

## Is your organization ready to support a hybrid office environment as part of a post-COVID return to office strategy?

Use this guide to start planning your organizations return to the office.

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Due to the pandemic, organizations have been forced to re-evaluate their business operations, supporting processes and adapt/innovate at a rapid pace. As a COVID-19 vaccine becomes more widely available, most organizations are beginning to consider what a return to the office looks like.

In order to help our customers, Blackink IT has been reviewing information from trusted sources – including McKinsey & Company, Deloitte, the Society for Human Resources (SHRM), Gartner, and Forbes to name a few – in the hopes of developing a “return to office checklist...” The simple reality is that all businesses are unique and there is no “one size fits all” solution associated with return to office strategies.

There has been a tremendous amount of material written about if, when and how to return to the office. Research suggests that most organizations will adopt a “hybrid approach” – defined as mix between remote and in-person workers. Based on conversations with our customers, we know most organizations are considering a hybrid approach leading to a full return based on the success of the vaccine.

To help organizations with their return to the office, Blackink IT has developed this checklist to help organizations develop their strategy:

### 1. **Identify What’s Working**

At the beginning of the pandemic, many companies just sent employees home, connected those employees via VPN, and attempted to transfer existing workflow and processes to a now remote staff. While some organizations were able to succeed, many encountered operational, organization and/or cultural challenges.

Now is the time to identify and review the most important processes for each major business unit, location, or function, and re-envision them completely, often with involvement and feedback from employees.

Review:

- a. Who and how workflow tasks are completed.
- b. The systems, applications, access, tools used, and determine if they are effectively supporting a remote work force or need to be modified.

- c. Develop a gap analysis for the key systems, applications, access, and tools.

## 2. Decide 'people to work' or 'work to people' approach

McKinsey suggests that as organizations evaluate how they work, they should identify what work can be done remotely in a manner to help provide clarity and drive decisions related to return to office strategy. Organizations should consider evaluating roles based on the value remote working could deliver based on the following classifications:

- a. **Fully Remote.** Roles that can continue to be fully remote based on creating positive value and ability to attained desired outcomes.
- b. **Hybrid Remote.** Roles that can be done either remotely or onsite with no negative impact to desired outcomes.
- c. **Hybrid Remote by Exception.** These types of roles encounter a negative impact to desired; however, they can be performed remotely (as needed).
- d. **On site.** Roles that need to be onsite and cannot be completed remotely.

## 3. Identify Strategies and Tools

Depending on how your team returns to the office, hybrid office operations will challenge many accepted pre-COVID operational norms resulting in changes to office operations and process. Meeting or break-out rooms that once supported 2-4 team members will now become individual focus rooms. Conference rooms that once seated 10-12 participants could be limited to 2-4 team members.

Does your organization have:

- a. The ability to track all individuals (including staff and visitors) that enter the office every day? In the past, this has been more of a security issue. In today's COVID / hybrid office world, a front office application needs the ability to provide security, support COVID office visit advisories and requirements, and provide the information needed should an organization need to conduct contract tracing.
- b. Collaboration tools need to share information. Just because part of the team is back in the office does not mean it's back to business as usual. Organizations will need to continue use of key collaboration tools, including:
  - i. **COMMUNICATION** – an identified tool, intra-net site, share or platform staff can turn to for up-to-date information regarding hybrid office operations, office visit requirements or a schedule detailing individual team members remote or onsite work days?

- ii. FILE SHARING - Many organizations are leveraging cloud-based resources including Microsoft OneDrive, Google Drive, Microsoft Teams and other storage solutions. How will a hybrid office operations posture impact sharing of information in your organization?
- iii. DATA BACKUP – Many organizations are leveraging new file sharing / data storage strategies because of the pandemic. Has your organization reviewed its backup strategy to ensure that all data is protected in accordance with the organizations data protection requirements/policies?
- iv. VIDEO CONFERENCING – A hybrid office posture will probably include the on-going use of personal video conferencing. Does everyone in the office have a camera and microphones that support video conferencing? Many organizations provided “loaner laptops” for their COVID response only to have staff return to the office and begin using their prior desktop-based systems ... which often don’t include a camera or microphone.
- v. HEADSETS – Many offices are configured using an open office / open cubicle concept. While the physical reconfiguration of office layout is a consideration, so, too, is the notion of noise from individuals participating in video/conference calls from their desk. Do you need to order headsets?

#### 4. Workplace Redesign

Has your organization evaluated office layout and considered social distancing, traffic flow or



even how many people can be in the restroom at the same time? Evaluating your workplace and implementing any needed modifications is a key requirement to an effective HYBRID OFFICE strategy.

## 5. Workplace Policies

No return to office / hybrid office strategy preparation is complete without a review of existing organization policies. Now is a good time to review you:

- a. Remote Work Policy
  - i. To determine what roles are eligible for full remote, hybrid remote or need to be onsite.
  - ii. To determine what hardware/systems are provided to remote workers.
  - iii. To determine if remote workers need ability to access systems that, in the past, may have been blocked (e.g. USB-based document scanners).
- b. Data Retention & Backup Policy
  - i. Is data from all locations being backed up and retained?
  - ii. What about newly implemented cloud-based tools?
- c. Password policy
  - i. Have password policies been maintained?
  - ii. Are remote workers subject to different password policies?
- d. Physical access policy
  - i. To support extended hours access for your employees
  - ii. To support the collection of health information for all visitors

Blackink IT has extensive experience helping organizations plan for and execute a hybrid office solution. There is no one-size fits all approach; however, we have the strategies and experience to help organizations survive and thrive in these pandemic times. If you want to dive deeper into your return to office approach, please reach out to Cat Edmonds at [cedmonds@blackinkit.com](mailto:cedmonds@blackinkit.com)

### Sources:

- Deloitte: [Workforce Strategies for Post-COVID Recovery](#).
- McKinsey: [Reimagining the office and work life after COVID-19](#).
- SHRM: [Adapting Workplace Practices Due to COVID 19](#).
- Forbes: [The Future of Work: The Hybrid Workforce](#).
- TechRepublic: [How IT can prepare for the coming hybrid work environment](#).
- CIO: [How to build a safe and productive hybrid work culture](#).
- CIO: [Return to Work: What the New Normal will Look Like](#).