IGLOO

The Future of Work is Here

Your Back to the Office Guide

What's inside:

Adapting. Again.

As restrictions lift and life begins to return to whatever normal is for you, organizations like yours are working to create back-to-the-office (B2TO) strategies for a workforce with changed expectations.

Choosing the right B2TO strategy for your organization requires understanding your workplace and your employees' needs. But whichever model you choose, cultivating a strong corporate culture should be top of mind.

In this guide, we'll walk you through how to plan your B2TO strategy, and give you tips to create a digital workplace that meets employees where they are, on any device.
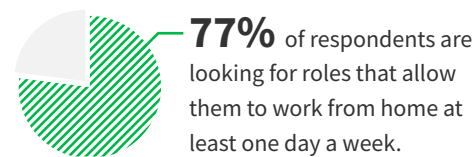
Expectations have changed. What does that mean for you?

One thing is clear — the pandemic has changed the way we think about how work, productivity, and culture intersect.

Office location is no longer a primary factor influencing recruitment or retention.

According to Upwork's 2020 Future Workforce Pulse Report, one in four Americans will be remote workers this year.

Already, new grads and first-time employees have made remote work an important factor in their career planning. In its *Student Insight Survey*, AfterCollege reported that:

77% of respondents are looking for roles that allow them to work from home at least one day a week.

Before the pandemic, remote work was a rarely offered option for many employees. Technical limitations played a part in some cases, but the reality was that many leaders simply didn't believe their people could be as effective or productive away from the office day after day.

"For most organizations, the expectation that work requires commuting into an office and sitting at a desk to use technologies to do the job is no longer relevant or acceptable."

Gartner, The Future of Work Requires Executive Leaders to Embrace Radical Flexibility, Suzanne Adnams, 11 May 2021

But as offices start to re-open, employers' traditional views on remote work are shifting. According to a recent report from Gartner®,

90% of HR leaders indicated that they now completely trust employees to work from home.
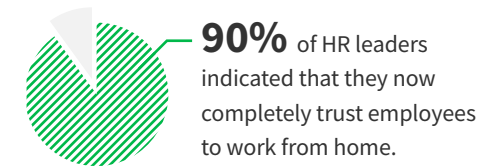
And looking forward, a study from Bloomberg cites a potential 5% increase in productivity among businesses with a work-from-home strategy. Yet, other data predicts working from home could compromise productivity, particularly for tasks that need collaboration or co-creation.

Forbes suggests encouraging people to consider where they do their best work and to avoid assuming all work can be done most effectively in any particular location.

Additionally, when it comes to work that requires more collaboration, Forbes notes that it's key to help people form strong bonds with teammates and encourage them to build relationships. Whether working in an office, virtually, or via a digital workplace, relationships influence productivity positively.

Work-from-home and remote work options have quickly become requirements for many employees. Multiple studies and surveys have reported on the looming "Great Resignation," where upwards of 40% of workers think about quitting their jobs if they're required to go back to the office full time.

Navigating your options for a return to the office

"Retiring the legacy remote work policy and replacing it with a new flexible work policy sends a clear signal across the enterprise, to management and workers, that the work environment is changing to accommodate new patterns and expectations."

Gartner, The Future of Work Requires Executive Leaders to Embrace Radical Flexibility, Suzanne Adnams, 11 May 2021

Full back-to-the-office

What it means

Some organizations — including finance leader Morgan Stanley and tech giant Apple — are requiring employees to return to their offices for work.

These employers are likely to return to pre-pandemic policies for work-from-home.

Many businesses indicate they plan to review their digital tools to ensure an effective return to an in-office focus on collaboration and productivity.

What to watch out for

Employees are rethinking and reprioritizing their career needs. Not having remote work options could cause some employees to leave for other opportunities.

Depending on your location, workplace safety requirements could limit the number of employees allowed on-site at any given time. You may also need to make considerable capital investments to meet new workplace safety requirements.

Digital by default

What it means

Some organizations — including e-commerce leader Shopify — have opted to reduce or eliminate physical offices.

These employers are dedicated to the concept of giving their people the option to live, and work, wherever they choose.

What to watch out for

Employees who've moved out of state, province, or country may make your organization liable to new employment laws.

Digital by default doesn't have to mean no physical face-time. Consider a centralized, shared workplace with desks and amenities in locations where you have many employees. They're likely to appreciate the ability to meet — even if it's rarely.

When there's very little in terms of physical space to latch onto, the digital workplace is everything. These organizations need to ensure they have the technology and approach required to maintain a strong and vibrant culture when people are rarely in the same room.

Hybrid

What it means

Some organizations continue to offer remote options for their employees while encouraging the use of physical office space when necessary, or on an agreed schedule (for example, once or twice a week).

These organizations need a renewed focus on digital workplace technologies to ensure employees can communicate, collaborate, and connect with the corporate culture, wherever they're working.

What to watch out for

Multiple digital tools, if they're not consolidated or contained in a digital workplace solution, can reduce productivity for employees working remotely.

As with digital by default, employees who move out of state, province, or country may make your organization liable to new employment laws.

No matter which model you embrace, there are things you can do to make your back-to-the-office strategy successful — for your organization and your employees.

Five keys to making B2TO work for your organization

Building a back-to-the-office strategy is unique to every organization. What separates a successful plan from the rest is a focus on what works for your business, your employees, and your culture.

1 Ask employees what works for them

Every team and individual is different. While you can't cater to every request, surveying your employees can help identify macro issues or needs that you can address before they impact your organization's effectiveness.

2 Make work-from-home an easy option

It's no secret that many will want to continue working from home in some form. In a recent internal survey of 30,000 Microsoft employees, 73% responded that they wanted to do exactly that for a portion of the week.

You can make work-from-home or hybrid work models successful for your organization by providing clear guidance on:

► How many days a week your employees can work from home.

► Core hours that employees need to be available while working from home.

► How leveraging a digital workplace can foster communication and collaboration in a shared environment for both in-office and work-from-home employees.

3 Create workspaces with purpose

Whether you're keeping your physical office or transitioning to a shared space to support a hybrid approach, that space needs to have purpose.

► Offer hot-desks or hotel desks for remote employees to use when they're in the workplace.

► Offer ergonomic options and appropriate monitor setups if needed.

► For large internal meetings and town halls, offer opportunities to attend both virtually and in-person.

► Consider desk arrangements that emphasize collaboration amongst team members.

4 Recognize and appreciate your people

Recognizing your employees' contributions to your organization is more critical than ever.

► Use your digital workplace to acknowledge employee, team, and organization milestones.

► Add tangible recognition to the mix, with certificates, awards, or other physical items when possible.

► Create a unified corporate culture that all employees can participate in digitally.

5 Emphasize two-way communication

No matter where your employees are working, communication is critical to a successful back-to-the-office strategy.

► Communicate clearly and communicate often.

► Use your digital workplace to facilitate communication within and across teams no matter where they sit.

► Share updates on your back-to-the-office strategy as it evolves and offer opportunities for feedback and input. Communication needs to go both ways, not just top-down.

Connecting in the post-pandemic workplace

The physical workplace was where connections were made, work was done, and culture was fostered. When we quickly transitioned to a work-from-home model, two things changed — the tools we used for work and how we interacted and used the physical workplace.

Managing work-from-home meant adopting new digital-first technologies to keep employees connected and facilitate everything from meetings to social hours.

While tools like Slack, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or Google Meet may be great for meetings, they don't facilitate the kind of communication that used to happen on site — like the unplanned desk drop-by. The kitchen chat that solved a problem. Or the impromptu opportunity to jump into a meeting room for 10 minutes and iron-out a solution together.

> **DID YOU KNOW?**
>
> Mobile workers will be 60% of the total U.S. workforce by 2024, according to IDC.

How having the right digital workplace can help

No matter what B2TO scenario you're looking at, a digital workplace solution — a cutting-edge intranet — is key. Because today's employees need a digital workplace that can meet the same needs as the physical workplace, and then some.

The right digital workplace solution strengthens culture and engagement, communication, collaboration, and knowledge management — no matter where your employees are located.

An excellent digital workplace should help you bring back the best aspects of being together in a shared physical space. It's a place where your teams communicate, collaborate, and work together. It puts your company's internal brand front and center to help everyone feel connected no matter where they're working.

Shared drives are good for storing and organizing documents, but they're not built for communication. Digital workplaces are effective at giving every employee a voice and enabling two-way communication.

Just like the office, digital workplaces need to be open spaces. Culture is built on your company's mission and brand — and on the ways your team connects to deliver for your stakeholders. For many organizations, that culture also includes aspects like charitable work that adds to your brand's strength. Social engagement is key, too. Yesterday's watercooler can be today's social zone, where even pets and TV shows get the airtime they deserve. Digital workplaces have room for these conversations to continue and grow. They matter.

Digital workplaces need to meet your people where they are — whether that's in the office, at home, or in a coffee shop. Great digital workplaces are built to be mobile — and work on any mobile device. A branded mobile intranet experience can drive engagement, as mobile employees feel like they're part of the company culture. And for many workers, especially Generation Z and Millennials, working in an environment that doesn't have modern, branded, and mobile-optimized tools and resources, is simply unimaginable.

Defining your digital HQ

Regardless of the model your back-to-the-office strategy adopts, your employees need a place they can feel like part of a collective — wherever they're working. And these days, a basic, old-school intranet doesn't cut it.

With people working from everywhere, you need a mobile optimized digital workplace solution that ties everyone together and keeps everything organized. That's where Igloo comes in. It's your digital HQ in the post-pandemic world.

A place where employees see each other as real people, friends, and teammates who are all navigating the future of work, right now. Where organizations are prioritizing employee engagement right next to things like product innovation and customer satisfaction on their list of key corporate objectives.

Do you have the tools to create a flexible, healthy, dispersed, and digital-first workplace?

Learn more about Igloo digital workplace solutions or book a demo to see how Igloo could fit into your organization as you navigate the months ahead.

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Igloo is a leading provider of digital workplace solutions, helping companies move beyond traditional intranets to inspiring digital destinations that improve communication, knowledge sharing, collaboration, and culture. All Igloo solutions are 100% cloud-based, mobile-enabled, and integrate with leading enterprise and cloud apps.

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