Workplace Team

RETURN TO THE OFFICE 2.0

Work models and office space



From hybrid work policies
to office space utilisation strategy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE WORK MODEL SHAPES THE OFFICE 4

Work Model Principles 5

THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE CHANGING YOUR WORK MODEL 8

Will our office support our new way of work? 8

What changes does our office need? 9

How can we better use our current space? 10

FROM HYBRID WORK POLICY TO OFFICE UTILISATION STRATEGY 12

ABOUT WORKPLACE TEAM 13



INTRODUCTION

Hybrid work was intended to address the changing nature of work in the post-pandemic era. Today, it is no longer a competitive advantage or an experiment in itself – it has become the market standard. Discussions typically focus on two perspectives: that of employees (the extent of remote work, office attendance requirements and the flexibility offered) and that of the organisation (costs and business value). Yet a third, equally critical dimension is too often overlooked, namely the perspective of office space.

The work model is much more than an HR policy. It is the foundation that determines the size and layout of office space, the level of desk sharing and (most importantly) the day–to–day experience of teams. Organisations have tested different approaches and are now reassessing their policies. The key question is also changing: **how do you manage office space when work models are constantly evolving?**

In this publication, we explore hybrid work from the perspective of workplace experts. Drawing on our experience of real–world implementations, we show how different working styles and specific policies shape office space – helping you make better use of it and make informed decisions.

We hope you enjoy reading our report!

Your Workplace Team

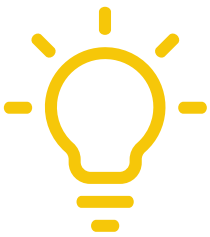
HOW WORK MODELS SHAPE OFFICE SPACE

Over the past few years, the way organisations structure work has undergone several distinct changes. Remote work first became widespread at an unprecedented pace, followed by the adoption of hybrid work models by most organisations. Today, some employers are once again increasing expectations around office attendance.

This does not, however, mean a straightforward return to pre-pandemic ways of working. Hybrid work remains an important approach to work organisation. Organisations are rather testing how much physical office attendance is actually necessary - and for what purpose.

Whether employees come to the office five, three or two days a week has a direct impact on how much office space is needed and used. The work model can therefore influence, among other things:

- the purpose and role of the office;
- the number of workstations and how they are shared;
- demand for meeting rooms;
- how teams are positioned in relation to one another;
- the balance between individual workspaces and collaborative areas;
- the overall employee experience.



Therefore, planning a hybrid work model should go beyond asking, "*How many days in the office should we opt for?*" Instead, it should lead to further questions:

- How does the organisation want to work?
- What role should the office play?
- What does the chosen model mean with regard to the workspace?
- How should employees use the space, and how will they actually use it?

Work model policies

Changing a work model is not simply a matter of deciding whether employees should be in the office two, three or five days a week. An equally important issue is how these policies are structured:

- ? Are the same rules applied to all employees?
- ? Is office attendance linked to specific activities, team needs or the nature of an employee's role?

Organisations should move away from the assumption that one universal rule will work for everyone. Depending on the nature of the work, several approaches may be worth considering, including:

THREE MODELS OF OFFICE PRESENCE



THE DIVERSE MODEL

different office attendance requirements for different teams or employee groups, based on the nature of their work, collaboration needs or management practices.



THE TASK-BASED MODEL

office attendance being applied when physical presence is needed to carry out specific activities, such as workshops, team meetings, project work or key project milestones.



THE ROLE-BASED MODEL

office attendance requirements tailored to the nature and seniority of a role. Managers may be subject to different attendance rules than operational teams, as may employees whose roles require frequent collaboration or client contact.

What is equally important is how office attendance is tracked and which rules apply:

? Is attendance measured weekly, monthly or over a more flexible period basis?

The same “three days in the office” model can result in a **very different pattern of office attendance, depending on the reporting period adopted**. This, in turn, affects how predictable attendance is and how office space is used.

- **WEEKLY** measurement
  Employees are required to work from the office 3 days per week. This approach provides greater predictability in office attendance but may also lead to employee concentration on specific days and increased pressure on office space.
- **MONTHLY** measurement
  Employees are required to work from the office a specified number of days per month. This approach offers greater flexibility in planning attendance and allows this to be better aligned with team needs and the nature of the work.
- **QUARTERLY** measurement
  A longer tracking period allows for even greater flexibility. For example, requiring 36 days in the office per quarter enables employees to plan their attendance around workshops, project meetings, and key stages of team activities.

Each of these approaches affects employee **flexibility, attendance predictability, space management, and opportunities to optimise office space**. Therefore, defining the number of days employees are expected to work from the office is not sufficient. It is also necessary to determine **the period over which attendance will be tracked and measured**.



A well-designed work model should reflect how the organisation operates, the nature of the work, and the needs of individual teams. Only then can its implications for the workplace be properly assessed.

CASE STUDY

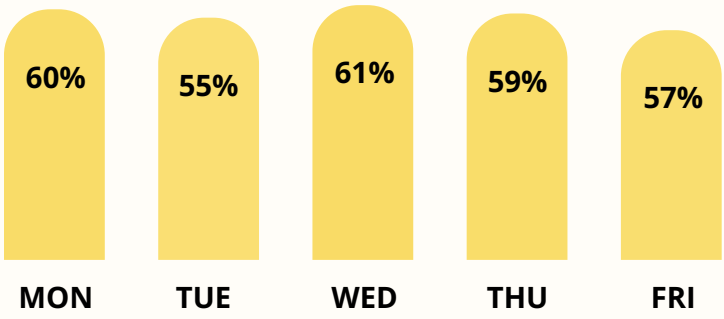
3 days in the office, 2 days working remotely

Let's assume an organisation introduces a policy requiring employees to work from the office 3 days a week and remotely for 2 days, with attendance being tracked weekly. At first glance, this might suggest that around 60% of employees will be in the office on any given day.

But what happens if most of them choose the same days?

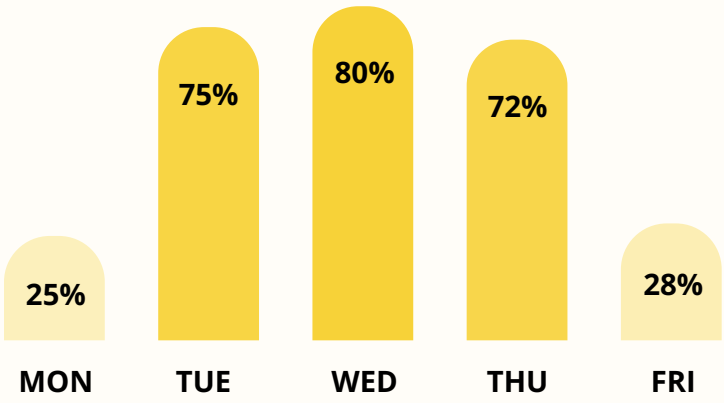
SCENARIO A
Evenly distributed attendance

Office occupancy remains relatively stable throughout the week.



SCENARIO B
Peak attendance

Most employees come to the office midweek, while Mondays and Fridays are less busy.



The same "3 days in the office" policy can therefore generate very different space requirements. When changing the working model, it is important not only to define the number of days employees are expected to be in the office, but also to **consider what attendance will look like in practice**.

THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE CHANGING THE WORK MODEL

A change in the work model often starts with a simple announcement: "From September, we'll work from the office three days a week." From a workplace perspective, however, this is only the beginning... Before changing the number of workstations, expanding the office, or introducing stricter desk-sharing rules, it is worth taking the following three steps.

First, one needs to assess how the office operates today and how it will be used under the new work model. Then, there is a need to identify which changes are genuinely necessary and which challenges can be addressed differently - for example, by changing office usage policies, team work arrangements, or workstation-sharing practices. This process–driven approach provides a foundation for informed decision-making and helps avoid unnecessary costs.

01. Will our office support our new way of work?

The first step should be to analyse how the office is really used in relation to the adopted work model and the functions available within the workspace.

Average office attendance alone tells us very little. An attendance rate of 40% does not mean that we need workstations for exactly 40% of the organisation every day. It is essential to examine additional factors:

- **Peak occupancy** – the maximum number of people present at the same time.
- **Daily attendance patterns** across different days of the week.
- **Length of stay** – how long employees stay in the office.
- **Peak usage hours** – when the office experiences the highest occupancy level.
- **Team co-occurrence and interaction patterns**.
- **Space utilisation** – how workstations, meeting rooms and other office zones are used.
- **Work patterns and office–based activities** undertaken by particular departments.

This approach helps to identify **where the actual problems lie**. We may find that there are plenty of desks but not enough meeting rooms. On Mondays and Fridays, workstations may sit empty, while on Wednesdays, finding an available desk becomes a challenge. Or, conversely, the organisation may have significantly more office space than it needs.

But what if we do not have data for the new work model yet? If an organisation is planning, for example, to move from two to three days of office–based work per week, it is worth developing a **scenario for future space utilisation**.

Analysing different scenarios makes it possible to assess their impact on **peak occupancy**, desk availability, pressure on shared areas and collaboration between teams. Comparing several scenarios helps answer not only whether the existing office can accommodate the change, but also which work arrangements will allow the space to operate most efficiently.



ONE EXTRA DAY – A MAJOR CHANGE FOR THE WORKSPACE

One of the most frequently considered changes today is increasing the expected number of days employees spend working in the office. At first glance, it seems like a minor adjustment: 2 days → 3 days.

From a workplace perspective, however, it is worth examining what this change means for future office utilisation.

Let us assume a company employs 1,000 people. Under a two–day office model, each employee generates an average of two potential office attendance days per week, resulting in approximately 2,000 person-days of office attendance in total. Under a three-day model, this figure rises to approximately 3,000.

That is a 50% increase in potential office attendance.

But does this mean the company needs to provide 50% more workstations? No. This is only the starting point for further analysis.

02. What changes does our office need?

If the analysis shows that the current work model is putting pressure on office space, the natural reaction is to ask: **How many more desks do we need?** However, this should not be the first question we ask.

The first step is to understand what is actually missing:

- ? Is the number of workstations insufficient?
- ? Do we need more meeting rooms?
- ? Is there a lack of space for collaboration and workshops?
- ? Does the current functional layout reflect how teams actually work?

The same principle applies in the opposite situation. If the analysis reveals a **surplus of office space**, it does not automatically mean that the space should be reduced. Instead, it is worth taking a closer look at how the space is being used and identifying **which functions are genuinely needed and which could be modified, combined, or used more efficiently**.

The goal should not simply be to increase or reduce office space, but **to align the workplace with the way people actually work**, taking into account all the functions teams need to perform their tasks effectively.

Only once we understand what is truly needed can we determine whether the solution lies in reorganising the space and its functions or in changing its overall size.

03. How can we better use our current space?

This question takes us one step further.

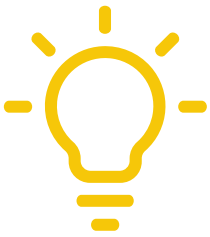
Can we manage employee attendance in a way that makes better use of our existing office space?

If most employees choose Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday as their office days, the problem may not be a lack of space, but **the concentration of attendance on the same days**. In this case, it is worth exploring whether we can change not the space itself, but the **rules governing how it is used**.

For example, we can:

- distribute office days more evenly across teams;
- establish shared office days where collaboration is particularly important;
- differentiate attendance requirements based on job function and seniority;
- schedule workshops and team meetings in ways that help reduce peak occupancy;
- increase desk sharing in teams where it makes sense;
- share not only desks, but also private offices, project rooms and other spaces;
- make better use of existing zones.

As a result, it is not always necessary to expand office space or reduce attendance requirements. Sometimes, all it takes is **changing the rules governing how the space is used**.



This is where **workplace utilisation strategy** comes in: the deliberate management of who comes to the office, when and why, and how the available space supports those needs.

FROM HYBRID WORK POLICY TO OFFICE UTILISATION STRATEGY

Changes to the way we work start with policies, but they do not end with putting them in writing. Decisions to increase the number of office days, introduce greater flexibility or adopt different approaches for individual teams affect more than just how work is organised. They also influence how, when and for what purposes the office is used.

That is why every decision to change a work policy should raise further questions:

- ? Why do we want people to come together in the office?
- ? What should office days look like?
- ? What types of spaces will employees need?
- ? How many workstations must be available at the same time?
- ? Which office resources and facilities can we share?
- ? Can we distribute attendance more evenly to make better use of the existing space?
- ? Do we actually need more office space?

The solution may involve expanding the office, reducing the number of workstations or changing the functional layout. Sometimes, however, better management of when, by whom and how the office is used may be enough.

This is where a straightforward hybrid work policy ends and a considered office space management strategy begins.

Every change to the work model also changes how the office is used. Even one additional day in the office can make a significant difference. But how that difference is felt will depend on the work arrangements in place and how effectively the space is managed.

So, rather than focusing solely on the number of days employees spend at their desks, let us consider **how to transform the office itself into a practical tool that supports the entire organisation**.



ABOUT WORKPLACE TEAM

We help organisations make informed decisions about how they work and create spaces that genuinely meet both employee needs and business objectives.

We are an independent consultancy specialising in workplace strategy. We combine industry expertise, research and data analysis to support informed decisions about the working environment.

We take a holistic approach to strategy – from how space is used and the work model design to successfully guiding organisations through change.

Throughout each project, we become an extension of our client's in–house workplace team. We take the time to understand the company's specific needs, work dynamics and interdependencies, and help to answer the questions also explored in this publication:

- ? What role should the office play in the future?
- ? How can we make the most of the existing space?
- ? When is change truly needed, and what kind of change will make a difference?

We work with a diverse range of organisations – from leading international corporations to emerging startups – delivering projects in spaces ranging from 350 m^2 to over 18,000 m^2.

For daily inspiration and insights from our experts, follow our channels.

Discover our full range of services

Stay up to date with workplace trends

Read in-depth analyses and case studies

Are you planning a change to your work model?
Contact us to see what it means for your office.

© 2026 Workplace Team | All rights reserved.

Excerpts from this publication may be quoted provided the source is acknowledged:
Return to the office 2.0: Work models and office space. Workplace Team, 2026.
Reproduction or use of this publication in its entirety, or for commercial purposes, requires prior permission from Workplace Team.

www.workplaceteam.pl/en