



Designing a successful hybrid working strategy

The best of both worlds



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Why you should embrace hybrid working

The change-averse legal sector has slowly been moving towards digitisation for years.

However, since the global pandemic and the accompanying government-enforced lockdowns, the sector has been forced to review their working habits and embrace remote working.

As the world enters 'the new normal', and Freedom Day in the UK seems a long way behind us, offices are reopening, and businesses are accommodating a blend of home and office working: the hybrid-working model.

But behind the scenes, the world is moving into an era of 'The Great Resignation'.

New research from the [Institute of Workplace and Facilities Management](#) has found that a large proportion of employees will expect a level of 'hybrid' working in the future – with just under half (44%) of the workforce wanting to work from the office for 3 days or fewer each week. Additionally, results also found that 63% of employees now believe the office to be unnecessary – this was a rise of one-fifth since the first lockdown (51%).

The poll, which surveyed 2,000 office workers across the country in March 2021, shows that demand for hybrid working is especially prevalent in the younger demographic.

Two-thirds (66%) of 18-24-year-olds confessed that not being offered flexible work patterns would cause them to look for another job. Yet disturbingly, over a third (38%) of this demographic feel their employer is putting pressure on them to return to the office – risking losing new talent.

The legal sector needs to understand what's happening on the ground to ensure they are attracting new talent, providing a competitive working environment for staff, and proactively identifying concerns or issues amongst their employees – to provide the best experience to their teams.

And this guide is designed to help you to do that.



The benefits of a hybrid working model

Cost Savings

The hybrid working model can allow your legal practice to cut costs in several different areas, from reducing office equipment, supplies and business expenses, or even by downsizing or reconfiguring your office space.

On top of contributing to the sustainability and eco-friendliness of a firm, hybrid working will enable law firms to significantly cut costs, such as overhead costs and property fees. Less people in the office means that large amounts of office space are no longer required – something that many law firms, including Linklaters, Slater & Gordon and Clifford Chance have already realised as a result of the national government-enforced lockdown in reaction to COVID-19, permanently closing down some of their offices.

Alternatively, hybrid working can allow your law firm or chambers to move away from an old-fashioned presenteeism style of management – in the form of banks of desks filled with people – to an open plan, flexible model, with the office being redesigned for more specific reasons, such as collaborative work, face-to-face team or client meetings, and brainstorming sessions.

Talent Retention & Gain

When it comes to gaining and retaining talent, technology will continue to play a vital part in achieving a work-life balance and flexibility for employees, with the use of virtual collaboration tools helping to streamline workloads and enable staff to feel connected as part of a team, even when they are not in the office.

From a recruitment perspective, law firms and barristers' chambers are no longer limited to a geographical proximity. Your legal firm can scale up or down to suit your business needs. This can open up the potential to hire excellent candidates from further afield – if you're willing to let them work in a hybrid model.

However, law firms and chambers need an agile recruitment process that is digitally efficient, with smart onboarding tools for the virtual environment. Technology can streamline the recruitment process and make it more cost effective with tools such as video conferencing, interviewing online and digital HR platforms to track performance.



Improved Collaboration

With hybrid working, both synchronous and asynchronous collaboration is possible – allowing for flexible collaboration that caters to all needs and requirements, and as a result, increases productivity and efficiency.

Synchronous Collaboration

This happens in real time, where at least two people are exchanging information, at the same time with each other.

- in-person meetings
- video conferences
- 'watercooler' chats
- phone calls

Asynchronous Collaboration

This has a lag between when communication is sent and when the recipient receiving it interprets it.

- email messages
- project management tools
- instant messages
- document sharing e.g. SharePoint

For firms concerned about how they can communicate and collaborate with their team members when working from home, having the right communication tools in place is vital.

By [leveraging Microsoft Teams](#), you can alleviate any communication issues, as well as enable document and file sharing and matter management to aid better collaboration. As opposed to email, Microsoft Teams can improve employee productivity, communication, and collaboration by pulling together all forms of collaboration in one, centralised platform.

Increased Productivity

Before the requirement for all employees to work from home, there were suspicions by senior management that productivity and innovation could not be maintained outside of the office.

However, according to a [research paper by Microsoft](#), which explored the impact of the pandemic on performance, 82% of leaders reported that their companies were at least as productive as they were before the pandemic when working in the office. And further research by [finder.com](#) found:

65% of workers said they would be more productive in a home office than a normal office

75% of workers say they will be more productive due to reduced distractions

83% of employees feel they do not need an office to be productive

Furthermore, the introduction of automation and artificial intelligence technologies can free up as much as 23% of fee earners' billable hours, reducing time spent on repetitive administrative tasks and enabling your fee earners to focus on delivering value-added results for the clients they serve.



What do employees want from a hybrid working model?

There are numerous reasons why employees are pushing their companies to move away from the office-first, 9-5 model and adopt a hybrid working model.



Appropriate Technology

Taking the most simplistic view, for employees to work efficiently and be productive from home, they need [access to the right equipment](#) and tools to deliver the requirements of their job role. This ranges from basic desk, chair, lighting requirements through to computer equipment, internet access, headphones, and software tooling to facilitate collaboration and role-specific functions.

Additionally, employees should be provided with training on how to use the tools required for remote working and have access to a helpdesk, whether an internal IT team or a Managed Service Provider, when issues arise.

A Clear Work-Life Balance

Work and life are more intertwined than ever, and so having control over work-life boundaries is vital for boosting the wellbeing of employees, teams and businesses, as well as reducing stress and preventing burnout.

The flexibility of the hybrid working model is attractive to many. Finding the balance between work and homelife is much easier as employees have more control over their work processes and schedules, meaning that they still have the ability to take care of things that may arise – childcare, running errands, or home deliveries. Being granted more control, alongside the feeling of being trusted by your employer, is invaluable.



Effective Training & Support

Trainee or junior lawyers who would typically spend time shadowing partners, listening in on calls and enjoying lunch with senior team members in the workplace are experiencing a disconnect when trying to learn 'on the job' at home, and are therefore, anxious about staying at home.

Legal firms must ensure a support network is in place without neglecting vital 1-on-1 training with senior members of the team, while ensuring younger employees have the appropriate equipment and working space for remote working.

Effective remote supervision can be carried out using regular phone and video calls using secure and reliable applications, such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Channels for feedback, supervisory meetings and regular catch ups should be maintained at all times to ensure any issue is dealt with promptly. Shared screen feedback and 1-2-1 virtual chats are essential in helping employees develop and build confidence.

A Strong Company Culture

In order to circumvent inequalities and divisiveness, legal businesses must forge a robust hybrid working culture by developing the following:

Better Visibility

When working remotely, employees can often feel overlooked when it comes to career opportunities, feedback and acknowledgement compared to their in-office counterparts.

To make employees feel valued within their company, your hybrid working strategy should ensure an even playing field, which keeps remote workers visible. Management should consider regular check-ins, feedback surveys and better reporting processes.

Remote Communication Plan

Having a remote communication structure in place can enable fluidity between office and remote workplace settings meaning that information can be easily disseminated and accessed by all, which improves collaboration and communication, and in turn, transparency and inclusion.

Inclusivity

Working remotely can contribute to feelings of isolation and loneliness as employees feel disconnected from their team and extended company.

Your legal practice must bridge the gap by incorporating regular company-wide and 1-2-1 check-ins, utilising collaboration tools such as Microsoft Teams where employees can share news, catch-up and nurture company culture and values, and celebrate company events and celebrations that are felt universally, regardless of location.



Hybrid working considerations

Hybrid working is here to stay, but with it comes many challenges in terms of engagement, culture, management and productivity. When writing your hybrid working strategy, you must take all factors into account to ensure its success.

Technology Inequality

According to research by [Actual Experience](#), two thirds of business leaders are concerned about digital inequality – and this gap must be closed quickly to retain talent and protect productivity.

It is considered that younger lawyers or those in training usually have lower grade equipment, whereas more established or longer-term employees have a better home set-up than the office. This may be due to experience, finances or space configuration in their home working space. Due to this, equipment should be standardised across all levels and departments, and user needs must be taken into account when developing your hybrid working IT strategy.

“To achieve agility, law firms must be able to adapt their technology solutions to the requirements of their end-users and their working practices.”

David Fazakerley, In-House Legal CIO at CTS

Data Protection

It's imperative that law firms quickly understand the devices being used to access the company network to assess and manage the risk. When it comes to law firm employees and barristers using their own devices when working from home, the main area for concern is data leakage. [Endpoint Protection \(EPP\)](#) ensures that endpoints, including both personal and business-issued devices, remain secured, protecting them from malicious attack.

Additionally, [unsecured networks](#) can be another element that must be considered for remote workers. The accessing of company and client information via an unsecure and unencrypted WIFI connection leaves you vulnerable to a data breach, as hackers seek to exploit security flaws to intercept sensitive data. Implementing [multifactor authentication \(MFA\)](#) can protect your data by using a second source of validation to verify user identity before granting access.



Office Optimisation

The concept of hybrid working has also inspired an evolution in workplace design, and the legal sector must consider not only what their employees need but what will inspire them.

Following a long period of solely working from home, employees and potential employees are demanding much more from their office working environments – gone are the days of the traditional office that only offer a desk, computer and chair.

Instead, a successful hybrid office includes a blend of flexible spaces that are designed to meet employee needs and support them across different tasks. For example, team-working spaces that encourage collaboration, acoustic or soundproof pods for phone meetings, hot desks that employees can book through an app, relaxed social spaces to nurture company culture, and meeting rooms equipped with audio-visual technology for seamless video conferencing with remote-working colleagues or clients.

By taking a user-centric approach when redesigning or leasing your office, you can encourage focus, collaboration, engagement and productivity, and so optimising your office space should be a key element of your hybrid working strategy.

[Discover more here](#) about how you can make your return to a hybrid office successful.





Summary

In conclusion, it's safe to say that the trend towards hybrid working is an evolving situation, one which the legal sector should be mindful of when considering future plans.

Whilst there is no single right or wrong answer, employees will have an opinion on what works for them and the employers likely to be most successful in navigating this challenge will be those that consult and communicate with their workforce to understand exactly what is going to work for everyone.

Holding purposeful consultations will help to steer formulating solutions, as will being mindful that the right answer is likely to be a framework that will evolve over time rather than a rigid one size fits all answer. Most importantly, as always, clear communication of any agreement and expectations between both employer and employee is critical.

To discover more about how you can measure the success of your hybrid working strategy, you can [watch our webinar here](#).



About CTS

CTS delivers IT services that transform the user experience and operational success of Law Firms and Barristers Chambers, both day-to-day and in the longer term.

This is because we focus only on the legal sector, understanding their needs better than others and shape our services around the unique requirements of the legal sector and their users.

About ComXo

ComXo is an industry leader in transformational switchboard and business support services, combining innovative technology and personal expertise to deliver world class experiences.

Trusted by over 40 of the top law firms in The City, our specialist teams understand the tailored support needed within the legal sector, and ensure the optimum experience for your clients and employees alike.

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