptops, printers, ergonomic chairs, phones, mice, docking stations, and wireless headsets.

Loaning equipment rather than providing a home-office reimbursement allowance for remote eligible positions may mitigate any perceived inequity that may foster division between fully on-site employees and hybrid staff.

Stakeholder Considerations When Adopting a Hybrid Model

Engaging with stakeholders to understand their concerns and perspectives will be key to successfully transitioning to a hybrid work model. For York Region's municipalities, key stakeholder groups include taxpayers, union executives, employees, councils, and the senior leadership team.

¹⁸ Johnson, *Tax Implications of Working From Home During COVID-19: Employer FAQs*.

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There is the potential for a divide between employees in positions suited for hybrid or remote workplace arrangements versus employees in roles that are not operationally feasible for hybrid or remote work. Additional flexible options for on-site staff should be communicated appropriately.

Public Impact of Transformation of Services

Municipalities are funded largely by tax dollars and therefore experience a higher level of public scrutiny. City employees, particularly in smaller communities, have received complaints from the public for running errands during business hours, even when using their personal vacation days.

Municipalities agree that there has been no detrimental public impact from the shift to remote work. The digital transformation of services provides value to the public, as online accessibility is more convenient and efficient for many customers. Shifting to a hybrid plan will allow individuals who prefer to access municipal services in person to do so, while maintaining flexibility for employees.

Union Impact of Hybrid Workplace

A union's top priority is to ensure equity among all their members. HR leaders have yet to experience any union resistance to a potential hybrid workplace arrangement. Thus far, partnering unions have been supportive of current workplace arrangements due to the health and safety precautions surrounding those decisions. However, as we transition out of the pandemic,

municipalities worry that their partnering unions may raise concerns about a permanent hybrid workplace model because it does not offer equal remote/on-site opportunities for all employees.

Municipalities plan to offer some form of flexibility for all staff. For example, grass cutters could choose to work four 10-hour days instead of five 8-hour days.

Council Perceptions and Impact

Several municipalities stated that some of their councillors have expressed strong preferences for returning to working fully on-site. As such, it is key for municipalities to get their council members' support for a transition to a hybrid workplace by demonstrating elevated productivity levels and emphasizing the value of being a progressive employer.

Recommendations for Transitioning to a Hybrid Model

Based on best practices, the following are some suggested recommendations when transitioning to a hybrid workplace model. For toolkits and further resources for implementing a hybrid workplace model, please see Appendix D.

Communicate Vaccine Policy and Expectations Regarding Antigen Testing

On August 17, 2021, the Province of Ontario mandated a vaccine policy for high-risk industries including hospitals, nursing homes, and care service providers. Organizations that require a vaccine policy must have one implemented by September 7, 2021. Employees will need to provide proof of full vaccination or medical documents that exempt them from being vaccinated.¹⁹

All York Region municipalities have implemented mandatory vaccination policies that will help keep the public and their staff safe.

Embrace the Opportunity to Redefine Workplace Culture

Transitioning to a hybrid workplace model will provide municipalities with an opportunity to redefine their workplace culture. Transparency and clear communication when redefining workplace values and culture will give employees a sense of excitement and a renewed purpose. It is imperative that leaders collaborate with their employees on how to build and contribute to a new workplace culture in order to encourage employee engagement.

- Reconsider and update company values to align with hybrid workplace conditions.
- Recognize that the workplace will be everchanging.
- Maintain strong relationships and cross-functional team collaboration as a top priority through redefined company values.

Focus on Key Performance Indicators and Employee Accountability

Those planning to transition to a workplace model that incorporates remote work should consider a paradigm shift on what performance means and how it will be measured going forward.

- Define key performance indicators for each position.
- Consider opting out of the traditional annual performance review and opt for more regular performance evaluations.
- Adopt a Results-Only Work Environment (ROWE) that measures performance based on results and deliverables rather than on time worked.

Enhance Your Digital Transformation Strategy

Continuing to enhance, update, and modernize customer services is important for the success of a hybrid workplace model. A digital transformation strategy needs to consider requirements for the IT infrastructure, cyber security, digital skills development, workforce planning, digitizing processes, and the biggest opportunities for service automation.

- Digitize services that are of primary interest to the public such as online self-serve for recreational bookings, ordering blue bins, accepting job applications, development and building applications, and paying taxes.
- Introduce digital software platforms such as EngagementHQ to increase community engagement.

19 Province of Ontario, "Ontario Makes COVID-19 Vaccination Policies Mandatory for High-Risk Settings."

The Conference Board of Canada

- Provide training for staff on new technologies and digital processes.
- Consider hiring additional application support and information technology staff to support remote workers.

Incorporate Different Forms of Flexibility

Municipalities are unique in that they provide different blends of services, making it impossible to provide all employees with the same type of remote work options. Some job functions require on-site performance, and so it is vital to incorporate different forms of flexibility that will also benefit those employee groups. The municipalities interviewed expressed a desire to take a flexible approach that is not overly regimented, while balancing operational needs for the business to remain successful.

- Offer flexible work options to employees in roles ineligible for hybrid work.
- Communicate the criteria for eligible remote and hybrid positions.
- Fully leverage technology to automate certain activities in each role and redesign roles based on efficiency gains.



Communicate Expectations About Residence

Municipalities should establish policies that indicate whether employees, depending on their roles and responsibilities, must live within a certain radius of the main office. Perhaps only those working in fully remote positions would have the flexibility to work anywhere within the province.

- A hybrid workplace policy needs to communicate the geographical radius from the on-site workplace where it is permissible for an employee to reside.
- Employees in all positions must know whether they are permitted to move further away within the same province or to move anywhere within Canada, so long as they adhere to established work hours.

Be Proactive in Engaging Stakeholders

Municipalities need to be proactive in engaging key stakeholders, including taxpayers, unions, and the council, as part of the change process. A communication strategy with key messages for all stakeholder groups should be developed prior to, and upon re-entry to, the on-site workplace.

- Perform proactive outreach through impromptu calls or reach out to forge social connections with key stakeholders.
- Human resources can require leaders to include an approach to sustain social connections and collaborations in their engagement plan.
- Create a change management strategy to communicate benefits for each audience group to increase trust and adapt the communication for key audiences such as citizens, councillors, and unions.

- Encourage the use of various technology platforms for employee engagement, such as Google Hangout Rooms, Slack channels, Asana, and Microsoft Teams.

Coach Management on New Leadership Skills

For leaders who have spent years managing in an office setting, the change to a hybrid workplace model will come with challenges and uncertainties. Leaders should be provided with training and coaching to learn how to create culture and lead virtually.

Professional coaches can be brought in to support senior leaders who are learning to lead effectively in the new hybrid workplace. This coaching may address topics such as creating emotional engagement with employees remotely through the expression of empathy, or how to coach and mentor staff remotely.

- Train leaders how to carry out performance management remotely and how to communicate/manage remotely.

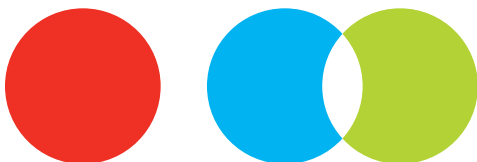
- Have health and wellness values as role models and have leaders encourage employee participation in mental health and wellness programs.
- Make time for personal conversations at the start of each meeting so colleagues feel comfortable taking the time to get to know one another.

Embrace the Opportunity in Front of Us

The pandemic has created a unique opportunity to rethink the workplace. It is important to recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to implementing a hybrid workplace model. Organizations that are considering transitioning to hybrid work arrangements should customize the recommendations to best suit the unique needs of their employees and business strategy. Although many factors need to be considered, it is to the benefit of the employers that they offer some form of flexibility for employees.

“We now have an opportunity to look at how we could be more effective as an organization. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us how effective we can be while working remotely and has given us the chance to drive change in a positive way moving forward.”

Christine Gianino, Chief Human Resources Officer of the City of Vaughan



Appendix A

Methodology

This project followed a multi-step process, including interviews with municipal leaders, a comprehensive literature review, and the formulation of recommendations for implementation.

The Conference Board of Canada conducted semi-structured interviews with officials in York Region and its nine local municipalities. Interviews were held with chief administrative officers/city managers and human resources leaders within each municipality. Interview data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis (NVivo) software to identify overarching themes for future workplace models.



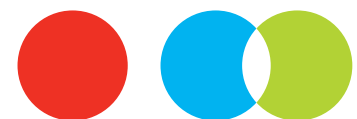
Appendix B

Interview Participants

Interview participants included chief administrative officers and HR leaders from the following York Region municipalities in the province of Ontario, Canada.

Municipalities

- Town of Aurora
 - Doug Nadorozny, CAO
 - Demetre Rigakos, Manager, Human Resources
- Town of Georgina
 - Ryan Cronsberry, Deputy CAO
 - Beverley Moffatt, Director, Human Resources Services
- Regional Municipality of York
 - Bruce Macgregor, CAO
 - Sharon Kennedy, Executive Director, Human Resources
- City of Richmond Hill
 - Darlene Joslin, City Manager (Acting)
 - Cathy Treacy, Director, Human Resources
- Township of King
 - Daniel Kostopoulos, CAO
 - Jodi Mancini, Acting Manager of Human Resources
- City of Markham
 - Andy Taylor, CAO
 - Claudia Storto, City Solicitor and Director of Human Resources
- City of Vaughan
 - Nick Spensieri, City Manager
 - Christine Gianino, Chief Human Resources Officer
- Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville
 - Rob Adams, CAO
 - Claudette Banks, Human Resources Manager
- Town of East Gwillimbury
 - Mark Valcic, Deputy CAO
 - Michelle Collette, Director of Human Resources
- Town of Newmarket
 - Ian McDougall, CAO
 - Lynn Georgeff, Director, Human Resources



Appendix C

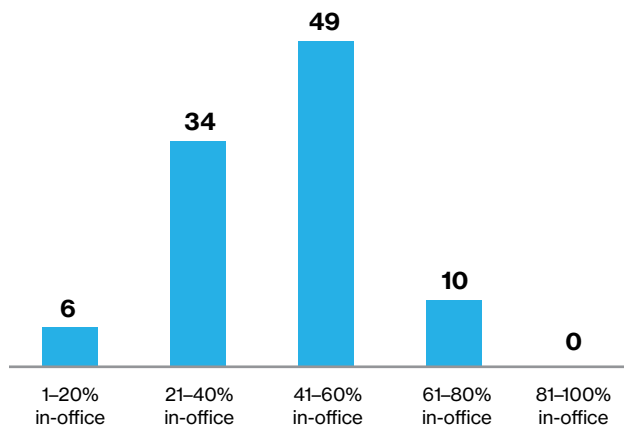
Relevant Graphs and Information

In May 2021, The Conference Board of Canada surveyed 236 organizations on their future workplace plans. The survey found that, on average, organizations expected their hybrid employees to be in the office for half of the time. (See Chart 1.) Whether that is measured over the course of a week, month, or year differs by employer.

Chart 1

Q: For hybrid employees, please specify the amount of time employees will be required to work in-office.

(n = 67; percentage of time in-office)



Note: Total does not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

Industry Variation on the Adoption of a Hybrid Workplace Model

Many Canadian employers have announced their plans to increase flexibility in workplace arrangements for employees as part of their future workplace model. The big banks in Canada have committed to plans that embed this flexibility. TD Canada Trust plans to continue work-life flexibility where possible. It anticipates that “most roles will require some presence in the office, in order to foster collaboration, innovation and strengthening of our culture.”¹ Ford Motor Company has taken a firm hybrid position, allowing over 30,000 employees to continue working remotely with the option to utilize office space as needed.

There is variation across provincial regions in terms of return-to-work plans, with a greater proportion of employers in Ontario and Quebec leaning toward hybrid/remote options. However, out west, the City of Kelowna, B.C., is planning to have most of its workforce return to the office.²

1 Evans, “Here’s What Canada’s Business Leaders Think About Heading Back to the Office.”

2 McCoy, “Will Working From Home Continue in the Post COVID-19 Municipal Workforce?”

Based on a report from Sage, over three-quarters (76 per cent) of Canadian employers plan to offer remote work options within a hybrid model. Transitioning to a hybrid model varies by industry. Eighty-five per cent of employers in the knowledge and professional services sector plan to adopt a hybrid workplace model, followed by the industrial and natural resources industry (73 per cent), public and not-for-profit sector (72 per cent), and retail industries (66 per cent).

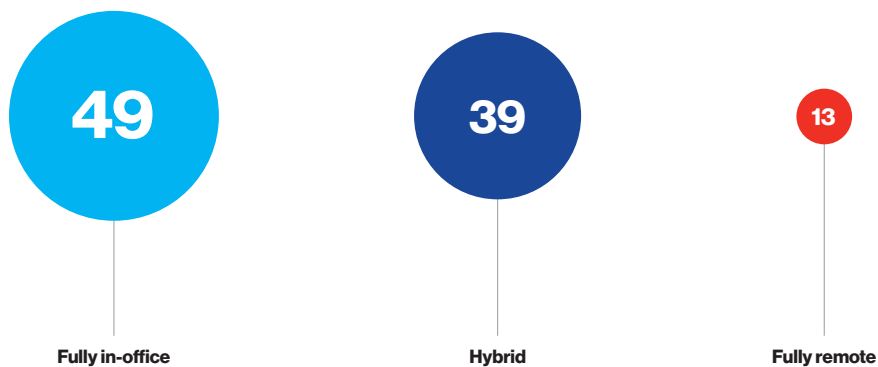
In May 2021, The Conference Board of Canada conducted a survey on plans for future workplace models. Survey results highlighted that the average organization would have 39 per cent of its workforce in a hybrid workplace arrangement once the vaccine rollout is complete. (See Exhibit 1).³

In-office work will still be common

Exhibit 1

Q: Post-vaccine rollout, what proportion of your workforce do you anticipate will be fully in-office, hybrid, or fully remote?

(n = 236; percentage of employees)



Note: Total does not add to 100 due to rounding.
Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

3 Conference Board of Canada, The. *Working Through COVID-19: The Next Normal*.

Appendix D

Resources for Transitioning to Remote and Hybrid Workplaces

The website resources listed below contain templates for remote and hybrid workplaces:

1. **2021 Toolkit: Managing Hybrid and Remote Teams** (intellihr.ca)
 - Managing hybrid and remote teams ebook
 - Quick guide to mental health and wellbeing
 - 1:1 Manager-team check in template
 - Goal setting template
 - Remote onboarding checklist
 - Project retrospective template
 - Psychological safety exercise
2. **Tools and Resources | Harvard Human Resources**
 - Leading and Managing in a Hybrid Work Environment Toolkit
 - Managing Remotely Toolkit
 - Team Effectiveness Toolkit
 - Performance Management for Managers Tip Sheet for 2021
 - Diversity, Inclusion, Belonging and Equity Toolkit
 - Change Leadership Toolkit
3. **City of Vancouver Remote and Flexible Work Toolkit for Employers**
 - Manager Tips
 - Sample Staff Survey
 - Sample Remote Work Policy
 - Sample Employee Remote Work Agreement
 - Sample Program Evaluation Survey
4. **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Work Succeeding Toolkit for Managers**
 - Work Decisions and Design
 - Work Planning Protocols
 - Technology and Equipment
 - Culture, Well-Being, and Inclusion
 - Communication and Collaboration
 - Performance Management

Appendix E

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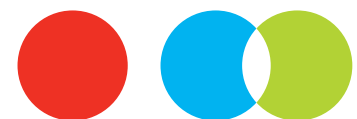
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Susan Power, Natalie Arruda, and Liz Marcil

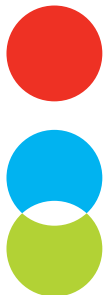
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