Resilient hybrid work: How to enable your teams leveraging Cisco tools

Key considerations for improving connectivity, collaboration, security, and cloud-based management.

Support a hybrid workplace that stands the test of time

The uncertainty of COVID-19 forced organizations to explore new ways to remain productive, profitable, and connected. Seemingly overnight, the remote work model was implemented across varying industries out of necessity. Now, as the post-pandemic workplace continues to adapt, leaders are discovering one change is here to stay – hybrid work.

In Q2 of 2024, 53% of U.S. workers reported working in a hybrid model, according to Statista. And according to a survey conducted by USA Today,

> "58% of white-collar workers prefer to work remotely at least three days a week."

It's time for organizations to treat hybrid infrastrucure as a permanent fixture to maximize benefits and minimize risks.

Building successful hybrid functionality improves employee satisfaction, agility, and responsiveness while helping organizations overcome technical debt accumulated from hastily procured "duct tape" solutions.

A permanent hybrid workforce infrastructure addresses four key areas:

Connectivity to support necessary work applications and allow access for any device anywhere.

Security that balances convenience with appropriate levels of access to data and applications.

Collaboration channels that enhance cooperation amongst teams and across the enterprise.

Management solutions allowing IT to maintain control and employees to self-service.

Build and deploy a "branch of one"

SHI leverages Cisco's comprehensive suite of tools to help organizations build a robust hybrid and remote network, addressing each of the four key areas via "branch of one" architecture. This model extends enterprise-class networks to remote and mobile employees or endpoints.

Rebuilding networks to this model translates to:

A cloud-based management platform providing IT oversight of enterprise network policies.

Centralized security including next-generation firewall, CASB, and URL filtering.

Client-based secure access to the internet.

Visibility and analytics tools that track application performance and user experience.

Branch of one architecture also offers centralized management and integrated security critical to edge devices, which is now more common as hybrid workers step away from the traditional office environment for several days a week.

We'll explore practical considerations for deploying a hybrid workforce infrastructure on the branch of one model – highlighting the opportunities for each component along the way.

Four components of effective hybrid work infrastructure

1

Enhanced connectivity

It's no surprise the massive remote work migration made an impact, including expanded network and telecommunications usage.

A successful digital infrastructure aligns with a robust [network architecture](#) and keeps workers linked to the information and applications that empower productivity. Enterprise networking solutions must account for increasing bandwidth requirements, cost impacts, accessibility, security concerns, and the perpetual addition of new endpoints.

While collaborative apps deserve their own discussion, you must first ensure you provide the network capacity to support such applications – in addition to video calls and other tools requiring an internet connection.

SHI works closely with your business and technology leaders to ensure your network aligns with and enables your strategic goals. Using [Cisco](#) tools such as SD-WAN, VPN, and Meraki Wireless and Management, we help you design and deploy a network architecture that maximizes connectivity to critical apps for modern workers.

SD-WAN not only provides a cost-effective option to connect users to the cloud and alleviate bandwidth but also offers security through the cloud and on-premises, an improved user experience, less downtime, and increased resiliency. SD-WAN is a key driver for:

- **Direct internet access (DIA):** DIA allows cloud-based applications to connect directly and securely to the internet from remote locations instead of routing through a centralized data center for inspection first. DIA improves application performance and significantly reduces unplanned downtime.

- **Multicloud access:** Cloud OnRamp tools accelerate access to software as a service (SaaS) and public cloud infrastructure as a service (IaaS) applications for branches and remote workers. SD-WAN automates the provisioning, workflow management, and policy enforcement for organizations migrating infrastructure to the major public cloud providers.

2 Improved collaboration

In a hybrid work environment, with employees both remote and in the office, systems and processes that don't bend tend to break. Flexibility is key to boosting productivity and retaining employees.

> "Already, 98% of all meetings have at least one remote participant – an increase of more than 1,000% in less than two years,"

according to Cisco. The impetus for employers is to create a seamless employee experience whether logging in at the home office or at headquarters – not just in terms of network connectivity but also for social and creative collaboration.

Going forward, organizations that embrace hybrid-style collaboration catering to in-office and remote participants will have a sizable advantage. The right technology in place can improve meeting experiences and promote productive teamwork.

The tools to unite teams

Cisco WebEx Meetings offer web conferencing capabilities for application sharing, screen sharing, audio conferencing, audio controls, and facilitator functions. Meanwhile, Cisco's Desk Pro and WebEx Board are purpose-built devices that improve collaboration from remote locations.

SHI's collaboration practice centers around three factors: assessment, architecture, and deployment. Once we get to know your needs, we can help you design and deploy a collaboration solution that aligns with your structure and goals – enabling your employees to collaborate as though they were in the same room.

3 Integrated security

A decentralized workforce expands your attack surface and opens new doors for malicious actors to cause untold damage with ransomware, malware, and other tactics. Each remote employee potentially represents another vulnerability, since a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

The strongest security solutions effectively defend employees from threats without sacrificing productivity, mobility, or convenience. Astute organizations realize that workers will bypass security and compliance measures if they impede work progress. So rather than forcing workers to jump through security hoops, they find ways to make risk management more user-friendly.

Integrated security measures protect against threats at each entry point, rather than from the center. Keeping your protection on the perimeter helps eliminate data breaches or losses.

Preparation is key. SHI can manage proof of value (POV) engagements for Cisco Umbrella, a one-month trial where you can deploy the solution and receive detailed post-POV threat analysis.

> SHI delivers modern security architecture to protect your remote infrastructure at every entry point, as well as in SaaS and legacy applications. Our experts can build your strategy, integrating Cisco's tools:
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> - Cisco VPN provides users access to business applications on any device at any time and uses always-on endpoint protection.
> - Cisco Duo utilizes multi-factor authentication (MFA) for endpoint protection.
> - The Cisco Identity Services Engine (ISE) gives you visibility into what is happening, who is connected, and which applications are running across your network.
> - The cloud access security broker (CASB) within Cisco Umbrella secures your identities, data, and apps.

4 Cloud-based management

A new way of working should usher in a new way of managing the diverse workforce. With a hybrid workplace, you'll need to keep tabs on processes that are invisible, agile, and always in motion.

Cloud-based management helps organizations control multiple environments as infrastructure and data expand in size and complexity, providing visibility and insights across the enterprise. Another benefit is simplified security managed from a centralized platform.

Cloud-based management works with legacy apps or SaaS. This level of versatility is crucial as the deployment of new cloud-native digital apps and services continues to grow.

Based on a thorough assessment of your current-state technology, SHI can design and deploy a cloud-based management solution that empowers your administrators and your hybrid workforce.

The Cisco Intersight platform, for example, combines full visibility of technology, teams, and operations with total control over apps and infrastructure.

Cisco Meraki's Mobility Management option allows workers to securely manage phones, tablets, laptops, and desktop computers – ideal for companies that use a bring your own device (BYOD) policy. Through Meraki's Systems Manager, admins can push apps and content, block or remove unwanted apps, and automatically enroll devices, which protects individual devices while they are on the network. Admins can use the Meraki dashboard to enforce passwords, restrict access, and track device locations in real time.

IaaS   SaaS   Private cloud

Office workers   Remote workers
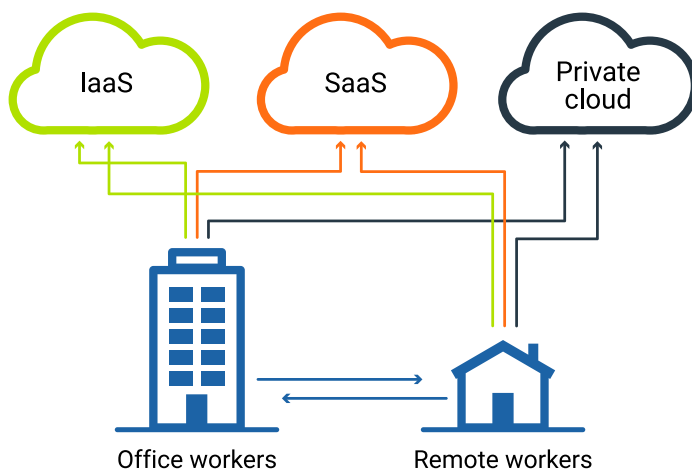
Set up your hybrid workplace for success

"In the ever-evolving landscape of work, the shift toward hybrid work has challenged traditional norms and urged global organizations to reassess their strategies,"

according to Forbes. How do you create technical parity for employees while working remotely and on-site? What's the best way to increase connectivity and collaboration without taking on new security risks?

We can solve these and other pressing questions, helping you bolster your infrastructure and build a long-lasting, successful hybrid workplace.

Leveraging solutions for connectivity, collaboration, security, and cloud-based management, SHI ensures you have systems designed for digital agility and resilience. Experience how Cisco Umbrella delivers actionable analysis on remote worker security and access, or demo multi-factor authentication as part of an integrated security architecture with Cisco Duo.

As a result, you gain a distinct advantage in today's changing digital landscape without worrying about temporary fixes every few months. SHI works alongside you to select, deploy, and manage technology that supports new workloads and operating models for the long term.

The future of work is here. Connect with one of our experts to enable your hybrid work strategy.