

# Back-to-Office REPORT

SURVEY DATA REVEALS HOW ORGANIZATIONS ARE PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK





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# Editor's NOTE

As organizations prepare to have their employees return to corporate offices and headquarters, go fully remote, or some hybrid of the two, there are still many questions that need to be answered and concerns to be addressed. As such, sister brands Women in Retail Leadership Circle (WIRLC) and Women Leading Travel & Hospitality asked executives from leading brands across both the retail and travel and hospitality industries how they're navigating the many challenges and questions that come with defining a new way to work. They responded to our survey with honest and actionable answers.

The online survey was conducted in May 2021 and generated 229 responses. Just over half of all respondents (52 percent) identified as being from the retail industry, with 38 percent coming from the travel and hospitality industry. Ten percent of respondents classified their primary business as outside of the retail or travel and hospitality industries. Data was captured only for respondents working for a company that has a corporate office/headquarters.

This report features the data captured in our survey, as well as analysis of said data. For example, we analyze what the future of work looks like, including the introduction of hybrid scheduling. How leaders are determining how frequently staff will be required to come into the office is addressed, including the reasons why doing so is necessary. In addition, we collected data on both leaders' and employees' concerns with a hybrid work schedule, including the impact it might have on communication and corporate culture. And, of course, what such an arrangement means for employee productivity.

"In the tug of war between remote work and in-person arrangements, we've seen benefits and drawbacks on both sides," says Anna Wenngren, chief people officer, SafetyCulture. "This is what has led us to the hybrid model, and we're constantly evolving our approach as the world of work changes. With our communication-first approach, we've encouraged our people to self-organize. This has reduced the need for us to mandate specifics.

"The pandemic really challenged people's perspectives about how they work most effectively," Wenngren adds. "The one thing we've learned is that there's no one size fits all when it comes to flexibility in the workplace. We believe it all comes down to good communication. Instead of becoming rigid about flexibility, we talk to each other about it. People are able to work out their individual flexibility directly with their manager and team members."

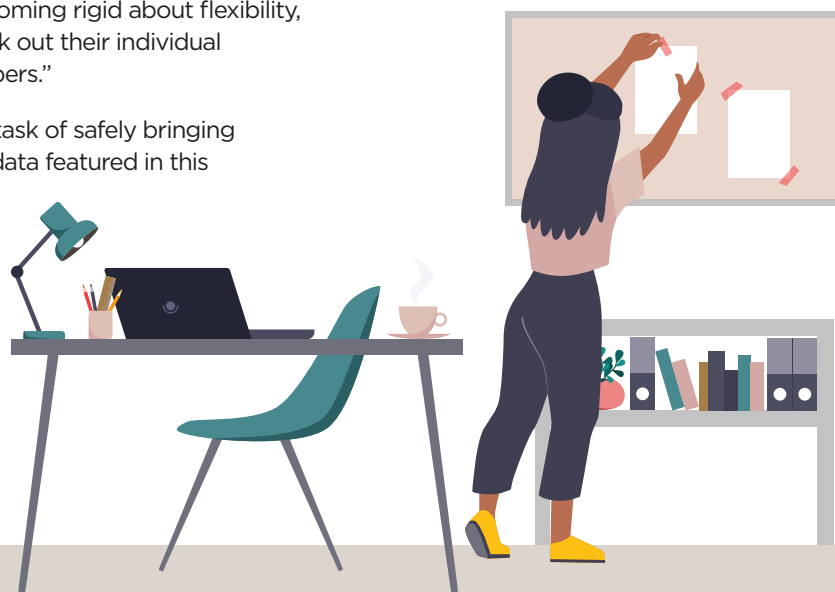
As you and your company go about the challenging task of safely bringing employees back into corporate offices, leverage the data featured in this report to inform that strategy. This report and its accompanying [checklist](#) offer actionable tips as well as insights that can enable businesses to thrive in this new work environment that we're all experiencing.

Melissa



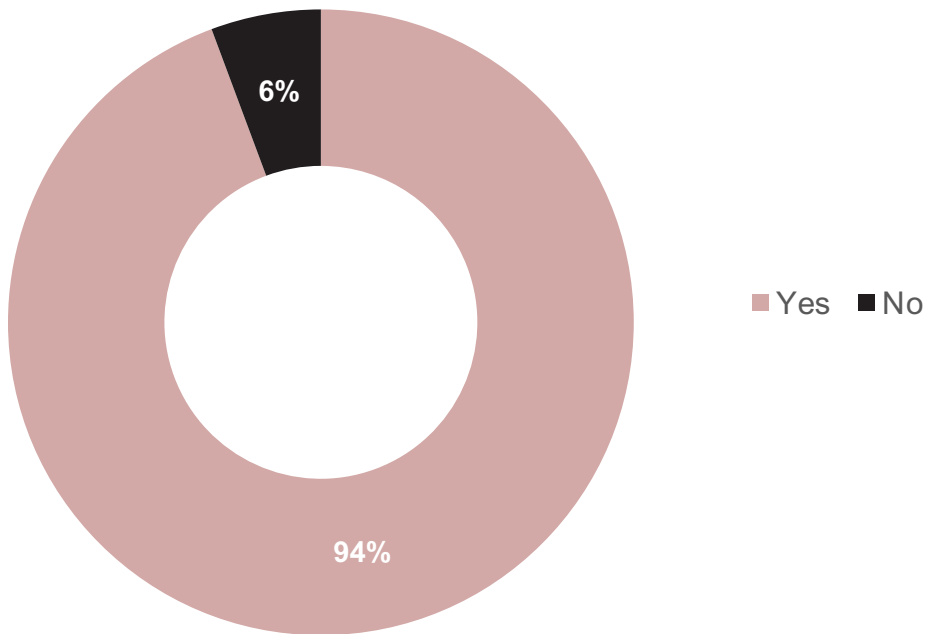
**MELISSA CAMPANELLI**

*Co Founder,  
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Brand and Content Director,  
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## Chart 1:

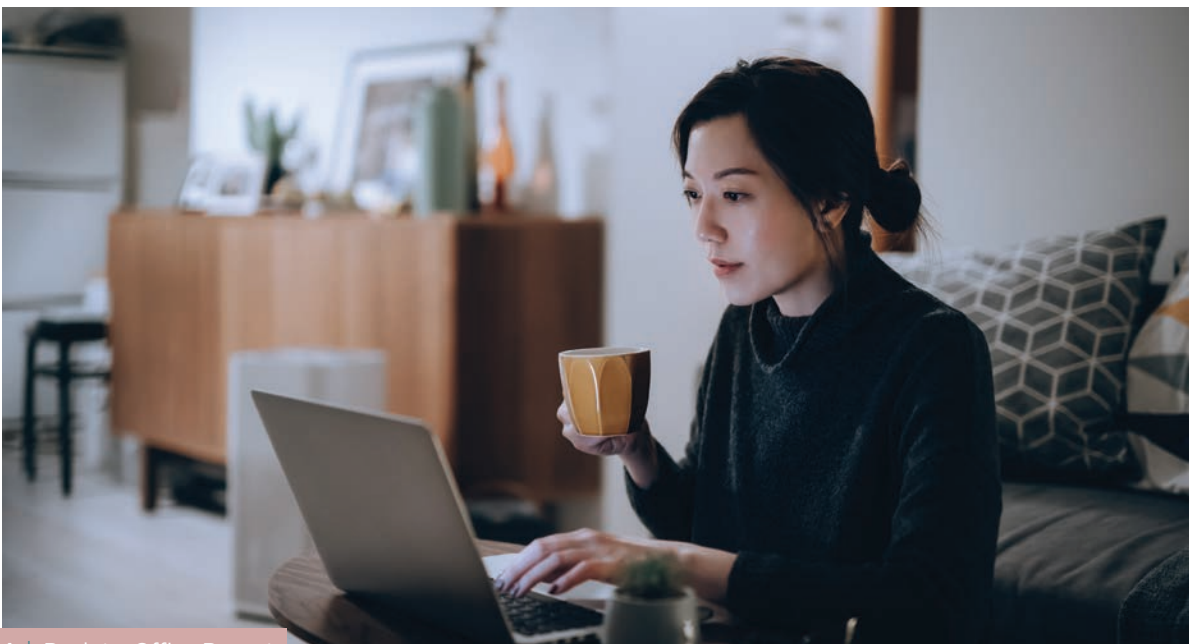
### HYBRID IS THE NEW NORMAL ... FOR NOW



*Q. Is your company currently offering or does it plan to offer a hybrid schedule to bring employees back into the office (e.g., work part time from home, part time in the office)?*  
n=229

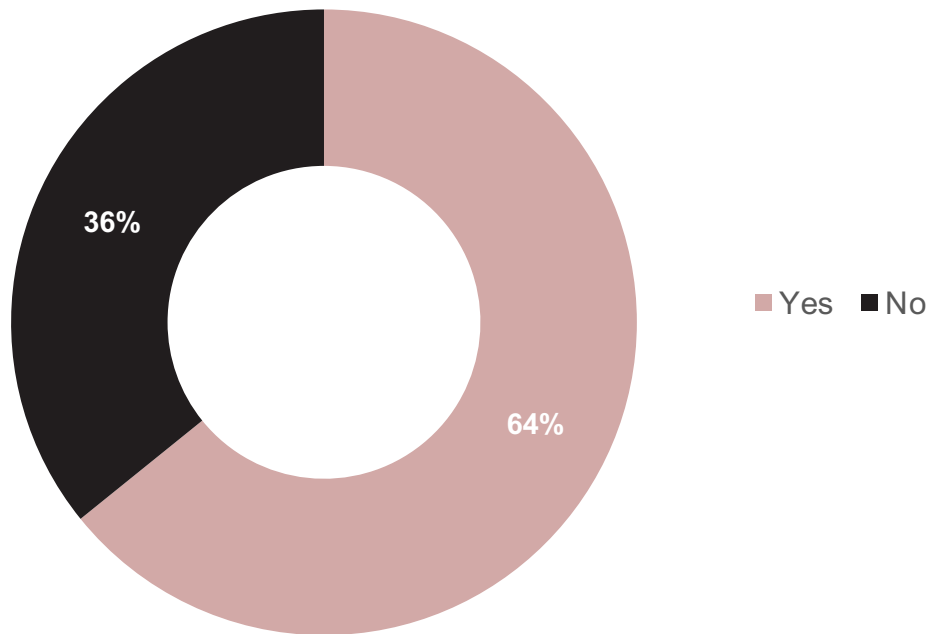
The overwhelming majority of employers (94 percent) are either currently offering or planning to offer a hybrid schedule (i.e., part-time work from home, part-time work in the office) when bringing employees back into the office. This data confirms what many employees are telling their employers: they value the flexibility that a hybrid schedule affords them.

Furthermore, implementing a hybrid schedule provides companies with the ability to ease into their return-to-office strategies, working out any expected issues as employees return to offices after a year-plus absence — and new protocols and procedures in place. While it's unclear how long hybrid schedules will remain in effect, the current reality is that both employers and employees have come to terms that the model is the best path forward for the foreseeable future.



## Chart 2:

### OFFICES NOT TO BECOME A THING OF THE PAST



*Q. Has your company required its employees or does it plan to eventually require its employees to return to the corporate office/headquarters full time after being closed during the pandemic?*  
n=229

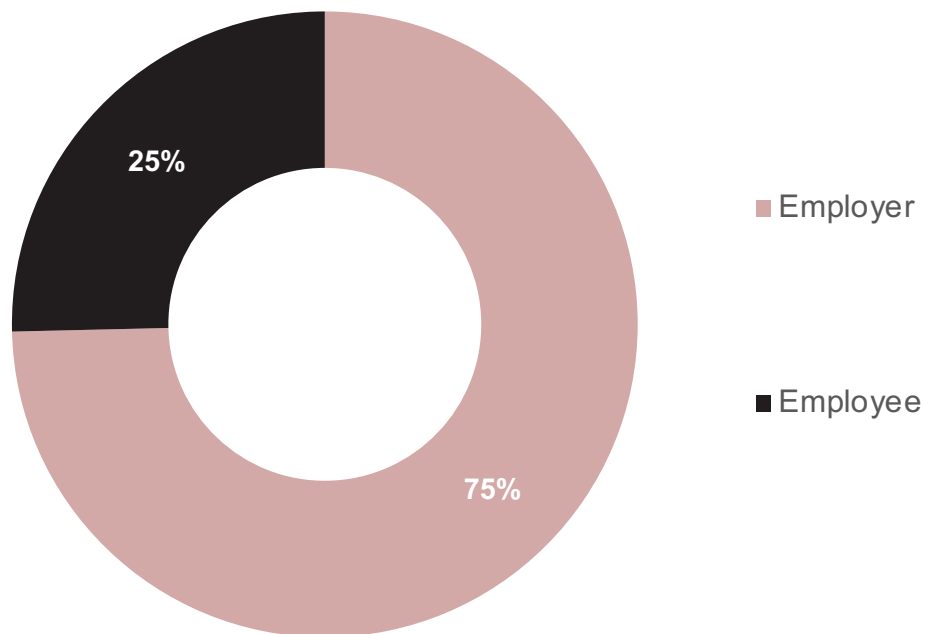
Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64 percent) said they either have required or will eventually require employees to return to corporate offices/headquarters full time. These offices were closed during the pandemic and employees worked remotely. The benefits gained from having employees in the office, including easier communication, improved team morale, better corporate culture, among other things, are leading employers to mandate employees be back in offices, either now or some point in the future, on a full-time basis.

The 36 percent who will not require employees to return may have sold or are planning to sell their office space, or perhaps employees were given the option to become fully remote. Many companies realized staff were as effective and in some cases even more productive working remotely than they were in-office.



### Chart 3:

## EMPLOYERS DICTATING HYBRID WORK SCHEDULES



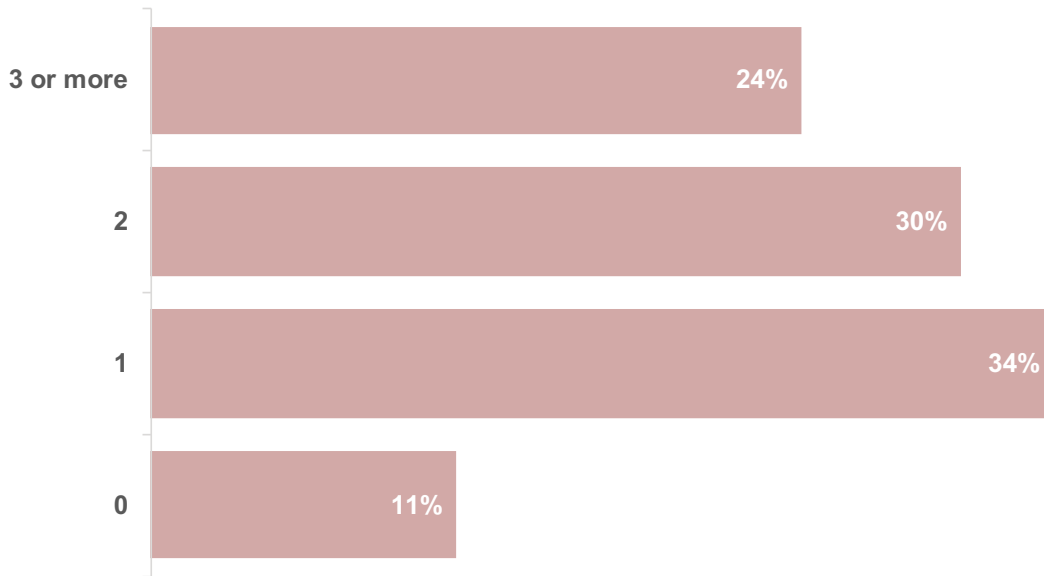
*Q. Who is determining employees' hybrid work schedules?*  
*n=201 Respondents whose companies offer or plan to offer a hybrid work schedule*

When asked who is determining employees' hybrid work schedules, 75 percent of respondents said the employer will be the decision maker. The other 25 percent said the employee will be determining their hybrid work schedule. Overall, the majority of companies that are offering a hybrid work schedule are having their leadership teams/decision makers determine how many days of the week and what days those are that employees will be required to work in the office and, conversely, what days they will work from home. As seen in Chart 1 above, of the 229 survey respondents, 94 percent are currently offering or plan to offer their staff a hybrid schedule to bring employees back into the office.



## Chart 4:

### ONE MAY NOT BE THE LONELIEST NUMBER

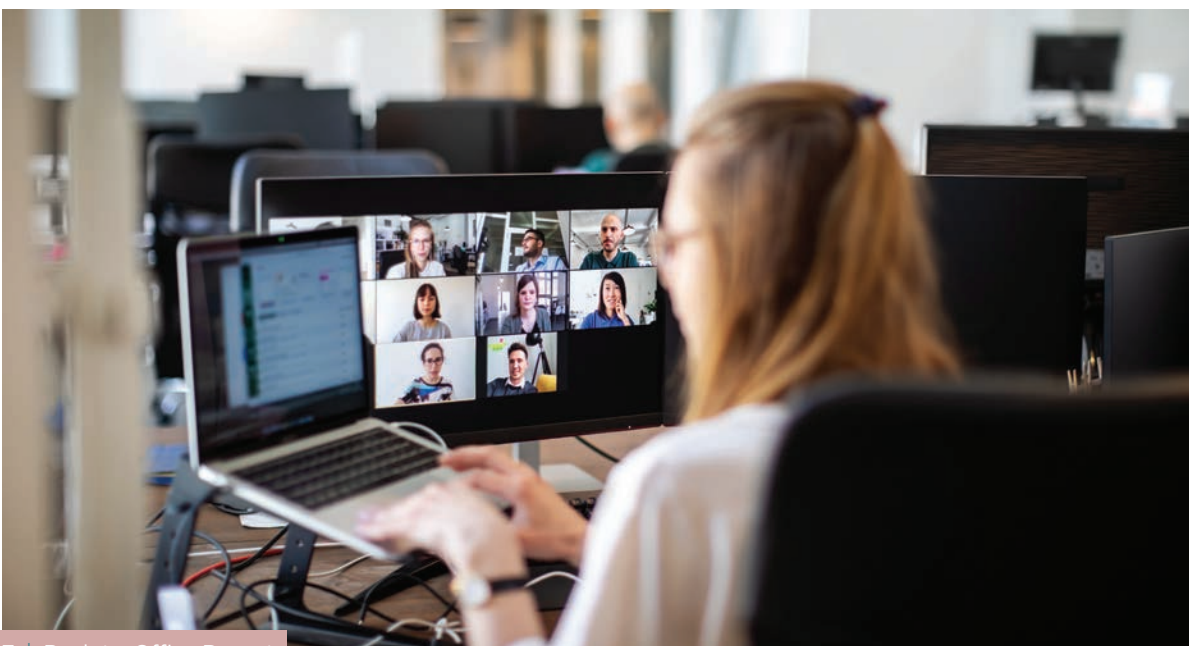


*Q. As part of your current or proposed hybrid work schedule, how many days are employees required to come into the office on a weekly basis?*

*n=201 Respondents whose companies offer or plan to offer a hybrid work schedule*

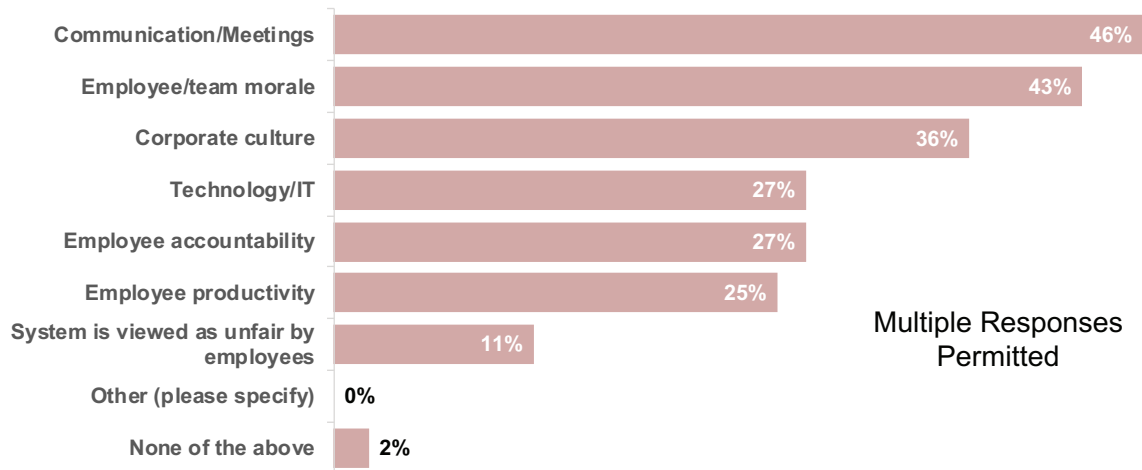
When asked how many days employees are required to come into the office on a weekly basis as part of their current or proposed hybrid work schedule, 34 percent of respondents said they will require their employees to come into the office just one day a week. Thirty percent will require their employees to come into the office twice a week. Only 24 percent of respondents will require their employees to come into the office three or more times a week as part of the hybrid work schedule, while 11 percent are not requiring their employees to come into the office at all on a weekly basis.

In the [Women in Retail and Women Leading Travel & Hospitality Back-to-Office Checklist](#), one of the tasks for leaders to complete is to develop a plan to communicate the value of having a corporate office for employees. Some of these values include employee collaboration, company culture, and innovation. Fifty-two percent of survey respondents cited collaboration as a very important reason for employees to return to the office, and 35 percent said creativity and innovation were also very important reasons.



**Chart 5:**

## EMPLOYERS' CONCERNS WITH HYBRID WORK SCHEDULES



*Q. As a leader, what are your primary concerns in offering a hybrid work option? (Choose all that apply.)  
n=201 Respondents whose companies offer or plan to offer a hybrid work schedule*

While hybrid work schedules are the preferred solutions for both for employers and employees as they navigate returning to corporate offices, there is a level of apprehension that comes with such an arrangement. We asked the retail industry leaders taking our survey what their primary concerns are in offering a hybrid work option, and their responses were telling. Most of their concerns revolve around collaboration and culture.

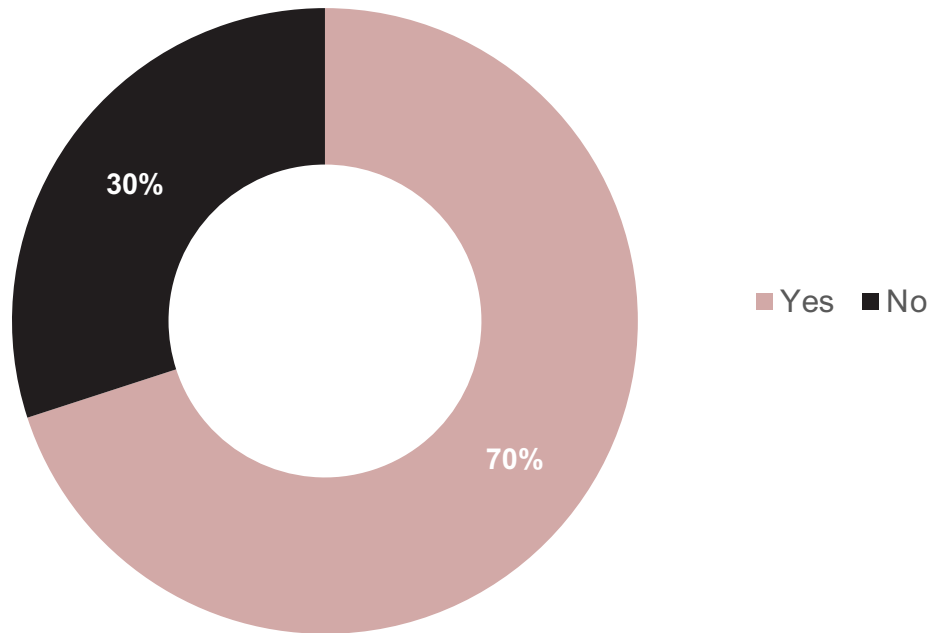
Nearly half of respondents (46 percent) said they are concerned about the effectiveness of meetings and the ease of communicating with other team members in a hybrid work environment. And speaking to leaders' concerns around building the right culture in a hybrid work environment, 43 percent expressed concern about potential negative ramifications on employee and team morale, while one-third cited the impact on corporate culture.

While leaders have more practical, concrete concerns with employees working hybrid schedules, including technology/IT considerations, they seem for the most part to have come to trust their employees working remotely. This is evidenced by the fact that just more than one-quarter (27 percent) list employee accountability as a concern, and even less cite employee performance (25 percent). That's a positive sign for the future of remote and hybrid work.



## Chart 6:

### CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS EXPECTED FROM EMPLOYERS



*Q. If any of your employees have children and are working either part time or full time from home, are you requiring that they have childcare arrangements in place?*

*n=200 Respondents whose companies offer or plan to offer a hybrid work schedule*

During the most recent school year, many school districts across the country shifted to hybrid or fully remote learning models in an effort to stop the spread of the coronavirus in their schools. This left students, many of them young children who need adult supervision, at home for their schooling. Inevitably what ended up happening is that parents, already working from home for the very same reasons that students weren't in classrooms, were forced to pick up the slack when it came to their children's education. Working parents were splitting time between their day jobs and educating their children. However, this type of system was fraught with challenges, and employers were often getting less than their employee's full attention during the workday.

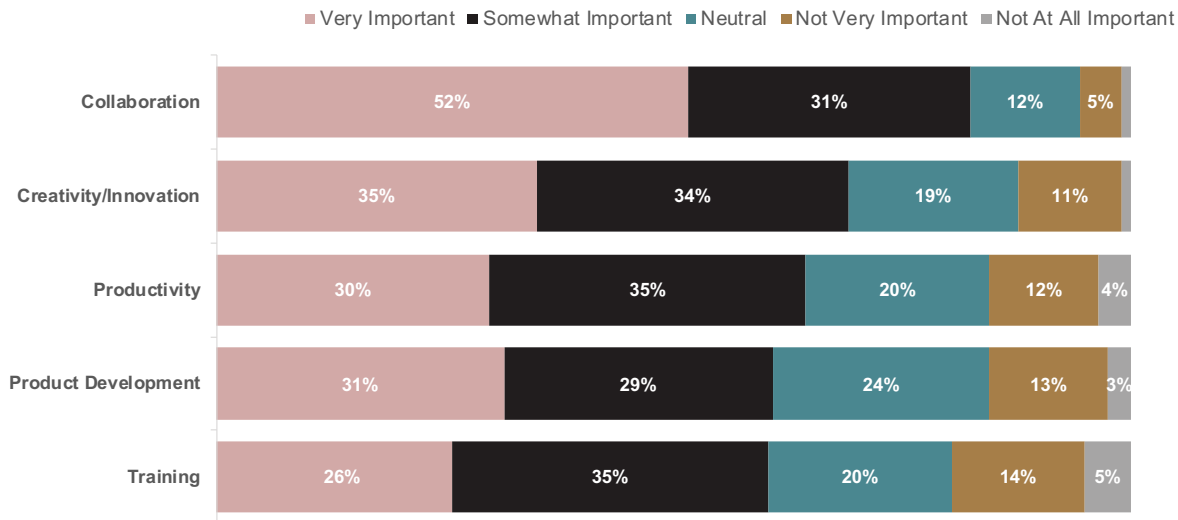
The chart above illustrates one way that employers are looking to address the issue of parents working remotely, particularly those with young children in the home — requiring that they have childcare arrangements in place. When asked if they were requiring that employees who have children and are working either part time or full time from home have childcare arrangements in place, 70 percent said they were. And for the 30 percent of companies that are not yet making this a requirement, I think you will see it become one soon.

For working parents pre-pandemic, having childcare arrangements in place was an expectation. Employees weren't expecting that their employer would be OK with them splitting their time during the workday between childcare and their job. The pandemic, and children being forced to be schooled from home, changed that mindset. Employers — at least the empathetic ones — understood that their employees with children were placed in an unprecedented situation with no real good solutions. They were willing to work with their employees, understanding that they had no real other options in place. However, those days are numbered. The data in the chart above speaks that reality.



**Chart 7:**

## COLLABORATION DRIVING EMPLOYERS TO BRING EMPLOYEES BACK INTO THE OFFICE



*Q. How important are the following reasons for having your company's employees return to the office, either on a full- or part-time basis?*  
n=194

Several reasons were listed and assessed regarding their level of importance as they relate to having employees return to the office, either on a full- or part-time basis. Leaders determined that of all the reasons to bring employees back to the office, collaboration was the most important. Eighty-three percent of respondents said it was very or somewhat important. The increased opportunity for creative and innovative thinking was cited by 69 percent of respondents as a very or somewhat important reason for their company's decision to have employees return to the office.

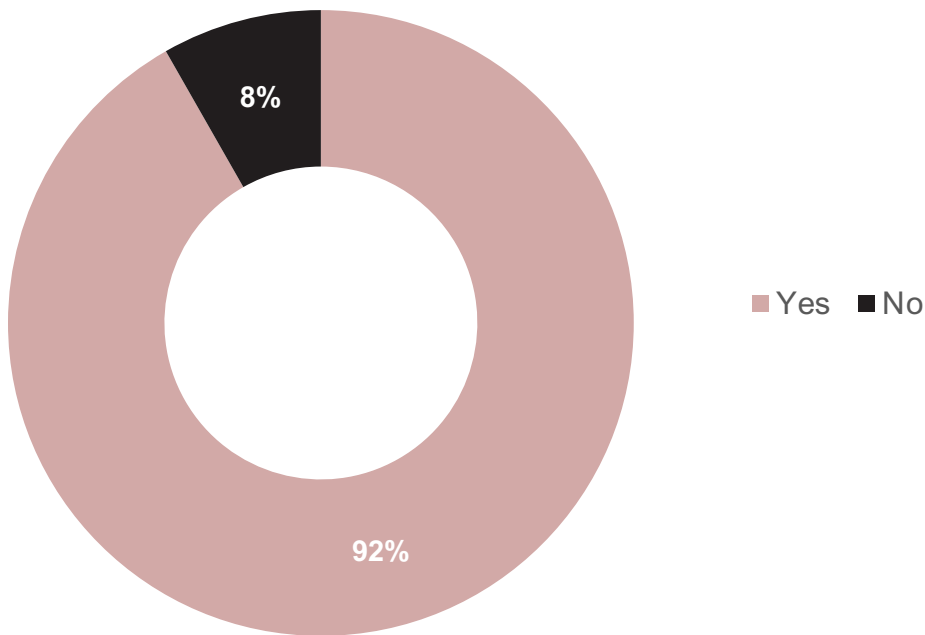
Despite [studies](#) to the contrary, many leaders still believe productivity is improved if employees are in the office. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) called this reason important, while 20 percent were neutral on the matter.

As for what leaders are deeming not as critical reasons for asking employees to return to corporate offices, 16 percent said product development was not very important or not at all important, and 19 percent said training was not important to hold in-person.



## Chart 8:

### REMOTE WORK OPTION KEY TO FUTURE EMPLOYEE ACQUISITION STRATEGIES



Q. Do you plan to offer the option to work remotely, either part time or full time, to all future hires?  
n=194

One of the silver linings that has emerged from the pandemic is that many organizations, including retail companies, have learned that their employees can be just as productive — in many cases even more so — working remotely. This realization is influencing organizations' future hiring plans and, more specifically, their willingness to allow employees to work either part time or full time from home.

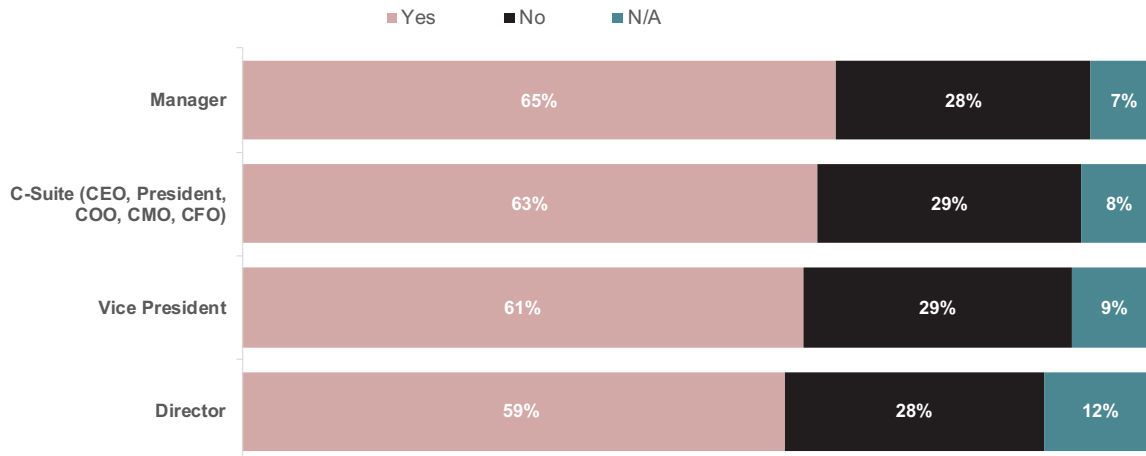
When asked whether they plan to offer future hires the option to work remotely, either part time or full time, an overwhelming 92 percent of respondents said they planned to do so. This data reflects a couple of trends:

- Employers' test runs with remote work, necessitated by the pandemic, have for the vast majority been a positive experience. This outcome has led decision makers to have the trust and confidence that a remote and/or hybrid workforce can be just as productive and effective as one that is in the office full time.
- Employers offering the option for remote work is becoming table stakes to stay competitive in a tight labor market. For many employees, the pandemic was the first time they were able to work remotely on a full-time basis, and they enjoyed the experience — the time and money saved on commuting, the comfort of working from home, the ability to run out for small errands quickly and easily during the day, etc. Given the taste of remote work, most employees are unwilling to give it up. They're now expecting that their employer will give them the option to work remotely, at least on a part-time schedule. If their employer doesn't, they will look to move to another company that will. Remote work options are being added to employee benefit packages as an incentive to both acquire and retain top-tier talent.



## Chart 9:

### EQUAL TREATMENT ACROSS THE BOARD



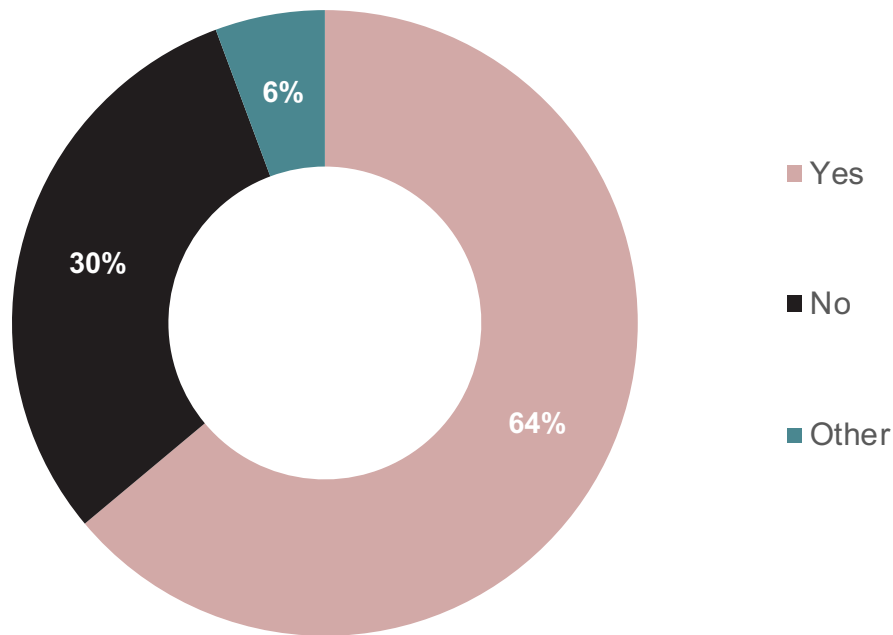
*Q. Of the following titles/roles within your organization, which, if any, are required to work in the office, either on a part-time or full-time basis?*  
n=194

Based on the survey responses, there's not a hierarchy for which employees are required to return to the office, either on a part- or full-time basis. Sixty-five percent of companies are requiring managers within their organization to work in the office either on a part-time or full-time basis, and 63 percent are requiring C-suite title holders to work in the office either on a part-time or full-time basis. Similarly, 61 percent are requiring vice presidents and 59 percent are requiring directors to work in the office, part-time or full-time. The role of the employee doesn't seem to matter to companies when determining their return-to-office strategy, and wisely so. Requiring some employees but not all to return to working in the office while others can continue working remotely can create dissension between team members, negatively impacting corporate culture and, ultimately, business performance.



## Chart 10:

### PLANNING TO MOVE IN THIS REMOTE AND HYBRID WORLD? CHECK WITH YOUR EMPLOYER FIRST



*Q. Has your company already or is it planning to re-evaluate compensation packages for employees who have moved or are planning to move away from the geographic region of your corporate headquarters (e.g., cost of living adjustments)?*

*n=194*

A trend that many companies saw during the height of the pandemic (while all staff was working remotely) was their employees moving away from the geographic region of their corporate headquarters, often to places with a lower cost of living. If all that the employee needed was their laptop and a Wi-Fi connection, it didn't matter where they were located. That may no longer be the case.

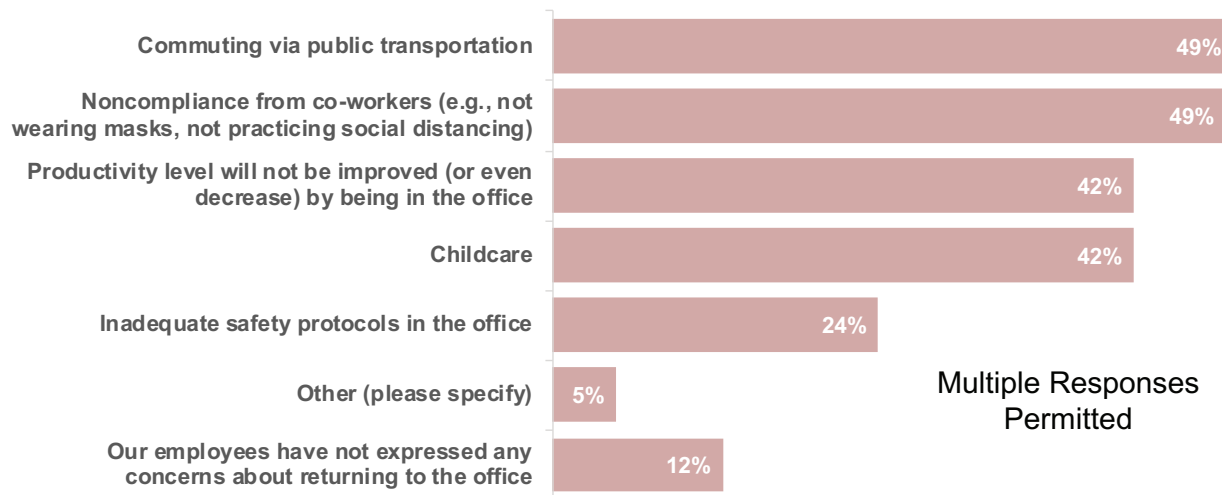
When asked if their company has already or is planning to re-evaluate compensation packages for employees who have moved or are planning to move away from the geographic region of their corporate headquarters (e.g., cost of living adjustments), nearly two-thirds of respondents (64 percent) said yes. Companies are basing employee compensation packages upon the geographic market in which they operate. If an employee moves outside of that geographic region, employers are increasingly looking to re-evaluate their compensation. For example, an employer based in New York City is unlikely to continue paying an employee the same salary if that employee decides he/she is going to move to Florida.

While many employees took advantage of the freedom to work wherever they chose during the pandemic, they may be reconsidering that decision if their salary is reduced as a result.



**Chart 11:**

## EMPLOYEES VOICE CONCERNS OVER RETURNING TO OFFICES



*Q. What are the primary concerns you're hearing from employees regarding returning to the office?  
(Choose all that apply.)  
n=194*

Leaders across industries are hearing many of the same concerns from their employees regarding returning to the office. Four of the concerns are similar in their importance to employees, with 49 percent stating they are concerned about commuting to the office via public transportation, and an equal 49 percent concerned about noncompliance from co-workers regarding not wearing masks, not practicing social distancing and other behaviors that could potentially spread COVID.

Arranging for childcare is a concern for 42 percent of employees, with 70 percent of employers mandating this from their workers (see Chart 6). The fact that productivity levels will not be improved and may even decrease in the office — in the opinion of employees — is also at 42%. Only 24 percent of respondents are concerned about inadequate safety protocols in the office, so it seems that employees believe their companies will implement safety measures, they're just concerned about compliance levels. Lastly, 12 percent said their employees have not expressed any concerns about returning to the office, a positive sign that we are emerging on the other side of the pandemic.



# Who WE ARE



SafetyCulture is the operational heartbeat of working teams around the world. Its mobile-first operations platform leverages the power of human observation to identify issues and opportunities for businesses to improve every day. More than 28,000 organizations use its flagship products, iAuditor and EdApp, to perform checks, train staff, report issues, automate tasks and communicate fluidly. SafetyCulture powers over 600 million checks per year, approximately 50,000 lessons per day and millions of corrective actions, giving leaders visibility and workers a voice, in driving safety, quality and efficiency improvements.



Women Leading Travel & Hospitality is a membership-based association that connects executive women across all sectors of the travel and hospitality industry. Its mission is to unite, inspire and empower its community of executive women leaders by providing unparalleled resources, support and motivation to achieve personal and professional growth. For more information, visit [womenleadingtravelandhospitality.com](http://womenleadingtravelandhospitality.com).



Women in Retail Leadership Circle (WIRLC) is an exclusive community of women executives at leading retailers and brands. Its mission is to foster leadership development for its members by providing an unparalleled mix of events, content and elite connections. Focused on both business strategy and executive professional development, WIRLC offers women leaders the opportunity to network, discuss industry issues, and learn how to become better leaders. For more information, visit [womeninretail.com](http://womeninretail.com).



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