



ACCOMMODATIONS

TOOL 12: Creating Flexible Workplaces

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THE TRANSITION INTO NEW WORK ENVIRONMENTS

The Transition into New Work Environments

Within a matter of weeks in 2020, many employers were forced to pivot to cope with changing conditions of the pandemic. Flexible hours, working from home, and increased usage of accessible technology are just some of the transformative workplace adjustments that have become commonplace for all workers, regardless of whether they have a disability.

“In 2021, as the world continued to respond to the ongoing pandemic, we stayed true to our Purpose: to Boldly Grow the Good in business and life. Guided by our bold commitments to a thriving economy, a sustainable future and an inclusive society, we are addressing the most urgent economic, environmental and social challenges of our day” – Darryl White, Chief Executive Officer

Now that businesses are gradually moving towards a post-pandemic workplace, we're at a critical juncture where there is immense potential for growth and change. What have we learned? [1]

- Many people with disabilities have shared that the increased flexibility of remote work comes with enhanced perceptions of wellbeing
- Working from home enables employees to utilize their own workspace and computer set up, which may already be optimized for assistive technology or other adjustments that works best for them
- Remote work can also be comfortable for employees, as they are able to move through a familiar environment and perform activities of daily living with support if needed

“The pandemic has shown us that accessibility is an opportunity; a strategic business benefit that empowers all employees to do their best work.



HYBRID WORKPLACES

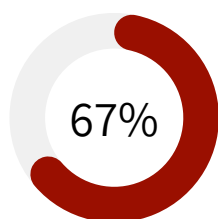
Hybrid Workplaces

Although the rapid pivot to remote work came with challenges, many businesses in Canada found that the shift was easier than they anticipated. It prompted employers to rethink the workspace, and better understand how accommodations and flexibility could be built into the work environment.

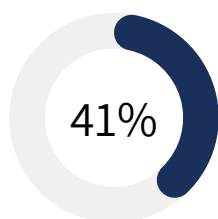
Virtually every industry has the capacity to host a hybrid work model. For instance, sectors and fields that require onsite workers (e.g., construction, trades, hospitality) also have roles that can be completed remotely. Employers may be hesitant to manage or offer a hybrid workplace, but remember:

Working from home (WFH) is not necessarily a preferred work environment by businesses, but for some employees with disabilities, it is a necessity that they may request as an accommodation to support their best work.

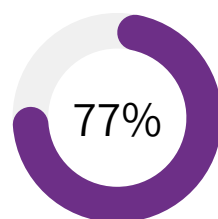
In fact, KPMG Canada has found that: [2]



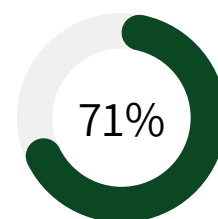
67% of Canadians are satisfied with their current virtual WFH environment



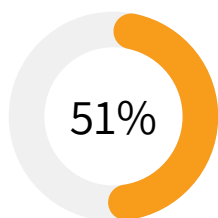
40% of Canadians are still fearful of returning to the workplace



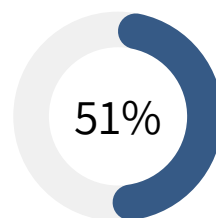
77% of Canadians like the idea of a hybrid workplace model



71% believe a hybrid workplace should be the standard model for all organizations



51% of Canadians do not have to go back physically because their employer will let them WFH



81% are concerned employers aren't prepared/equipped to manage hybrid models



HYBRID WORKPLACES

“Hybrid is top of mind — how we work, where we work — and organizations like RBC must create the conditions where people can be successful at what they do, no matter where they do it. But, more than that, there’s a huge shift in the way employees expect to be engaged to be their best selves, their most productive selves. A lot of that comes down to how employers set their people up for success, from policy and program offerings to the tools and technology.” - Alan Richardson, RBC Senior Executive

A Focus on Flexibility

New workplaces have emerged, with an emphasis on collaboration, mutual learning, knowledge sharing, and social and spatial relationships among workers. [3] [4] Fundamental to these new workplaces is flexibility. Importantly, embracing flexibility means keeping up with existing structures and organizational policies, while also considering employee’s preferences, capabilities, and limitations when enforcing such policies. The aim is to promote new ways of working (e.g., more dynamic, less closely linked to place and time), improve labour productivity, and make major cost savings (e.g., fewer workplaces), to support and improve employee satisfaction. [5]

Consider KPMG’s recommendations to help define and optimize your organization’s flexibility in workplace locations: [2]

Management by motivation and results

- Employers must embrace attitudes and soft skills to keep remote workers inspired and engaged.
- To help reduce burnout, isolation and other challenges related to WFH, location should not prevent in providing supports and adjustments when needed

Unbiased opportunities and equity

- Employees who work from home may be concerned they will be seen as less committed, less valuable, and overlooked than their in-person peers. Vice-versa, employees who cannot work from home may resent those who can, all impacting workplace culture
- Employers must ensure these biases are recognized and addressed at all levels



HYBRID WORKPLACES

Flexible work schedules

- Employers must embrace attitudes and soft skills to keep remote workers inspired and engaged.
- To help reduce burnout, isolation and other challenges related to WFH, location should not prevent in providing supports and adjustments when needed

Unbiased opportunities and equity

- Flexible work schedules does not mean giving employees a "free call" to make their own hours. It does mean being more aware of individual circumstances, preferences and challenges, and establishing arrangements that work best for the team's overall objectives

Safety

- Employers must embrace attitudes and soft skills to keep remote workers inspired and engaged.
- Be mindful of accommodations needed when working in office such as built environment supports and vaccines policies.

Flexible supports

- Choosing to work from home should not come with additional costs. True flexibility means providing financial and logistical support to help individuals thrive.
- Consider the costs of remote teams are incurring (e.g., internet, smartphone, office equipment, ergonomics adjustments)

Note: Often, hybrid models of work are considered 'flexible' work arrangements. Although this can be the case for many employees who to work from home, for employees who **NEED** to be working from home as an essential workplace accommodation, this means the employer is only accommodating their needs 50% of the time. This can lead to further isolation and distress for employees who require a remote setting because they are seen as being 'inflexible' compared to their in-person peers.

DISABILITY CONFIDENCE IN FLEXIBLE WORKPLACES

As your workplace evolves, recognize that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. Each organization must define their own vision and model. You may wish to consider your: [4]

Business Goals

Tailor your goals into investments, training, and technologies to achieve meaningful results (i.e., benefits, increased productivity, attract/retain talent, etc.).

Mutual Expectations

At the core of planning and optimization, leadership must understand their employee's needs. Their feedback, combined with organizational needs, will inform policies that ensure everyone knows what's expected.

Supporting Accommodation Needs in Remote Workplaces

Employers are encouraged to take the following steps to assess accommodation needs for employees who are working remotely: [5]

- Identify employees who may be able to work from home depending on their role and discuss with employees (and your human resources department) what accommodation may be required for remote work.
- Have periodic one-on-one discussions with employees to identify any accommodations that may be newly required or need adjustments (i.e., flexible schedules, ergonomics supports, reducing/preventing complications due to extensive screen time, etc.)
- As needed, seek guidance from your human resources department on employee accommodations and considerations on whether and how accommodations can be implemented (e.g., technical aids, flexible hours of work, adaptive technology, etc.).
- Assess each situation on a case-by-case basis, beginning with an open and positive conversation with the employee. Do not automatically assume that an employee who is accommodated at the worksite will necessarily require any or similar accommodations while working remotely. Equally, an employee who was not accommodated at the worksite may now require accommodation while remote working.
- Assess any health and safety impacts and measures that should be considered when providing necessary equipment, including how it should be delivered (e.g., contactless pickup, disinfecting equipment, etc.).
- Raise awareness among staff about available supports in the workplace (e.g., extended benefits, mental health days off, personal paid time off, work-life balance opportunities, wellness initiatives, mentorship programs)

INTERSECTIONALITY VIGNETTE

Intersectionality Vignette

Min Jia

I'm Min, and I work to advance the diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy at my company. My primary focus is accessibility in the workplace. Two years ago, I became a new parent. When I eventually returned to work, I quickly learned that I would have to seek some flexibility to accommodate the important things that come with being a parent. Flexibility was needed for the numerous doctor's appointments, childcare, impromptu pick up's when my little one is sick, etc. And that's not to mention when I need a mental health day to recuperate after a sleepless night."

The Take Two program at my workplace, the flexibility in my schedule, and the support from my supervisors have made seeking accommodations effortless. They have alleviated so much stress on the days when the only thing I can feel is the weight of being a parent. Having these accommodations means that I can take the time to take care of myself and my little one and that I can be my best self when I step into work and can give my all to my colleagues and company.

For more information on the types of accommodation, please visit [Accommodations Tool 2 - Exploring Types of Accommodations](#)

SPOTLIGHT: MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS REMOTE WORK

Remote work may be socially isolating for individuals. Bringing remote team members together in single locations and events for meetings and events can provide opportunities to interact frequently with other team members.

- Provide opportunities for social interaction to help employees feel a sense of inclusion and belonging
- Develop routine and structured opportunities for employees to spend time together in a social context, even when they are working remotely
- Dedicate social interaction time at the beginning of regularly scheduled meetings
- Plan social events such as virtual lunches or parties to create a space where conversation does not revolve around job roles and expectations
- Raise awareness among staff about the supports available in the workplace
- Offer an employment employee assistance program, which may include resources, tools, and access to personnel that can provide mental health support, counselling, referral services, etc.

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