

BUILDING EFFECTIVE MEETING ROOMS IN THE HYBRID WORKPLACE



The DNA of the workplace has changed on a fundamental level.

Even in a world where countless companies are attempting to push their employees back into the office environment, flexibility remains a priority for teams. As of the second quarter of 2023, only **42% of employees** in one report worked full-time in office environments.

Hybrid work policies are now the new norm for virtually every industry.

According to the 6th annual **State of Remote Work report** from Owl Labs, interest in entirely in-office work has dropped by 24%. Additionally, 52% of workers say they would take a pay cut of 5% or more just to maintain flexibility in their work location.

Failure to adapt to the new demand for hybrid work can lead to severe problems for business leaders. Not only do companies with rigid in-office work policies suffer from lower levels of productivity and engagement, but they risk losing crucial members of staff. Around **66% of employees** say they would immediately start looking for another job if hybrid working options were removed.

Unfortunately, while hybrid work mandates are beneficial (and often necessary) for today's teams, they're not always easy to implement. Introducing a hybrid work strategy requires companies to rethink virtually every part of their teams' workflows, from how staff members collaborate and share knowledge, to how they engage in meetings.

So how do companies build highly effective meeting rooms in the hybrid workplace?

"Meeting rooms need to meet employees at the point of why they are coming into the office."

Craig Durr, Senior Analyst, Wainhouse



What are Hybrid Meeting Rooms?

The hybrid meeting room is a critical component of any hybrid work strategy. It's a core part of ensuring teams remain aligned and knowledge can be shared throughout the business without limitations or data silos.

Unlike traditional meeting rooms, which are focused on in-person attendees, or virtual meeting spaces for entirely remote workers hybrid meeting rooms combine the two landscapes. They empower employees to have a voice, and a presence in every meeting, regardless of whether they're working from home, in the office, or dialling in from the field.

Hybrid meetings eliminate the gaps between distributed workers, using a combination of physical equipment and software to synchronize staff. These toolkits, combining audio and visual capabilities with collaboration tools for whiteboarding and content sharing, are essential in the new world.

What's more, as the hybrid work landscape **continues to evolve**, meeting room solutions are growing more advanced. Today's most powerful systems not only connect workers but promote inclusion and creativity, through the use of AI-powered solutions and innovative software.



Planning Your Hybrid Meeting Room: Assessing Requirements

Building effective meeting rooms in the world of hybrid work requires a multi-faceted approach. Business leaders need to consider policies and technology and how meeting rooms can be designed to improve inclusion and collaboration.

The process starts with taking a closer look at the physical spaces within the office. Though there's still a place for large conference spaces and boardrooms, many companies are redesigning their meeting landscape to offer more variety and unlock advanced capabilities.

According to Microsoft's research, **66% of business decision-makers** are now redesigning their physical spaces to better accommodate hybrid work requirements.

Meeting Room Size

Initially, this often means determining what size meeting rooms are necessary for the new workflows in the office environment. Depending on your teams, and the nature of their work and meetings, you may need to invest in:

Small rooms: Small rooms and huddle rooms have become particularly popular for ad-hoc meetings and impromptu gatherings. Generally intended to support up to 5 participants, these rooms are great for bringing smaller teams together for everyday work.

Medium rooms: Mid-sized rooms generally support up to 9 participants, allowing more space for in-office teams to come together and interact with other remote participants. They're highly adaptable spaces, suitable for brainstorming, training and more.

Large rooms: Closest to the traditional boardroom, large meeting rooms are intended for larger groups, educational sessions, and business-wide meetings. They support a larger number of in-office participants while still allowing for hybrid connections.



Each **size of room** comes with its own requirements to consider. The larger the room, the more powerful your microphones, cameras and speakers may need to be. Some companies may also need to invest in more screens and accessories to accommodate a larger number of employees.

Meeting Room Design

The size of each meeting room in a company's hybrid work strategy will influence a lot of factors, from the technology they buy to the tools they offer teams. However, it's also important to consider design elements to keep meetings and conferences as productive as possible.

Some key factors to consider include:

Lighting: Lighting is important in a meeting room, not just to create an attractive atmosphere but to ensure teams can collaborate effectively. Most camera systems for hybrid meetings function best in a well-lit environment (250 lux or brighter). Make sure your lighting is evenly distributed to eliminate dark spots and shadows.

Comfort: Every meeting room should feel comfortable for in-office employees. Ergonomic seating areas, easy-to-use equipment, and spacious environments are more conducive to high-quality work and collaboration.

Acoustics: Since audio is essential in any meeting, choosing an environment with the right acoustics is important. Find ways to minimize echo and distractions with soundproofing. It's also worth ensuring there's not too much background noise in your meeting space.

Crucial Hybrid Meeting Room Equipment: Video and Audio

After examining the size, structure and design of each meeting room, the next step is investing in the right technology to power hybrid meetings. The essential tools in a hybrid meeting environment can vary from one company to the next.

Most businesses will need to invest in laptops or screens where teams can manage meeting room settings, connect to team collaboration apps, and even leverage scheduling tools for meeting room management. Depending on your needs, you might also need to invest in touchscreens for whiteboarding and accessories like tripods and mounts.

Of course, the most important considerations for any hybrid meeting will be the audio and video technology.

Video Technology for the Hybrid Meeting Room

Video meetings have exploded in the business landscape in recent years, with around 89% of companies using multiple video conferencing platforms. **Americans alone** engage in around 11 million video conferencing sessions per day.

Video meetings can help to bridge the gaps between workers, replicating the face-to-face interactions of an in-person meeting. They allow for greater meeting equity, stronger feelings of inclusion, and better context sharing during conversations.

However, Owl Labs found **only a third of employers** (36%) have upgraded their video meeting tools since the beginning of the pandemic.



To ensure teams can collaborate effectively over video, companies should focus on:

Exceptional video quality: The higher the resolution of your meeting room cameras, the more efficient and productive meetings will be. 4K video output is often essential for not just boosting clarity but sending the right message to meeting participants.

Integrations: The best video cameras should integrate naturally with the meeting platforms and video conferencing tools businesses use. This includes not just collaboration platforms but also whiteboarding tools and content-sharing apps.

Camera angles: Multiple camera angles are often essential for ensuring everyone in a meeting room can share the spotlight. With a leading meeting room camera, you'll be able to capture the best head-on angle of every meeting room participant, regardless of where they are.

Intelligent features: Built-in AI solutions can help to streamline meetings with automatic speaker framing and camera switching. This ensures remote participants get the best view of speakers and the room at any given time.

Scalability: Depending on the size of your meeting room, you may need multiple cameras. Choosing a solution that can pair seamlessly with other cameras and support all of your meeting spaces easily will be crucial.



"Customers are waking up to the idea that Hybrid Work is more than putting a device in a meeting room."

Craig Durr, Senior Analyst, Wainhouse

Audio Technology for the Hybrid Meeting Room



Video might be the most attractive new technology in the hybrid meeting environment, but excellent video conferences are nothing without the right audio. Even with intelligent tools for captioning and translation, it's important to ensure everyone can be heard clearly.

High-quality audio, both from an input and output perspective, is critical to meeting clarity. This means companies need to invest both in effective microphones and speakers for their meeting environments. Focus on:

Omni-directional microphones: Omni-directional microphones with beamforming technology can quickly and clearly capture audio content from anywhere in a meeting room. This ensures everyone is heard, no matter where they're sitting.

Powerful speakers: Standalone speakers or speakers built into a meeting room bar should provide 360-degree clear coverage and in-room sound. Ensure the audio quality on your speakers is essential, so everyone can communicate clearly.

Audio enhancements: AI solutions and innovative technology can also improve the quality of meeting room audio, eliminating excess echo and background noise. Some can also home in on specific speaker voices to deliver more clarity.

It's also worth ensuring the solution you choose for audio is easy to use and scalable. It should be simple to set up microphones and speakers in seconds and monitor their performance in a unified back-end environment.

User Experience and Engagement

Creating an effective meeting room environment for the age of hybrid work isn't just about installing cameras or investing in collaboration software. Even as hybrid work becomes more common, issues like **proximity bias** are still creating problems with company culture and engagement.

Owl Labs found that around **48% of remote workers** believe being outside of the office will mean they will have less of a say at work and may miss out on opportunities.

To ensure the hybrid workforce can thrive, companies need to invest in making their meeting rooms an inclusive place where everyone maintains an equal level of presence.

There are a few ways to boost inclusion in the modern meeting room, including:

1. Investing in Smart Technology

AI has become a powerful tool for virtually every aspect of the modern business environment. Built into the meeting room, AI solutions can help with everything from real-time translation and multi-lingual teams to transcription and even meeting summarization.

AI solutions can also improve the meeting room experience for both remote and in-office employees alike. For instance, the Owl Labs Intelligence System, designed to take hybrid collaboration to the next level, leverages machine learning, computer vision, and AI. The solution automatically ensures cameras and systems focus on the person speaking in a meeting.

This makes it easier for remote attendees to follow the conversation in a conference as though they were sitting in the same room. The right AI technology can make it easier to highlight active speakers, improve sound equalization based on the layout of the meeting room, and improve inclusivity.

2. Ensure Ease of Use for Adoption

Even the best hybrid meeting rooms won't have an impact on employee productivity and collaboration if they're difficult to access and use. Complex meeting rooms are becoming a thing of the past, particularly as teams participating in ad-hoc meetings don't have time to wait for technical support. Plug-and-play solutions are now necessary.

The right meeting room technology should be free from complex software and easy to implement for any user. Team members should be able to simply place a camera system in the middle of a meeting room or plug in a meeting bar and start communicating instantly.

Ensure any meeting room solution you choose is compatible with your choice of web-based meeting platform. It's also worth looking for back-end software and tools that can help you to control your meeting room technology quickly and effectively from any device.

3. Introducing New Modes of Collaboration

While the right meeting room technology for the age of hybrid work should always allow teams to communicate clearly, it should support exceptional collaboration too. Ensuring integration between your meeting room equipment and collaboration tools will help with this, allowing for messaging, file sharing, and presentation features.

However, it may also be worth considering how you can improve the collaborative experience for your employees by giving them new ways to share ideas.

For instance, whiteboards are becoming extremely popular in hybrid meetings for brainstorming and visual ideas sharing. An effective meeting room solution for hybrid teams should be able to integrate with whiteboarding tools to allow teams to share video and content at the same time.

Building Your Meeting Rooms for Hybrid Work

The world of hybrid work is here to stay. Employees **demand more flexible work** environments, and businesses need to adapt if they want to retain high levels of productivity and engagement. While re-creating the meeting room with a focus on hybrid work can seem complex, the right strategy can help businesses to improve collaboration and align their teams.

Invest in the right meeting room setup for your employees, integrate the most effective video and audio tools, and ensure you're taking steps to promote engagement and inclusivity among your teams. Your staff members will thank you, and your business will be more likely to grow.

