

The post-pandemic future of work is a hybrid model - Axios

[Bryan Walsh](#)

As the pandemic hopefully enters a [more subdued stage in the U.S.](#), the door is opening to a future with hybrid work, schooling and more that is here to stay.

Why it matters: A hybrid life promises the best of both worlds: the connections and experiences of in-person with the flexibility and freedom of remote. But a truly hybrid world is one we haven't experienced before, and adjusting to it won't be easy.

Driving the news: On Tuesday GM [told reporters](#) its 155,000 global employees would be given the flexibility to choose between working from home or in the office, in an open-ended system that CEO Mary Barra described as "work appropriately."

- JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon told shareholders this month that hybrid plans in the future mean the company [might need only 60 seats in its offices](#) for every 100 employees, while Lloyds Banking Group and HSBC [have said that hybrid](#) means their office space

will shrink by 20% and 40% respectively.

- Tech companies — which [led the way](#) in sending their workforces home at the start of the pandemic — have [announced plans to reopen offices](#), but for the most part with limited capacity and plenty of opportunity to continue remote work.

The big picture: As a [sprawling study from Microsoft](#) last month put it, "the next great disruption is hybrid work."

- More than 70% of workers surveyed in the study want flexible remote work options to continue, while about 65% say they want more time in person with their teams.
- Attempting to satisfy both desires points the way toward a hybrid setup, where many workers would continue to operate remotely most days of the week while gathering in offices or other communal spaces occasionally for meetings or collaboration.

The catch: As much as a hybrid future seems ideal for everyone except [office caterers](#) and [public transit managers](#) — employees punch in where and when they want, while companies save on real estate — no one actually knows how this will work.

- "A lot of people assume that because we know how to work together [in the office], we know how to work

apart, then we can do hybrid," Kristi Woolsey, an associate director at Boston Consulting Group, [told the Financial Times](#). "But hybrid is a third way. It's incredibly difficult to do."

Details: A more permanent hybrid setup will require physical changes to office space to promote collaboration over solo work, and more complex logistics to ensure the right team members are in the office at the right time. It also puts additional burdens on managers who will need to juggle employees working in very different environments at any given time.

- At its worst, hybrid work may resemble the subpar [hybrid schooling too many American students have endured](#) over the past year, with overworked teachers struggling to simultaneously handle in-person and remote students.
- A hybrid future also risks entrenching the inequalities of the pandemic, with one group of better-paid and more educated workers — members of what New York Times journalist Kevin Roose [memorably calls the "YOLO economy"](#) — given the freedom to work as they wish, while lower-paid employees are forced to continue commuting to workplaces.

How it works: Pulling off a successful hybrid environment will require dedicated planning that might seem at odds with

the very freedom that hybrid promises.

- The tech company Quora recommends that everyone in a meeting — even those in an office — join with their laptops to avoid the dreaded scenario where half of those in a meeting are in person and half are tiny squares in a Zoom window.
- Dropbox — which [is going virtual first](#) while maintaining semi-regular in-person collaboration — has said it will [ask managers to regularly evaluate](#) whether they are fairly assigning tasks, to ensure that no one is left behind.
- Microsoft [has developed](#) what it calls a "Hybrid Workplace Dial" that adjusts in-person working levels based on local health data and government guidance, which will ensure that less risk-tolerant workers don't feel pressured to return to the office.

Of note: Varying levels of fear from the pandemic mean employers need to ensure "psychological safety" before many workers still at home will feel comfortable even switching to a hybrid model, Amy Edmonson and Mark Mortensen [write in the Harvard Business Review](#).

The bottom line: If there's one thing we've learned from the pandemic, it's this: There will be no single moment of victory when everything can go back to normal.

- A hybrid future offers the best chance to manage the realities of a lengthy pandemic while retaining some of the freedom many of us gained over the past year, but only if it's done thoughtfully.