RECRUIT, RETAIN AND GROW — THE IMPORTANCE OF MEETING EQUALITY TO LONG-TERM HYBRID WORK STRATEGIES

Executive Summary

Organizations that want to drive growth must accept a simple fact – hybrid working is here to stay.

Giving employees the freedom and the tools to mix being in the office with working remotely was already on the agenda: but it took overnight decisions taken by governments across the world to put it instantly to the test, and on a global scale.

Initially, short-term business continuity was the goal for many. Yet here we are, two years later. By now, we need to accept that things are not going to just snap back. And even if we do, anything could still happen. A new variant or another unpredictable challenge could come and throw the world into turmoil once more. So even if you are a business that does not intend to enable hybrid working in the long-term, you must still be capable of making the switch at a moment's notice. Planning to be agile and prepared is essential and having a strategy for enabling hybrid working is a business imperative.

Why is this so important? The hybrid work environment opens new opportunities for organizations. Companies that embrace the shift can evolve their company culture. They can improve accessibility for all. They can transform customers interactions. For hybrid to be successful, all employees must be able to engage and participate on an equal basis.

Hybrid work can also be key in securing and retaining the best talent. One unintended consequence of the pandemic has been the sharp rise in employees leaving their jobs – a trend referred to by professor Anthony Klotz as The Great Resignation – which has compounded the skills shortages that already existed across many industries. While some of this is driven by pandemic-induced soul searching, organizations' handling of the pandemic and the shift to hybrid work has also had an enormous impact. It's evident that without a long-term hybrid work strategy, organizations will struggle to retain and attract talent.

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This report, based on a comprehensive study of 2,528 global business decision makers from December 2021 to February 2022, examines how prepared organizations are for the future of work — looking at everything from recruitment and retention to hybrid strategy, workforce and wellness.

The report also raises key questions. What does work mean today? What is the future of work? How can the mix between office and home/remote working be managed? What does this mean for office design and what technology is required to deliver meeting equality?

Answering these questions in the months ahead will be pivotal because organizations are more powerful when they work as one.

At a Glance – The Outlook

72% **of organizations**
saw an increase in productivity as a result of remote/hybrid working

77% **of organizations**
plan to rethink or redesign the office for new ways of working

3 the average number of days employees are being asked to **visit the office**

At a Glance – The Challenges

37% **of organizations**
are only prepared for hybrid work in the short term

55% **of organizations**
say The Great Resignation, combined with the skills shortage, could put them out of business

67% **of organizations**
say they have a 'moral duty' to protect employees from working too much, but only half have taken steps to address this

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Recruitment and Retention

More than half of organizations report an increase in resignations, while also fearing recruitment difficulties could put them out of business.

Organizations know people are their greatest asset, but many risk losing their prized talent to other organizations. This is why an effective hybrid work strategy can be critical. Over half (56%) of organizations say that if they don't sort out their hybrid work plans, they'll start losing staff and be unable to attract new talent (see fig 1).

The backdrop for this is the "The Great Resignation". This phenomenon is having a huge impact across the globe. A Microsoft survey of over 30,000 workers across 31 countries showed that 41% were considering leaving their current jobs, citing shifting priorities and concerns over burn out as key reasons. A further survey by LinkedIn found 74% of employees said time spent at home during the pandemic caused them to re-evaluate their current work situation.

Fig 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that if you don't sort out your hybrid plans, you'll start losing staff and will be unable to attract new talent?
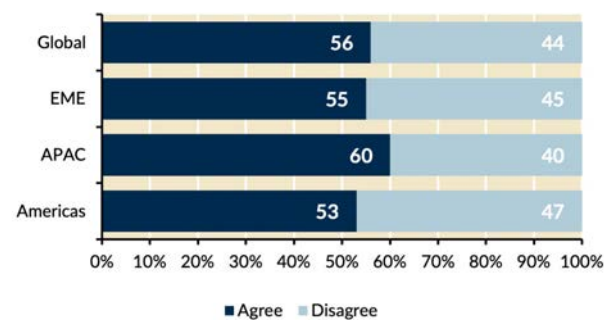
Region	Agree	Disagree
Global	56	44
EME	55	45
APAC	60	40
Americas	53	47

■ Agree ■ Disagree

'Organizations know people are their greatest asset, but many risk losing their prized talent to other organizations. This is why an effective hybrid work strategy can be critical.'

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As a record number of people leave their roles, the resulting fluidity in the job market provides an opportunity for employers. However, many will find wage increases accompanying the race for skill will hold back their efforts to retain and attract talent.

These factors are already being felt by organizations. Over half (58%) have experienced the effects of The Great Resignation, saying they've experienced higher staff turnover (see fig 2). This is having a serious business impact. Over half (55%) of employers say The Great Resignation, combined with the skills shortage, could put them out of business (see fig 3). Meanwhile, 59% say that the brain drain, and lack of available talent is impacting their ability to grow (see fig 4).

Yet opportunity also exists. With record numbers of people flooding the job market, organizations could be primed to snap up new talent, helping them to flourish and grow. Enabling remote and hybrid working can also open up the job market – potentially enabling organizations to recruit from anywhere in the world. This could help to make the talent search more inclusive, ensuring greater access to work for all.

Ultimately, providing a rich and flexible work environment, where people have the tools and support needed to be effective, will give organizations the best chance of success in a competitive market. Employers must focus their resources on positioning themselves as an attractive destination for top talent, rather than managing situations where staff are becoming demotivated and moving on.

Most of the reasons given by staff for leaving are avoidable and could be addressed through an effective hybrid work strategy. The most common reasons included:

- Employees finding something better suited
- Wanting more flexibility around anytime / hybrid / remote working
- Not liking the shift to hybrid work
- Being under too much pressure to work long hours
- Unhappiness over handling of COVID-19.

Fig 2: Has your organization experienced the effect of 'The Great Resignation' – whereby employees are leaving their jobs post-pandemic?
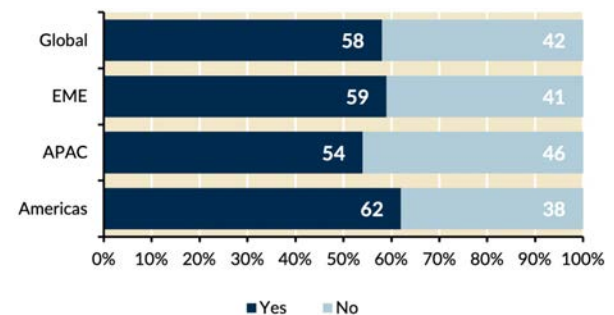

Fig 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that 'The Great Resignation', combined with the skills shortage, could put you out of business?
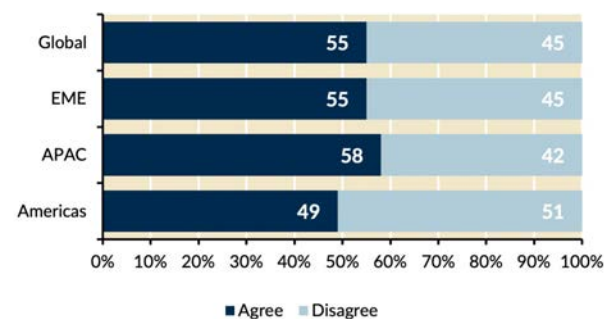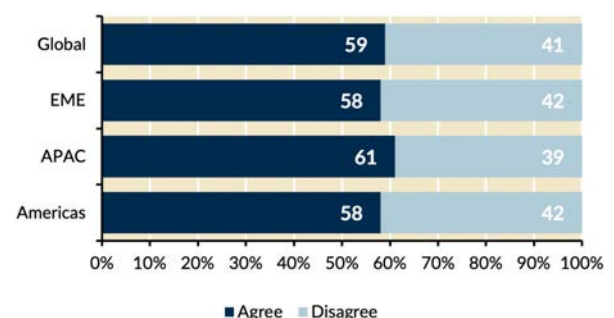

Fig 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the brain drain and lack of available talent is impacting your ability to grow your business?
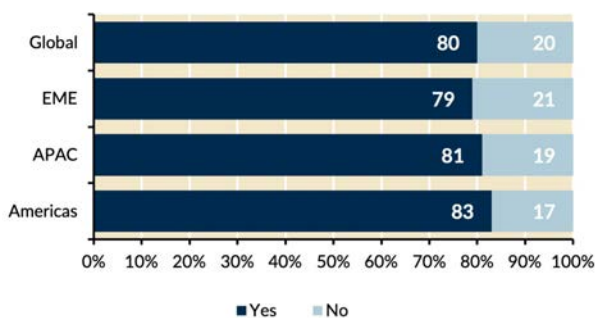

Key Takeaways

1 Fight against the Great Resignation: Make workers feel heard, valued and supported

2 Be flexible: Rigid rules are likely to alienate both existing staff and potential recruits

3 Be people-centric: Your employees hold the key to business success

Strategy and Equality

Companies are of two minds, caught between accepting that hybrid work is needed to attract talent and thinking it is just a passing trend..
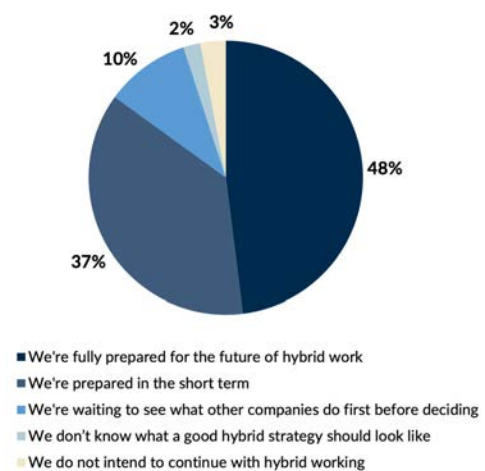
With organizations struggling to hire and retain talent, an effective and flexible hybrid work strategy is essential. Organizations surveyed seemed to understand this need, with a large majority (80%) agreeing with the need to offer flexible working from day one of a person's employment (see fig 5).

However, our study shows that less than half (48%) of organizations are "fully prepared" for the future of hybrid work. Alarmingly, over a third (37%) say they are only prepared for the short-term and the remaining 15% are either: waiting to see what others do first; don't know what a good hybrid strategy should look like; or don't intend to continue with hybrid working (see fig 6).

Fig 5: Do you think that employees should be given the right to request flexible working from day one?

Fig 6: Which of the following would best describe your organization's current approach to a hybrid work strategy?

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This split between the prepared and the unprepared might reflect the mindset of some of the respondents on the potential longevity of the current situation. Surprisingly, over half (52%) of organizations believe hybrid working is a blip and are looking forward to getting everyone back into the office (see fig 7). This may be wishful thinking, given the recent renewals of work from home mandates across the globe, which suggest ongoing disruptions are anything but a blip.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there was a variety of responses when it came to how often employers are asking staff to visit the office. While 19% of organizations want staff to return full-time, the remaining 81% are enabling some degree of flexibility – with 3 days being the average, and Wednesdays the most popular day for staff to visit the office. Only 9% were giving staff complete flexibility over when and how often they come in (see fig 8).

These shifts in working patterns are naturally impacting office occupancy, with employers estimating that their average weekly occupancy is 45% of the full workforce. As a result, 22% of organizations are planning to move to a smaller office.

Fig 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree that hybrid working is a blip, and that you are looking forward to getting everyone back into the office?
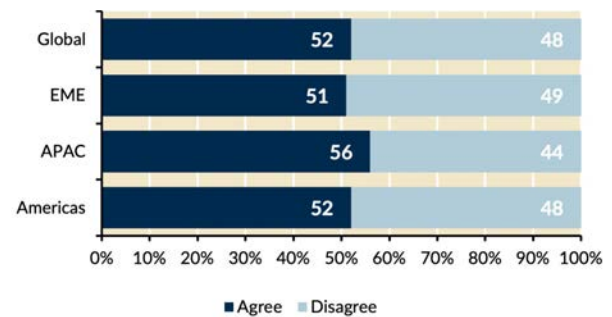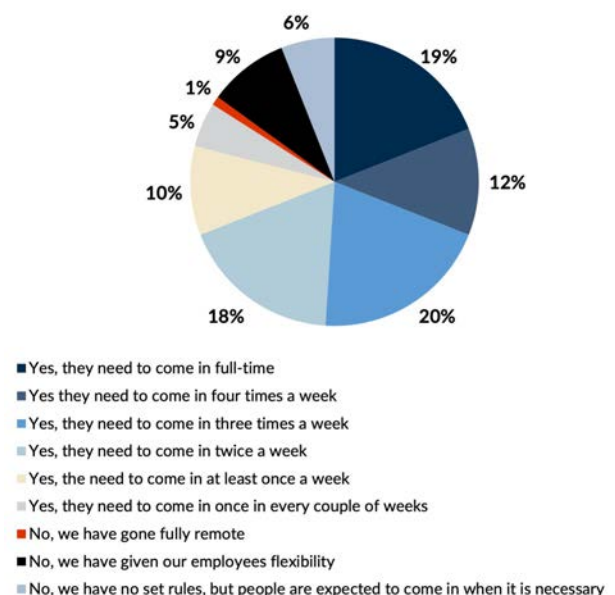

Fig 8: Have you set out rules regarding how often employees need to come into the office/be onsite and if so, how often?

- Yes, they need to come in full-time
- Yes they need to come in four times a week
- Yes, they need to come in three times a week
- Yes, they need to come in twice a week
- Yes, the need to come in at least once a week
- Yes, they need to come in once in every couple of weeks
- No, we have gone fully remote
- No, we have given our employees flexibility
- No, we have no set rules, but people are expected to come in when it is necessary

Regional variations for office work

Regional employers are asking employees to come in on average:

- Americas – 3.1 days per week
- APAC – 3.1 days per week
- EME – 2.9 days per week.

The most popular day also varies:

- Americas – Monday & Wednesday
- APAC – Monday
- EME – Wednesday.

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Yet it is clear that the office will continue to play a role – it's a go-to destination for employees, but the way it is being used will change. It's not just about showing your face. Our Evolution of the Workplace report found visits to the office will become purpose-driven: attending a meeting, brainstorming, collaborating and having access to appropriate technology. If such trends around occupancy and usage continue, and space is no longer used to capacity, the office as we know it today will need to evolve.

Key Takeaways

1 Embrace the future of work: Implement flexible policies that cater to all work personas

2 Hybrid isn't a blip: Stay agile and be prepared for future uncertainty

3 The role of the office is changing: Employers must rethink office attractiveness and purpose

Embracing flexibility

The fight to recruit and retain talent is on, and organizations are implementing policies to differentiate. The top five hybrid work initiatives organizations are considering include:

1 Offering flexibility to allow people to commute outside of rush hour

2 Reimbursing hybrid workers for bills, such as their utilities

3 Creating a reward scheme for coming into the office

4 Providing a technology allowance for hybrid workers

5 Offering incentives to come into the office (e.g. free lunches).

But while some organizations are offering these benefits, 17% are considering reducing pay for hybrid workers. The assumption is they are saving on transport costs and should therefore accept a lower wage. However, this could be a false assumption, and make it harder to recruit and retain talent and drive further resignations.

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Culture and Workforce Wellness

Seven-in-ten organizations have seen productivity increase after embracing remote and hybrid work, but this could be having unintended consequences.

A shift to a hybrid way of working does require planning and thought to ensure it does not negatively impact employees. Our Evolution of the Workplace report showed that employees enjoyed the benefits of having a greater work-life balance, being able to fit work around their lives, as opposed to the other way around. Conversely, 58% of employees feel the rise in remote working has meant they are always-on and always available.

This conundrum between enabling flexibility and anytime working, while protecting employees from burn out, is something employers are concerned about too. The research lays out the problem clearly. On the plus side, 72% of organizations saw an increase in productivity as a result of remote and hybrid working, with productivity increasing on average by 27% (see fig 9). Evidently, people can be trusted to not only get work done when away from the office, but to actually get more done.

Fig 9: On average, how much do you estimate productivity has increased since the shift to remote and hybrid working?
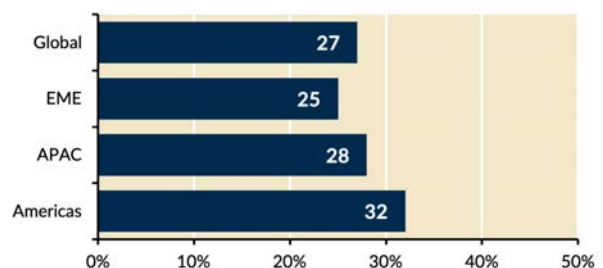
	%
Global	27
EME	25
APAC	28
Americas	32

'The conundrum between enabling flexibility and anytime working, while protecting employees from burn out, is something employers are concerned about too.'

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But organizations need to be on their guard as the risk of burn out increases – 49% say that there is an unhealthy culture of overworking in their organization that they must put a stop to (see fig 10). Indeed, two in three (67%) agree they have a moral duty to stop people from working excessive hours and risking burn out (see fig 11). However, only around half of organizations have taken steps to help staff fight the temptation: 38% are encouraging employees not to look at work emails outside of working hours and to take regular breaks, while 13% have processes in place to make sure employees aren't working long hours (e.g. time tracking, set hours) (see fig 12).

To help improve retention and recruitment, organizations need to offer a great hybrid work experience. The main benefits of doing so are clear:

- Ability to give employees a better work-life balance
- A happier and less stressed workforce
- A more productive workforce.

But there can be drawbacks if hybrid work isn't done correctly, which suggest a better understanding of people, space and technology is needed to create an equal experience:

- It's harder to onboard and train new employees
- There is difficulty collaborating
- There is reduced employee engagement.

Clearly, organizations are caught between knowing that performance can be improved by hybrid working and fearing their people will burn out. When you consider that workload is one of the top reasons for people leaving their jobs, this is brought into even greater focus. The key will be to engage with employees to set expectations and monitor well-being to ensure a good work-life balance and provide ongoing training for how best to manage their time when working remotely.

Fig 10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that there is an unhealthy culture of overworking at your company which you must put a stop to?
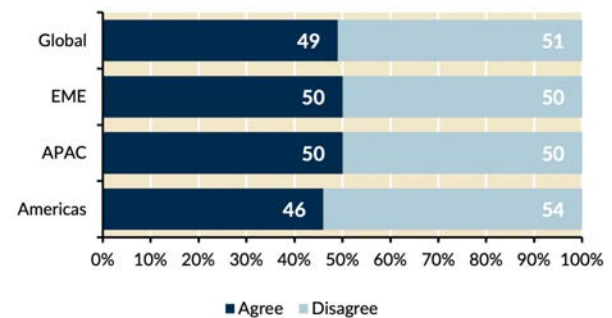

Fig 11: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the move from traditional 9-5 towards anytime working means you have a moral duty to protect your employees from working too much?
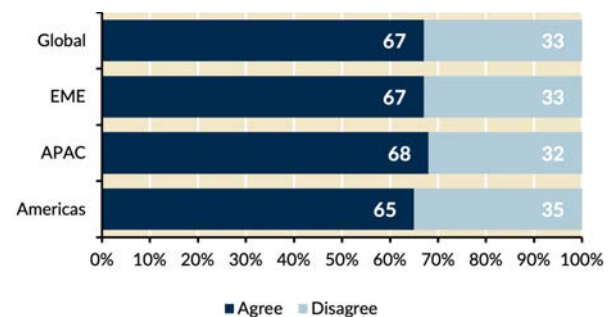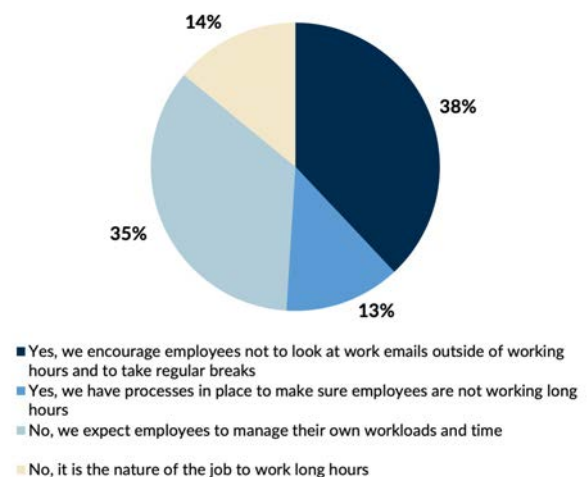

Fig 12: Does your organzation take steps to prevent people feeling like they need to be always on?

- Yes, we encourage employees not to look at work emails outside of working hours and to take regular breaks
- Yes, we have processes in place to make sure employees are not working long hours
- No, we expect employees to manage their own workloads and time
- No, it is the nature of the job to work long hours

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Yet the long hours are not the only problem to arise from a poorly managed hybrid strategy. Nearly three in four (74%) organizations say the pandemic, and increased home working, has made fostering and retaining work culture harder than ever (see fig 13). In addition, 60% of organizations say those not in the office will be unable to build the relationships needed to progress in their career. This echoes a finding in our Evolution of the Workplace report, which found that 43% of employees are concerned remote working will negatively impact career development.

Again, if we look back at the reasons people have been giving for leaving their jobs, the shift to hybrid working was a key factor for many, while poor handling of COVID-19 was another. This underscores the need for organizations to have an effective hybrid work plan in place to ensure that people can continue to learn and grow, wherever and whenever they are working.

'If we look back at the reasons people have been giving for leaving jobs,
the shift to hybrid working was a key factor for many.'

Fig 13: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the pandemic, and increased home working, has made fostering and retaining work culture harder than ever?
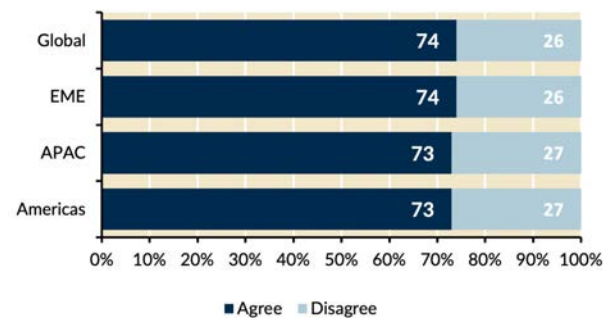
Key Takeaways

1 Productivity benefits for all: Trust employees to be as productive from home as they can be from the office

2 Being always-on is harmful: Set expectations and define boundaries to prevent burn out

3 Fostering culture: Equip employees with the technology they need to collaborate and build relationships with colleagues

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Equality, Experience and Evolution – Why Hybrid Work is the Future

Hybrid working is the future. The benefits are clear. So, what comes next? Organizations' attention must turn to thinking about people, spaces and technology to create a great, equal experience for staff. Doing so will help improve their ability to recruit and retain talent, enable growth and provide the flexibility needed to adapt for any future work-from-home orders.

But another critical component is the future of the office – more than six-in-ten (64%) organizations say the office is no longer the face of the company; it is an organization's technology and experience (see fig 14). Over three-quarters (77%) of organizations say the pandemic forced them to get smarter about how they use space, people and technology (see fig 15). As a result, 77% are planning to rethink and redesign the office for new ways of working (see fig 16).

But looking at your spaces and technology investment cannot be done in a silo. Any new investment must be assessed to see how it intersects with tools like Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Any existing or new spaces must be evaluated to see what technology works best in those

Fig 14: To what extent do you agree or disagree that with so many people now working from home, the office is no longer the face of the company, our technology and experience is?
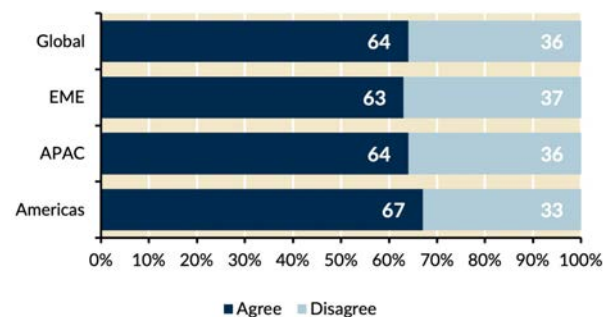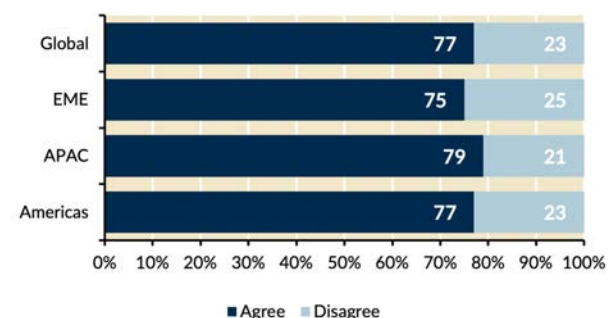

Fig 15: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the pandemic forced you to get smarter about how you use people, space and technology?

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environments. Most important, any investment needs to consider the needs of your most important users: your employees.

As part of your hybrid work strategy and when redesigning the office, it's important to take a people-first approach. This involves considering employee personas and how spaces will be used to ensure they deploy the right solutions. Organizations need to understand what the office will be used for and design spaces to suit these needs. Doing so will allow for the creation of engaging environments, while equalizing virtual experiences through meeting equality for the workforce.

Every business needs its own unique hybrid strategy that caters to its workforce. There is also a good case for experimenting to see what works and what doesn't – particularly across different regions. It's all about testing and measuring. Then considering employee reactions.

Employees are your business, and the findings clearly show that if you aren't investing in your employees and their experience, your rivals will be. And in the competition for recruiting and retaining talent, this could be crucial.

Organizations that do hybrid well will plan and design their spaces before equipping them with the right tools and support solutions. No matter how you collaborate or where in the world ideas are born, organizations are always better when employees can collaborate with ease. Those that are able to equalize the virtual and office experience by bringing everyone together will be the ones best positioned to retain talent, grow their business, maintain culture, and become more productive than ever.

'Employees are your business, and the findings clearly show that if you aren't investing in your employees and their experience, your rivals will be.'

Fig 16: Do you have any plans to rethink / redesign your office layout to accommodate new ways of working?
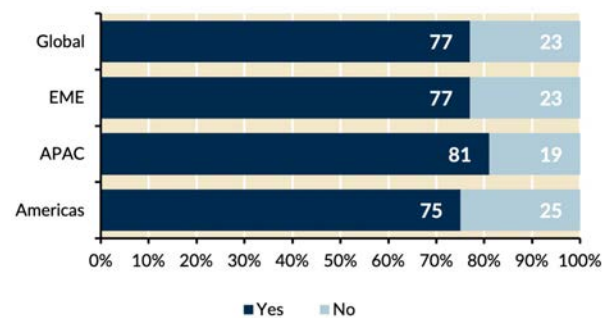
Shape your space to suit new ways of working

Many respondents are already looking at how they can evolve the office to suit the needs of a hybrid age:

- Create more open plan areas (36%)
- Create more collaboration spaces (36%)
- Create more 'quiet zones' (31%)
- Create more spaces to unwind and take breaks (32%)
- Reduce the number of desks (30%)
- Create more meeting rooms (29%)
- Create more areas to socialize (28%)
- Implement hot desking (26%).

Investing in the right technologies

The research shows that one of the biggest areas of investment that organizations are making to support hybrid working has been in communication technologies:

- Cloud applications (92%)
- Collaboration software (92%)
- Headsets (89%)
- Cameras (86%)
- Speakerphones (83%)
- Conference phones (83%)
- Desk phones (78%).

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Established in 2018 from the merger of veteran audio and video experts Plantronics and Polycom, Poly has a decades long history of expertise in audio and video solutions, consulting, device management, and industry-specific grants assistance.

No matter where or how your team works, our professional-grade audio and video conferencing solutions help office, remote, and hybrid workers communicate more clearly, collaborate better, and be seen and heard in every meeting. Our team of professional services experts helps organizations to plan their hybrid work strategy and invest in the right solutions.

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Methodology

The findings are based on an online omnibus survey of 2,528 business decision makers from middle management level and above conducted by Sapio from December 2021 – February 2022. Countries surveyed include the UK (303), France (200), Germany (204), Spain (229), Sweden (205), Poland (110), United Arab Emirates (224), USA (212), Canada (100), Mexico (100), Japan (105), Australia (104), India (104), Ireland (117), Singapore (102) and China (109).