

# Return to Office: The Next New Normal Challenge

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**Abstract:** In this two-part white paper series, we examine current best practices (and not-so-best practices) regarding return to office initiatives. In this first installment, we'll explore some common objectives organizations cite for bringing employees back to the office — including some that just don't hold water.

In the [second part of the series](#), we'll also look at creative ways to increase effectiveness of your return to office approach, including how to equip the one person who may be most responsible for the initiative's success: the manager.

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Many organizations are struggling with how to best get employees to return to a physical office space. Some are taking a heavy-handed approach and simply declaring “return or else.” Even Eric Yuan, CEO of Zoom — whose very existence extolls the virtues of virtual — declared that Zoom's 8,000+ employees are expected to return to the office, a move that [Forbes suggested](#) “potentially doomed his own company.” Other organizations offer a more flexible approach and require corporate employees to spend at least three days a week in the office.

Whatever the directive, employees are sure to have varying reactions and feelings to any change. In part one of this white paper series, we outline strategies to ensure your return to office initiative is as successful and well-received as possible. In our experience, we also know how important it is to equip frontline and mid-level leaders with the tools they need to help their teams adapt to and embrace the change. We view managers as essential players in any return to office plan and have tips to effectively empower and support them throughout the process in the [second part of the series](#).

## What's the Goal?

As with any major initiative, it's important to start by stating the ultimate objective. What does your organization hope to achieve by bringing people back to the office? Companies may have various reasons for insisting that employees return to the office full or part time, and these reasons can vary based on factors such as industry, company culture, business goals, and individual circumstances. Here are some common reasons companies might have for encouraging full-time office presence:



“ Corporate culture matters.  
How management chooses to  
treat its people impacts everything  
— for better or for worse. ”

— Simon Sinek, English-American author and inspirational speaker

**Collaboration and Creativity:** Physical proximity often facilitates spontaneous interactions and brainstorming sessions, leading to increased collaboration and creativity among team members.

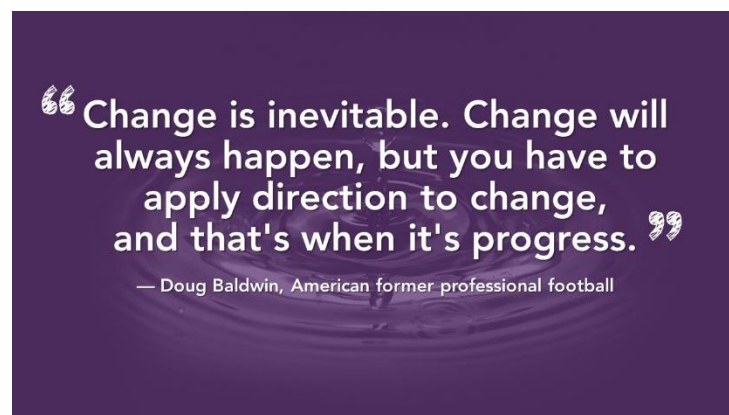
**Company Identity:** Some companies believe that the physical office space embodies their brand identity and provides a sense of belonging for employees.

**Team Bonding and Culture:** Being in the same physical space can foster a stronger sense of camaraderie and team bonding. It can also help reinforce the company's culture and values.

**Innovation and Knowledge Sharing:** Face-to-face interactions can lead to more effective knowledge sharing, problem-solving, and innovation as employees can exchange ideas more fluidly.

**Mentoring and Development:** Being in the office allows for more direct mentoring and development opportunities, where junior employees can learn from experienced colleagues.

**Access to Resources:** Employees may have better access to tools, equipment, and resources available in the office, which could enhance their productivity and efficiency.



**Control and Oversight:** Some employers might feel more comfortable having a level of direct oversight over employees' work and progress when they are working in the office.

**Client and Customer Interactions:** Industries that rely heavily on client or customer interactions may see value in having employees present in the office to facilitate these engagements.

**Security and Data Protection:** Certain industries, such as finance or healthcare, may have strict security and data protection requirements that are easier to enforce within a controlled office environment.

**Operational Efficiency:** For roles that require a physical presence, like manufacturing or logistics, having employees in the office or on-site can contribute to smoother operations.

**Technology and Infrastructure:** Some roles may require specialized technology or infrastructure that is best utilized in an office setting.

**Alignment and Decision-Making:** Being physically present in meetings can help ensure that all stakeholders are aligned and that critical decisions are made efficiently.

**Adapting to Change:** Some organizations may view a full-time return to the office as a return to normalcy and a way to adapt to changes in the business environment.

What are YOUR reasons? And, does research back up your reasons? While the research is scattered, it may be that:

- Remote work employees become “more siloed, less dynamic.” ([Study of 60,000 staff members at Microsoft](#) between December 2019 and June 2020.)
- Remote work employees formed stronger connections with their immediate team members ... (Same study.)
- ...however, remote work employees spent an average of 25% less time collaborating across groups. (Same study.)
- Gen Z and millennial remote workers are more likely to feel included in online meetings. ([Jabra study from April 2023.](#))

Your reasons need to be clear to justify the policy change.

## Reasons NOT to Require a Blanket Return to Office

While many companies have legitimate reasons for wanting employees to return to the office full time, some organizations try to justify a blanketed return to office with less favorable reasons:

**Micromanagement:** Insisting on full-time office presence as a way to micromanage employees, implying a lack of trust in their ability to work effectively remotely.

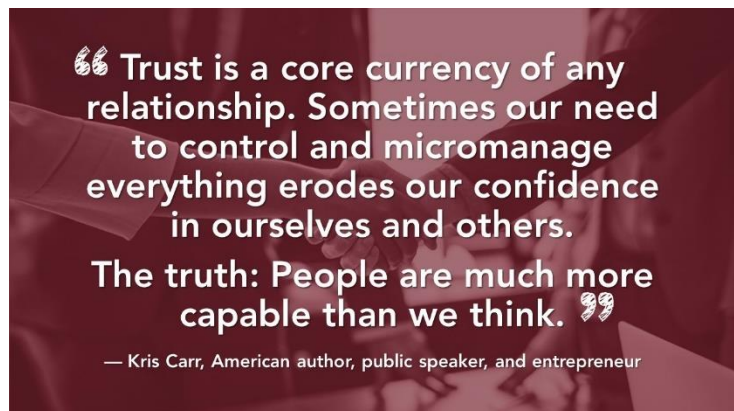
**Maintaining Status Quo:** A desire to maintain the traditional office setup without considering the evolving needs and preferences of the workforce.

**Presenteeism:** Prioritizing physical presence over actual productivity and results, valuing the appearance of work over actual outcomes.

**Cost Savings:** Insisting on full-time office presence solely to justify the costs associated with maintaining office spaces, even if remote or hybrid work would be more effective.

**Short-Term Thinking:** Focusing only on short-term gains or perceived benefits of returning to the office, without considering the long-term impact on employee morale and retention.

It’s important for companies to critically evaluate their reasons for insisting on full-time office presence and to prioritize the well-being, productivity, and preferences of their employees. A balanced approach that takes into consideration the evolving nature of work and the changing expectations of the workforce is more likely to result in a positive and effective work environment.



## Continue Reading for Strategies for Success

The success of the transition back to the office — or any transition today or tomorrow — will depend on leaders leading effectively. The second part of this series, [Return to Office: Strategies for Success](#), will outline specific actions organizations can take to ensure a smooth and successful return to office initiative. Hint: It starts with leaders.

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## How Entelechy Can Help

Entelechy's [Unleash Your Leadership Potential](#) program provides the skills and the confidence leaders need to effectively lead teams and individuals. Through engaging activities, real-world application, and skills practice, participants master relationship-building, analyzing and enabling performance, coaching, and having difficult conversations when needed. *Unleash Your Leadership Potential* has been the key leadership development program for companies like Thermo Fisher Scientific, RingCentral, DIRECTV, Republic Services, and hundreds of others.



Importantly, *Unleash Your Leadership Potential* is customizable — we can address the very specific challenges your company is facing — and flexible — you can continue to modify the program to address tomorrow's leadership challenges.

Entelechy is also an authorized [Everything DiSC®](#) partner, capable of providing your organization with the entire DiSC family of proven, research-validated solutions, including assessments and virtual workshops. Organizations considering return to office initiatives would benefit from the Everything DiSC Agility in the Workplace virtual workshop. This workshop fully prepares today's leaders for tomorrow's challenges, empowering them with actionable strategies to become more agile while navigating complex work environments.

## About Entelechy

Entelechy partners with leading global organizations to design and deliver leadership development programs that drive permanent change and bottom-line benefits. Entelechy's flagship leadership development programs, *Aspiring Leaders*, *Unleash Your Leadership Potential*, and *Leading Leaders*, transform leaders as they progress through their careers. To learn more about Entelechy, please visit [unlockit.com](https://unlockit.com) or connect on [LinkedIn](#).