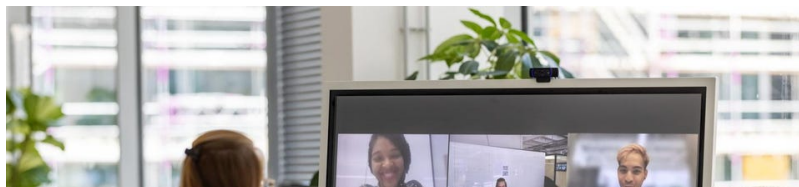EDITORS' PICK | Mar 15, 2022, 12:00am EDT | 4,226 views

Two Years Into The Pandemic, Almost Twice As Many Workers Prefer Hybrid Schedules To Fully Remote Work

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New data from Gallup shows that hybrid work schedules are by far the most preferred arrangement for what the research firm calls "remote-capable" employees—those whose current jobs can be done off-site at least part of the time.   GETTY

A s the grand work-from-home experiment hits the two-year mark— and many employers are finally enforcing return-to-office policies, dragging wary workers out of their sweatpants at home—it may seem like everyone wants to keep working remotely forever.

But new data from Gallup shows that hybrid work schedules are by far the most preferred arrangement for what the research firm calls "remote-capable" employees—those whose current jobs can be done off-site at least part of the time. Nearly 60% of such employees say that's their preferred arrangement, nearly twice the 32% who say they'd like to work remotely all the time.

"We're clearly seeing that employees and employers both agree hybrid work is a pretty good compromise," says Ben Wigert, Gallup's workplace management director of research and strategy. "It's just a really good negotiation—a best of both worlds."

While such figures aren't surprising, Gallup's data outlines in stark relief how much has changed over the last two years, ever since that scary week in March 2020 when employers and their workers went rushing home into a great unknown.

Two years ago, just 8% of remote-capable employees worked from home full-time, according to Gallup's data, and 60% of the same group worked in the office each day. Yet two years later, that first figure is nearly flipped, with just 9% preferring a full-time office environment.
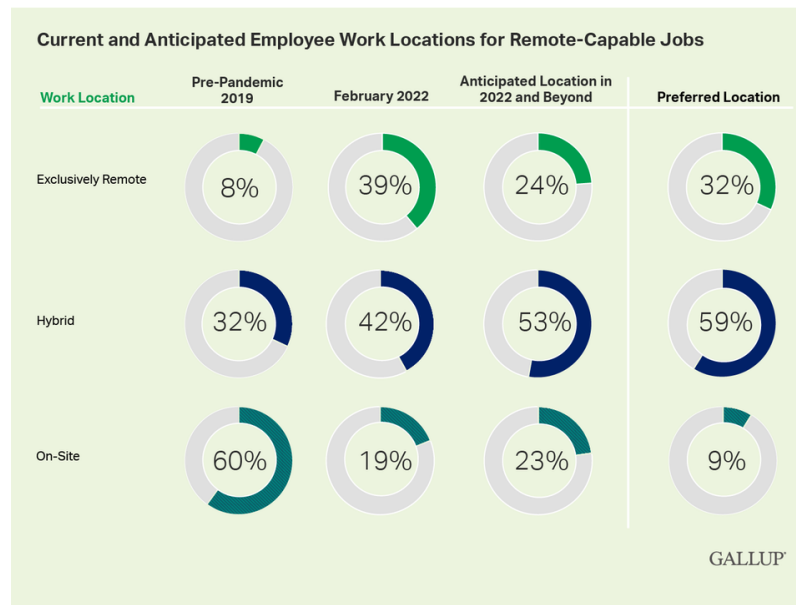
The percentage of "remote-capable" workers who anticipate working part of their time in office and part of their time somewhere else—even if that's just one day of the week—is now 53%, with even more, 59%, saying that's their preference. Today, 42% say they currently work in a hybrid arrangement, with 53% anticipating that will be how they work going forward.

More workers prefer being entirely remote than expect to be able to do so—32% versus 24%—and more than twice as many said they anticipate having to work full-time in the office than prefer that arrangement (23% versus 9%).

Yet what "hybrid" means varies greatly by employer. Google has said its workers will need to head back to the office April 4, sharing a model that says most employees will be coming in three days a week. Citigroup told workers that vaccinated U.S. employees should return to the

office at least two days a week starting March 21 if they weren't already working in the office.

And Microsoft, which told employees in mid-February they would have until March 28 to move to the hybrid arrangement they'd chosen with their managers, has said the company sees working from home part of the time—less than 50%—as standard for most roles.

New Gallup survey data of "remote-capable" employees finds that just 9% want to work on-site full-time, compared with with nearly 60% who prefer a hybrid location. Data: Gallup   CREDIT: GALLUP

Other companies are less prescriptive. Verizon plans to launch its hybrid Work Forward plan on April 1, which chief human resources officer Samantha Hammock says includes no "set schedule."

"With your leader, you define based on your own needs and your team's needs what your schedule is going to be," she says. "You could come in all five days a week. You could come in one day a

month. … We truly want to provide the flexibility based on the role need." She says three days is a typical cadence; two days is what most workers have expressed, on average, as their preference.

That fits with data from WFH Research, a survey project started in May 2020 by an economist and professors at Stanford University and ITAM in Mexico that tracks working arrangements and attitudes. In its latest data update, it found that the average days per week employers are planning for remote work has risen to nearly 2.2 days per week, up from 1.7 days about a year ago.

Overstock.com CEO Jonathan Johnson, meanwhile, says most of his workers are likely to spend even less time in the office as part of its plan that kicks off next month. Last fall, they experimented with executives voluntarily coming in when they wanted, but he says it was a "disaster."

"What we defined hybrid as was … when four people are in a conference room and four people are on a Zoom call," Johnson recalls, saying both people felt disadvantaged. "It was really bad."

Instead, all employees will be required to come on-site two days in April and two days in August for a "conference"-like event at the company's headquarters, with different tracks on topics like diversity as well as food and music on the lawn. His executive team will come in once a week and some teams may come in once a month or

quarter, but most workers' on-site requirements will be limited to four days.

Gallup's new data is part of a report that also draws on its prior surveys about why people prefer hybrid work (avoiding commutes was a top reason), how much of their week they want to be on-site (most people say two to three days) and how respondents prefer their employers to set up hybrid schedules (they're split on how much they want employers to mandate).

Wigert says what employers should be focusing on with hybrid work is less which days people come in, and more what kind of "new norms, processes and habits" are needed "to make sure we're focused on the right things."

"The office features aren't going to get it done, and neither is a moment in the elevator or constructed hallways conversations," he says.

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