

Best practices for returning to the office

A guide to designing the workplace for hybrid work with productivity and safety in mind.



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Getting started

Hybrid work is here to stay

While the world sheltered in place, our expectations for the workplace evolved.

During the height of the pandemic, we relied on technology to keep us connected with colleagues and friends. Through this difficult period, many of us discovered what it's like to get extra time in our day—from taking up new hobbies to reconnecting with friends and family. This increased flexibility isn't something the workforce wants to give back, with 91% saying they'd prefer a remote or hybrid work model going forward.¹

So the era of hybrid work is here, but what does it mean for the office? The ability to work from anywhere fundamentally shifts how we think about the office and the capabilities employees need when they're in the building.

At Webex, we help organizations around the world navigate the era of hybrid work. In this guide, we'll show how your office can evolve and how you can best support employees as they return.



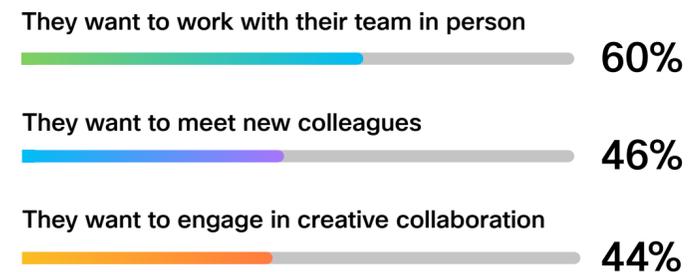
The evolution of the office

Prior to the pandemic, being in the office was the norm for most knowledge workers and for good reason.

It was where collaboration happened; where you connected with your colleagues; and frankly, where you were expected to be. But as work went remote, businesses realized their worst fears about distributed teams simply weren't true.

However, there is still something to be said about going into the office.

Reasons people want to return to the office:



In the hybrid workplace, the office will serve as the central hub for people to participate in rich collaboration experiences, build rapport with colleagues, and connect to the work culture and community.

By definition, a hybrid work model means you can expect a rotating cast of office workers. With fewer workers in the office on any given day and an increase in virtual collaboration, there's an opportunity to redefine physical spaces to provide better employee experiences, improve productivity, and reduce costs.

But before we can bring people back to the office, safety must be the top priority. If you design a collaboration hub, people need to feel confident that they will be in a safe environment and must understand office policies and safety guidelines before they feel comfortable returning.

Top trends that are changing the office

Businesses

Extending greater flexibility to employees  77%

Increasing video-enabled spaces for hybrid collaboration  97%

Increasing the number of reservable desks in the office  93%

Employees

Want changes to make the work environment safer  97%

Are concerned about touching shared office devices  64%

“Entering the Era of Hybrid Work,” Dimensional Research, September 2021

[Read More](#)

Redesigning the office for hybrid work success

Redesigning the office takes thoughtful strategy and planning. You'll want to consider the desired activities and outcomes of each space—will the space primarily be used for concentration, socializing, learning, or collaboration?

Factors such as room size, furniture, technology, and design should be considered and evaluated to ensure that the environment aligns to the goals of each space. It's important to look at every space as an opportunity to optimize employee productivity and well-being. And the best way to remove friction from the collaboration process is to ensure that every employee enjoys a consistent experience, whether at their desk, in a huddle room, or in the boardroom.

For hybrid work to truly redefine your business, physical spaces must merge with virtual experiences, and technology is needed to assist people throughout their day. Spaces must be designed for the desired outcome and equipped with collaboration devices that effortlessly pair with applications people use every day. Whether it's a collaboration device for hotdesking, a video endpoint in a bookable conference room, or an ideation board in an open collaboration area, being able to enter a space and effortlessly start working is critical.

As part of your office strategy, consider the following:

- How can we monitor the number of people are coming into the office?
- How will employees know a desk is available at the office?
- How can they easily book and navigate to workspaces?
- Can employees expect a consistent and familiar collaboration experience whether they are in the office or at home?
- Do we have the data we need to continually optimize spaces, including info on how they're being used (and how often)?
- Can we ensure that room and workspace conditions are optimal to create a healthy and engaging environment?

Tips for redesigning office spaces:

- Design spaces for the desired outcome.
- Equip spaces with collaboration devices to bridge the hybrid divide.
- Ensure devices can effortlessly pair with the applications people use every day.

Best practices for redesigning workspaces



Provide intuitive room
booking and office navigation



Enable frictionless hot desking



Equip desks and rooms
with video devices



Provide seamless
collaboration experiences



Continually optimize spaces



Provide intuitive room booking and office navigation

With the shift to hybrid work, employees will need technology to help them find available workspaces and collaborate. As more organizations redesign their offices by adding spaces for hot desking and rethinking the design of rooms, employees will need the ability to easily locate and reserve spaces.

By integrating room booking and wayfinding technology with collaboration devices, your employees will be able to quickly reserve and locate an open desk or meeting room. And wall-mounted devices with LED indicators outside a room make it easy to tell which rooms are available and which are occupied.

[Learn More](#)



Enable frictionless hot desking

With 93% of organizations increasing the number of reservable desks in the office, these spaces must provide everything an employee needs to be productive, just as they would have at their personal desk.

Hot desking devices allow anyone to walk up to an open desk and turn it into their personal workspace just by scanning a QR code, plugging-in a laptop, or docking their phone. After signing in, they have a simple, one button to push meeting join experience with access to their calendar meetings, recent calls, and go-to apps, all in an integrated desk collaboration unit.

Today's mobile, collaborative workers crave this type of agility, and you should aim to deliver these experiences throughout the office.

[See the Experience](#)





Equip desks and rooms with video devices

With only 9% of workers saying they'll return to the office full-time, it's safe to say that not everyone you collaborate with will be in the same room.

From desks to meeting rooms, spaces need to be equipped with video conferencing devices that provide high-quality experiences and remove friction from the meeting experience. And people who are working from home need to feel like they have an equal seat at the table.

Capabilities like background noise removal, intelligent camera views, wireless sharing, and digital whiteboarding are necessary for organizations to ensure that these spaces are productive and provide employees with the functionality they need to collaborate just as they would if everyone were in the office.

[Watch Video](#)



Provide seamless collaboration experiences

Getting work done and collaborating often takes multiple apps, devices, and locations.

With work happening everywhere, both physically and digitally, employees need a seamless experience from the home office to the desk and the meeting room.

Enabling every employee with a full-featured, intuitive collaboration experience that allows them to message, meet, call, share content, and collaborate from any space is a foundational requirement for the hybrid workplace.

A consistent experience helps remove friction from the collaboration process. Empowering your workforce with a high-quality solution they can count on to work every time, a familiar UI, and capabilities that are easy to use from day one will go a long way toward achieving your hybrid work goals.

[View Solution Overview](#)





Continually optimize spaces

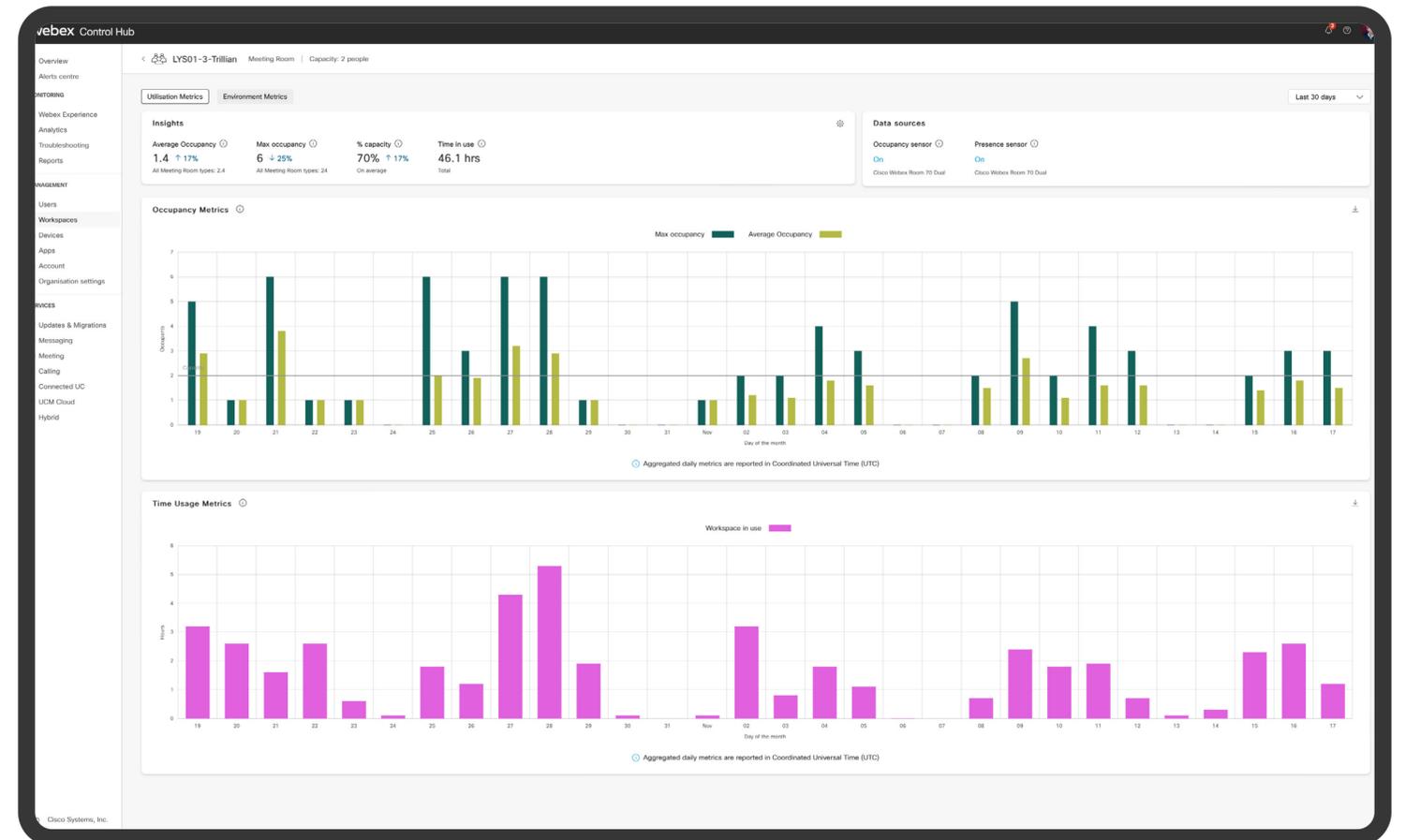
Redesigning your office spaces takes careful planning, but understanding how employees are engaging with those spaces is even more crucial for your hybrid work transformation.

Analytics and insights into room utilization provides organizations with a better picture of how often their spaces are being used and the types of activities happening within them.

Intelligent sensors extend the capabilities of the camera, microphone, and speakers in your video conferencing devices, allowing them to detect movement and the number of people within the meeting room. These sensors provide you with real-time analytics about all activities in the room, not just interactions with your device.

[Learn More](#)

Analytics provide the data-driven insights you need to continually optimize your space and understand whether the activities taking place in the room align to its intended purpose. You'll also be able to better plan building capacity and further understand the experience your employees have in the office.



Providing a safe return to office

As we enter the next phase of work, bringing people back into the office will mean new protocols, policies, and technology to keep employees safe.

Social distancing, vaccination records, mask requirements, frequent cleaning, and building capacity limits may be enforced to ensure safety.

Not only do these measures help reduce risk, but they also ease any anxiety employees may have about returning to the office.

According to a recent survey, 92% of the workforce have concerns about returning to the office and 97% indicated that they want their employer to make changes to the work environment before they return.

Top concerns about returning to the office



Too many people occupying a space for social distancing



Touching shared devices



Changes aren't made to improve workplace safety



Ability to collaborate with remote colleagues



Understanding new office policies



Not knowing when a room was last cleaned

As part of your return to the office strategy, consider the following:

- How do we administer health screens before employees enter common spaces?
- How can we make sure every employee is aware of the guidelines?
- Can we inform employees about which rooms were recently occupied and cleaned?
- If there are too many people occupying a space to meet social distancing requirements, how do we let employees know?

Best practices for designing safer workspaces



Greet employees with a digital office entry experience

- Enable frictionless check-ins
- Make office reception virtual
- Provide digital health surveys
- Activate screens with digital signage
- Monitor building occupancy
- Create zero-touch experiences



Prioritize safety and health in workspaces

- Keep employees informed about room cleanings
- Monitor and alert on room occupancy
- Monitor environmental health
- Provide alerting during emergency situations

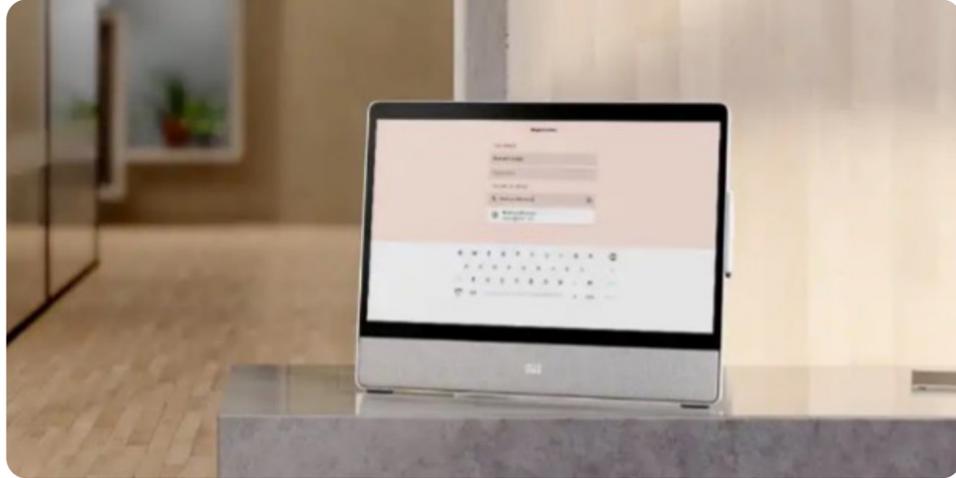
Greet employees with a digital office entry experience

The reception area will set the tone for how your company is handling your safe return to the office.

Greet employees and guests with digital signage, virtual reception, and custom web apps. You can immediately provide safety guidelines, begin health assessments, and connect visitors with a remote receptionist. You can also help them find an available space for the day and provide wayfinding to show them how to get there.

[See the Experience](#)





Enable frictionless check-ins

Office visitors can use a video conferencing display to check in and start a registration workflow that takes pictures and notifies employees that their guests have arrived.

You can even connect these displays to badge scanners or printers to provide access badges for guests. As organizations are in various stages of returning to work, with some reception desks remaining unstaffed, the visitor management solution will help to manage visitor details and traffic flow in and out of the office.

[See How](#)



Make office reception virtual

Virtual reception is a safer alternative to in-office receptions. Employees and guests should be able to easily connect with a remote receptionist to help answer questions or resolve any issues.

[Learn More](#)



Provide digital health surveys

Some organizations are planning health checks and surveys before employees and visitors can enter a common space. With custom web apps, employees can easily take health and contact surveys upon arrival, right from their mobile phones or other devices in the reception.



Activate every screen with digital signage

Digital signage in the reception can provide important safety reminders, remind employees of office guidelines, show building occupancy, and provide instructions on how to check in or find a workspace.

[Watch Video](#)

Monitor building occupancy

Prevent overcrowding by actively monitoring building occupancy. Sensors can provide real-time data on building occupancy to the facilities team, and digital signage can display this information to employees to help ease their workplace safety concerns.

[Learn More](#)

Create zero-touch experiences

With employees concerned about touching shared devices, a digital assistant in the office is essential to help reduce the spread of germs. For example, a digital assistant at the office entry can help people find a space to work or contact a virtual receptionist without having to touch a device.

[Learn More](#)

Prioritize safety and health in workspaces



Providing a safe and healthy work environment goes far beyond the reception area.

By leveraging the intelligent capabilities of video conferencing devices, you can prioritize health and safety in every space.

Analytics and AI (artificial intelligence) from sensors and devices such as people count, device utilization, temperature, humidity, and air quality are valuable to help IT, HR, and facilities managers gain a deeper understanding of environmental conditions and usage so they can optimize the workplace accordingly. However, to make these changes successfully, organizations need more than just reliable data. They also need a way to inform employees and drive user behavior.

Video conferencing devices can provide the machine-human interface that's necessary to keep employees informed and facilitate intelligent experiences that promote workplace safety.

For example, if a room is too crowded for social distancing, the video conferencing display can notify them and route them to the nearest available room that has enough capacity. These advances are leading to intelligent workplaces that augment the office environment with technology-driven experiences.

[Learn More](#)

Leverage the intelligent capabilities of video devices to prioritize health and safety in every space.



Monitor and alert on room occupancy

As social distancing continues to be encouraged, it's crucial to monitor room capacity to ensure there's enough space for everyone to gather safely.

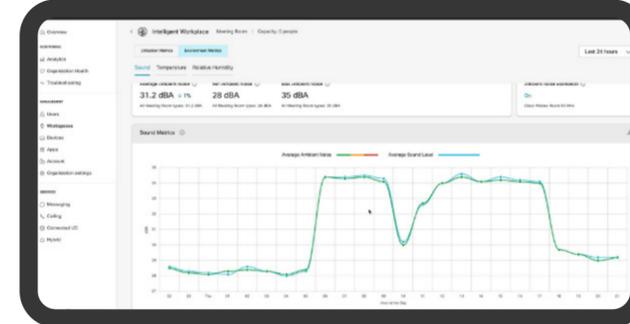
Facial detection sensors in video conferencing devices—which works even when employees are wearing masks—will count how many people are in a room, and if the capacity is exceeded, a notification will automatically appear on screen. Employees can then make necessary adjustments to ensure they're following social distancing measures, such as having part of the group join virtually from another conference room. When combined with wayfinding capabilities, the video conferencing device can also generate a QR code to make locating a second room nearby easy.

[See It in Action](#)



Provide alerting during emergency situations

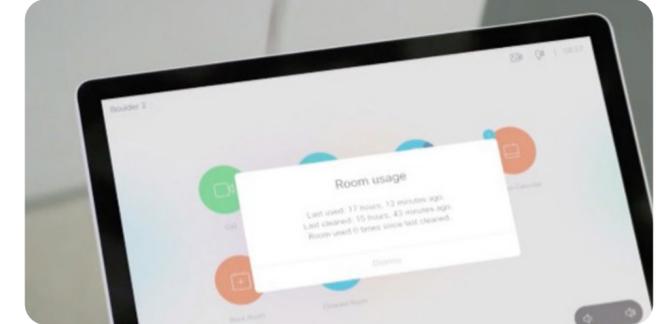
In an emergency, technology can guide employees to safety. For example, if a fire alarm goes off in the building, the video conferencing screen can display digital signage that shows employees the safest and fastest way to exit the building. In addition, the cameras in a video conferencing system can be used to alert emergency personnel which rooms still have people in them.



Monitor environmental health

It's important to make sure your working environment is augmented for maximum health and productivity, paying attention to everything from temperature to air quality. In addition to counting the number of people in a room, video conferencing systems equipped with sensors can also help you monitor a room's environmental health. Temperature, humidity, and air quality are just some of the sensor data that's provided to IT and facilities so they can optimize as needed.

Additionally, like the alerts for room occupancy, if any of these environmental indicators are above or below a pre-set threshold, the employee can be notified and directed to a different space.



Keep employees informed about room cleanings

Keeping employees informed about when a room was last used or cleaned is an important part of helping them feel comfortable in the office. Instead of manually providing this information with a cleaning chart on the door which can be prone to errors, you can leverage video conferencing devices to automate the process.

Cleaning staff can simply tap a button to record that the room has been cleaned and a people count sensor can keep track of how many people have occupied a space since it was last cleaned. All this information can be shared with employees through digital signage so they can make an informed decision about where they want to meet or work.



Getting started

Supporting a hybrid work environment is no longer an option, it's a requirement.

This new era of work has the potential to boost productivity and improve employee satisfaction, but it comes with challenges that require careful planning. It takes a willingness to listen to employees, implement the right technology, and continuously adjust based on new insights.

Now's the time to start planning how the office will evolve. Run proof of concepts—experiment with different video conferencing devices and features. Test intelligent alerting and digital assistants for touchless experiences, and most importantly, gather feedback. After all, the hybrid workplace is all about helping people get their jobs done safely, securely, and efficiently.

Webex is here to help

Provide safer working environments and transition to a hybrid workplace.

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