



BACK TO THE FUTURE OF WORK:

HOW TO EMBRACE THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Back to the Future of Work: How to Embrace the New World of Work	4
The Current Look of Remote Work	6
Group #1: Executive Leadership	8
Group #2: Human Resources	10
Group #3: Individual Leaders	12
Group #4: Employees	14
Change Model Thinking: The Flux Capacitor of the Future of Work	15
Practical Tips for Successful Hybrid Work Adoption	16
Conclusion	18
Meet the Authors	19
About Stewart Leadership	20
References	21



INTRODUCTION



The movie *Back to the Future Part II* offered a view of the future that included flying cars, hoverboards, and video calls. While flying cars and hoverboards aren't commonplace, video calls are an almost-daily occurrence for millions of workers worldwide as the global workforce shifts to long-term remote work models.

Workers and leaders have been talking about flexible work arrangements for decades with only

small incremental advancements. Technologies such as the Internet, smartphones, and laptop computers pushed those conversations forward, but the true accelerant came in the form of a pandemic that sent millions of workers from offices and cubicles to kitchen tables. In some sense, the pandemic brought the future to the present.

The leadership challenge going forward will be how to both accommodate worker needs *and* continue to meet business goals. Rather than simply continue to limp forward with temporary solutions adopted during the emergency, the current environment presents leaders, human resource professionals, and employees with a once-in-a-generation chance to shape, mold, and define what work looks like going forward. Similar to the adoption of assembly lines and 40-hour workweeks, the pivot to hybrid work could redefine work for the next several generations. Forward-thinking companies can use this time to set the trends for the future of work.

BACK TO THE FUTURE OF WORK: HOW TO EMBRACE THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

In the 1989 movie *Back to the Future Part II*,¹ filmgoers got a glimpse of a future where flying cars were the norm, lawyers were abolished, and video calls streamed through the family TV, straight into the living room.

We're now several years past the future envisioned by the movie, and while no one is using flying cars on a daily basis and the legal

profession is booming, video calls are a daily occurrence for billions of people. And more than video calls—with the invention of the Internet (notably omitted from the *Back to the Future* trilogy), adoption of hybrid and remote work options has finally leapt into mainstream discussion among corporate leaders and HR professionals.

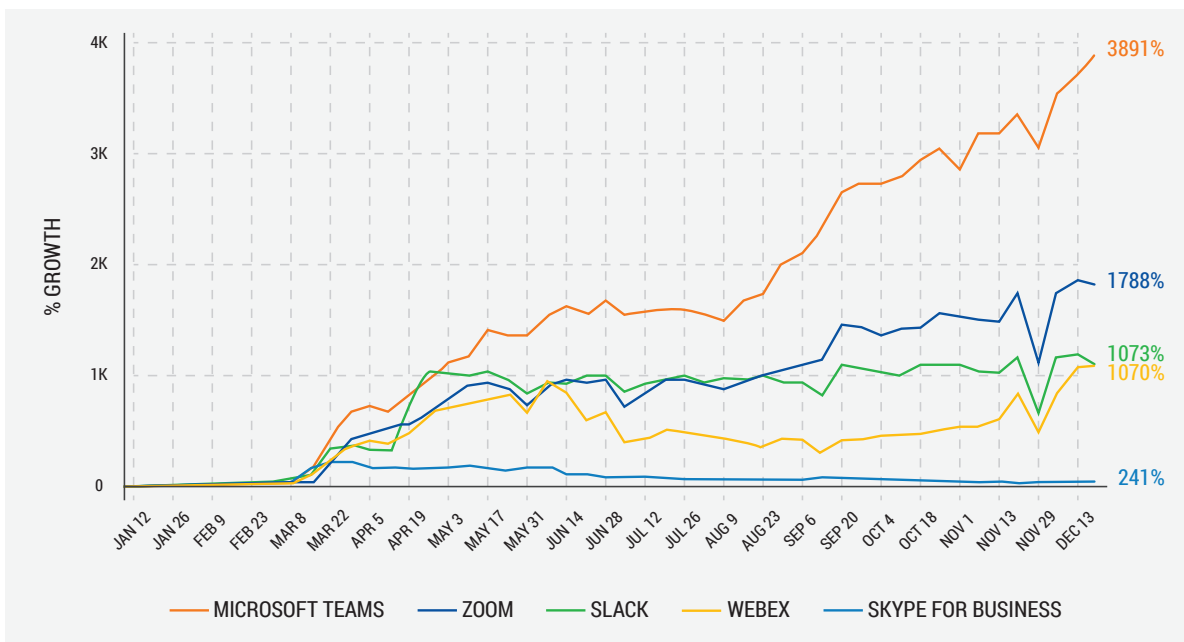
The call for flexible work options has been growing for decades.² but both practical obstacles and traditional ideas about the concept of work prevented widespread adoption. The advent and proliferation of laptops, the Internet, and smartphones addressed some practical issues, and some companies adopted remote work models quite some time ago.

But the real leap forward for the pro-remote work crowd came during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

Office workers who had never had the flexibility to work from home found themselves thrust into remote work, whether they were ready or not.

Collaborative applications and shared documents became the norm³ as organizations found ways to replicate real-time, face-to-face collaboration. And employers had to grapple with a seismic shift in how work gets done in the short- and long-term.

COLLABORATION APP USAGE GROWTH BY TOOL



The shift to remote options would probably not have been so rapid without the necessity generated by pandemic realities. And it's important to note that the global pause may have looked very different were it not for the wide availability of the tools that enable remote work. Only 35% of US adults owned a smartphone in 2011,⁴ for instance. What if the pandemic had

happened in 2010?

But alternate timelines only happen in the movies, and in this timeline of 2022, companies are grappling with a new reality—that is, how to approach the future of work and shape a work culture that gives everyone from the C-Suite down the chance to grow and thrive.

THE CURRENT LOOK OF REMOTE WORK



ASK YOURSELF: DO YOU RECOGNIZE ANY OF THESE CO-WORKERS?

MARIA MULTITASKER

An energetic, engaged employee, Maria is a high performer who jumps from activity to activity. For Maria, hybrid work gives her the flexibility to work at odd hours, integrate other responsibilities into her day, and pursue personal interests that she didn't have time for when she had a long commute. Maria expects some form of hybrid or remote work for the long-term; she has no desire to return to the office permanently.

JOAN JETSETTER

Joan saw the COVID pivot as the chance she needed to travel to Mexico, Hawaii, Italy, or some other "bucket list" location. She shows up for web meetings and collaborates over shared applications, but then she's off and running to explore new

places. Joan has no desire to return to full-time office work. In fact, Joan is the employee most likely to transition to freelance or contract work if she doesn't find a work arrangement that suits her personal needs.

PARKER PARENT

Parker has mixed feelings about hybrid work. For Parker, the sudden move to managing schoolwork, childcare, home obligations, and the office workload all at once was overwhelming. Parker may or may not have had a partner or other support to share the parenting and household load, but even when two parents are balancing school and work in one location, conflicts inevitably arise. As children return to school and daycare, Parker probably feels some of the tension lifting and recognizes the advantages of hybrid work. However, work-life balance issues are still very present, and Parker may need support to continue to be an active and engaged employee for the long-term.

OSCAR OVERWORKER

Always a hard worker, Oscar discovered that remote work enabled a whole new level of over-commitment. The old term for Oscar would have been “workaholic,” but in 2022, Oscar is a screen addict who never turns work off. The worker with all the apps, Oscar responds before and after hours, and he’s never far from one of his multiple options for collaboration. The very real concern for Oscar is burnout;⁵ even Oscar may not realize how close he is to completely burning out. Oscar likely does not have many day-to-day family obligations either because he does not live with family members or because his kids are grown.

Chances are good that anyone in a leadership position recognizes multiple employees who fit the above personas, and it’s certainly possible that other personas come to mind as well. But whatever the specific persona looks like in practice, recent surveys all show similar results: employees want continued flexible work options.

A McKinsey study conducted in January 2021 found that more than half of workers prefer a

hybrid work model post-pandemic, compared to just 30 percent of workers before the pandemic. And before the pandemic, 62% of workers preferred onsite arrangements to hybrid or remote, whereas only 37% of workers preferred onsite after the pandemic.⁶

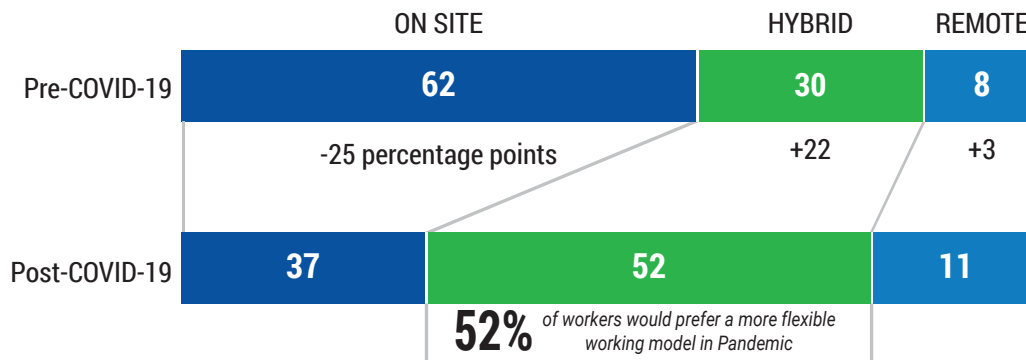
As leaders consider this rapid change in worker perspectives over just 18 months or so, it’s clear that the “return to work” era needs to include a shift to remote or hybrid work options for those employees who want it. If leaders remain entrenched in thinking that they must bring all workers back to onsite or in-office models of 2019 and earlier, they risk losing talented employees who are willing to take a pay cut to continue working remotely. In one study of 3,500 workers in the US, 61% said they would take a reduction in pay to continue working remotely.

In other words, flexible work models are here to stay, and companies that don’t adapt will find themselves struggling to remain fully staffed with highly engaged employees.⁷

The leadership challenge going forward will be how to shape and mold the culture of the workplace to both accommodate worker needs and continue to meet business goals. In our work

MOST EMPLOYEES WOULD PREFER A MORE FLEXIBLE WORKING MODEL AFTER THE PANDEMIC IS OVER

Working models pre-COVID-19 and desired working models post-COVID-19, % survey participants



with companies that are making the shift to long-term remote or hybrid work, we've found some commonalities among various stakeholders that

apply across industries, as well as some advice and solutions that will help those groups create an environment for long-term success.

GROUP #1: EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

For many in senior leadership positions, the shift to remote work in 2020 was a blip—a temporary situation that would eventually go away. The pandemic would end, and everyone would happily return to their former ways of working.

Yet that thinking reveals an entrenched mindset that comes from spending a career in an office setting. That perspective has a very specific view of “work” as a noun (a place) rather than a verb (an activity). When work is a destination, it's tough to envision work as an activity that can be accomplished anywhere. How does one conduct factory work from the home office, after all?

But it's not just the “laptop class” that wants more flexibility. In a 2021 Gartner survey, more than half of non-knowledge workers indicated that they would like more workplace flexibility; only 20-30% of companies offer the benefits those workers are looking for.⁸

A *Future Forum Pulse* study is even more revealing: among those working remotely, 44% of executives want to return to the office full time, whereas only 17% of non-executives want the same.⁹

To remain competitive in the war for talent, executives must look at how to align their strategic goals with the demand for flexible work arrangements.

The question is no longer *whether* flexible work will be part of the future, but *how*. It's critical that leaders fully engage in that

conversation and think strategically—and flexibly—around how to meet the needs of employees—whether they work at a laptop or on the factory floor. Among those working remotely, 44% of executives want to return to the office full time, whereas only 17% of non-executives want the same.¹⁰

