



RTO: making it work.

The enterprise guide to building smarter, more flexible return to office strategies.



Actual utilization

49% ↗ 6.3%

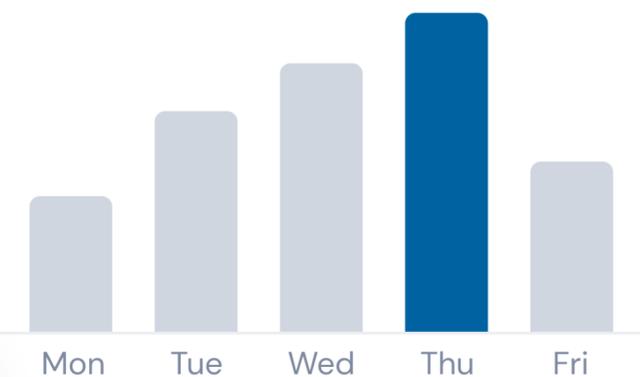


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Guide intro.

**Talk with a workplace
planning expert.**



RTO isn't just a challenge—it's a crossroads. Employees demand flexibility. CFOs demand cost control, and leaders are caught in the middle, trying to balance productivity, culture, and the bottom line. But here's the truth: work is no longer tied to a single location. The office isn't just a place—it's a strategic lever.

One-size-fits-all is dead. The future is a mix—traditional leased offices, short-term leases, managed offices, hub-and-spoke, and on-demand spaces. Smart organizations aren't forcing a return to the past; they're designing strategies that leverage new technologies and workplace options that align with how work happens today.

This guide breaks it all down and presents a path forward—the benefits, the challenges, and the real costs—so you can navigate RTO with confidence, not confusion.

Workplace model breakdown.

- ✓ Headquarters (HQ)
- ✓ Flexible, Private Office
- ✓ Managed Office
- ✓ Hub & Spoke
- ✓ On-Demand Workspace

The Headquarters (HQ)

For those still utilizing the flagship office model, a HQ serves as the corporate mothership—a fixed, central hub.

• **Pros:**

- Cultural unity, fostering a strong sense of identity.
- Fully customizable—your logo, your lobby, your expense.
- Having everyone in one place can boost communication and collaboration.

Cons:

- HQs come with unpredictable, premium costs.
- Scaling up or down is difficult, and breaking a lease early can result in hefty penalties.
- Employees may feel forced into long commutes.



Cost analysis:

A HQ locks you into a 5-to-10-year lease with massive upfront costs and unpredictable expenses. Build-out, furniture, construction? All on you. Utilities, cleaning? Another bill, every month. Security, maintenance? Your responsibility. And here's the kicker—you're paying for space whether it's used or not. In a world that demands agility, an HQ isn't just expensive—it's a financial anchor.

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Flexible, Private Office

Private workspace hubs that easily adapt to changing needs without the commitment of a rigid, long-term lease.

Pros:

- More cost-effective than traditional long-term leases.
- Highly flexible—scale up or down as needs shift.
- Supports regional teams and unlocks local talent pools.
- Offers a flexible anchor for centralized collaboration.

Cons:

- Limited customization. Branding, layout, and build-out options are often constrained.
- IT limitations. May not fully support enterprise-level infrastructure and security.



Cost analysis:

Flexible-term agreements? They let you move at the speed of business. Private workspace without the long-haul commitment means you can scale up, shift locations, or adapt on the fly. It's a cost-effective way to support regional teams while keeping collaboration seamless. The key? Smart planning to lock in the right spaces and the right tech to optimize costs. LiquidSpace can help with that.

Analyze the ROI of an office location.



Managed Office

A private, branded office—zero CapEx, zero maintenance. Solutions like altSpace offer predictable pricing and flexible terms.

Pros:

- Turnkey solution—move in and get to work, fast.
- No upfront capital expenditure.
- Custom-branded office without the long-term strings.
- Flexible lease terms that adapt to business needs.
- All services included—no operational burdens.

Cons:

- Not as flexible as on-demand, depending on terms.
- Still a lesser-known structure in the traditional CRE world.



Cost analysis:

A managed office spreads capital costs over time—no massive upfront spend, no unexpected surprises. With a fixed, predictable monthly rate, businesses gain financial stability while maintaining the flexibility to scale up or down as needs change. It's a shift from high-variable, high-risk real estate to a streamlined, operationally efficient model that works with your business, not against it.

Talk with an office solutions expert.



Hub & Spoke

A central hub paired with smaller, strategically placed spoke offices—balancing collaboration with convenience.

Pros:

- Highly cost-effective.
- Cuts commute times and boosts employee satisfaction.
- Supports regional teams and taps into local talent.
- Centralized collaboration with decentralized flexibility.

Cons:

- Ongoing portfolio management to right-size.
- May not fully replace HQ culture. Difficult to replicate team dynamics across multiple smaller spaces.



Cost analysis:

A hub-and-spoke model slashes costs by shifting away from a single, oversized HQ to a network of right-sized spaces. With smaller hubs in strategic locations and spokes that operate on a pay-as-you-go basis, businesses can scale workspace up or down as needed. Lower-cost locations and flexible terms mean real estate spend aligns with actual usage—maximizing efficiency while minimizing waste.

**Model the ROI of
Hub & Spoke.**



On-Demand

The ultimate flexibility—employees book space when and where they need it. Perfect for distributed teams and dynamic space needs.

Pros:

- Pay only for what you use—no wasted overhead.
- Zero long-term commitments or upfront costs.
- No maintenance, no IT setup, no furniture or facility management required.
- No delays in finding or expanding space.

Cons:

- Limited ability to customize or brand.
- Availability may vary by location and demand.



Cost analysis:

Paying for office space only when your teams need it might seem pricey per use, but compared to the sunk costs of fixed offices, it's a game-changer. No leases, no utilities, no maintenance—just workspace on demand. For companies with fluctuating needs or a distributed workforce, this model eliminates waste and turns real estate into a true pay-as-you-go asset.

Model the ROI of on-demand space.



LiquidSpace vs. "The Lease"

A traditional lease traps you into years of unpredictable costs, hefty upfront build-out expenses, amenities and variable operating costs. LiquidSpace flips the script—giving you instant, cost-effective workspace with zero CapEx, no wasted square footage, and total flexibility. Pay only for what you use, scale up or down as needed, and eliminate the financial handcuffs of long-term leases.



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Workplace optimization framework.

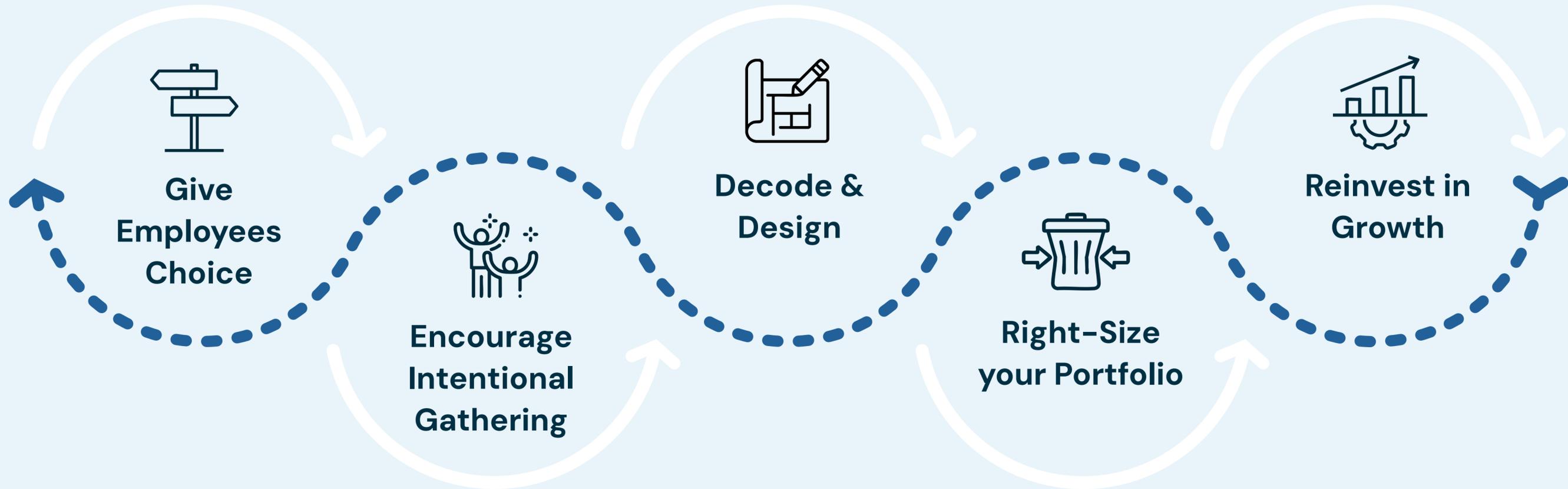
The smartest companies aren't just cutting space—they're transforming it. They're turning real estate from a fixed liability into a flexible, high-impact asset. And by following this framework, they're unlocking what we call the Hybrid Dividend: lower costs and higher productivity.

But this isn't just about trimming real estate expenses. It's about shifting from defense to offense. The real winners? They're reinvesting those savings—scaling teams, funding innovation, driving M&A, and creating real value for shareholders.

Because if your workplace strategy isn't fueling business growth, it's not a strategy. It's a drag.



 **The Framework**





Give your employees choice.

Adopt an 'any/many office' strategy: Empower employees to work where they work best—whether that's HQ, a coworking space, or a satellite hub.

Make access frictionless: Use platforms like LiquidSpace to give seamless workspace access.

Unlock insight through autonomy: Let employees choose where and how they work—and gain the behavioral data you need to evolve your strategy.



Encourage intentional gathering.

Create the conditions for connection: Foster meaningful in-person moments with a strategy that's flexible by design—not forced by mandate.

Make gathering easy: Integrate space with collaboration tools to streamline coordination.

Nudge with purpose: Use data and policies to prompt timely, intentional meetups that fuel culture and drive outcomes.

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Decode demand. Redesign workplaces.

Let data lead the way: Ditch guesswork and design your workplace strategy around how your teams actually work.

Decode demand: Use real-time behavioral data to uncover where, when, and why employees gather.

Design with intent: Build a responsive network of spaces that aligns with purpose—not assumptions.



Right-size your portfolio.

With clarity comes control: When you know what space is actually needed, you can right-size with confidence.

Optimize your footprint: Exit underutilized leases, scale flexibly, and align supply to real demand.

Reduce cost and complexity: Let data guide smart cuts—and smarter investments—in a leaner, more agile portfolio.

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planning expert.**





Reinvest in business growth.

Put your savings to work: A leaner portfolio frees up capital for what matters most.

Invest where it counts: Redirect savings into M&A, shareholder returns, and revenue-driving teams.

Reinvest with purpose: Fuel the next cycle of growth by channeling efficiency gains into high-impact initiatives.



Unlocking the Hybrid Dividend

> The Place Dividend

Reduce real estate costs—dramatically. By shifting from fixed leases to flexible space, companies can eliminate underused offices, and save 80%+ on workplace costs. It's not just cost-cutting—it's smart allocation of capital.

> The People Dividend

Boost productivity and retention. Empowering teams with flexibility builds trust, fuels collaboration, and attracts top talent. Happy employees stay longer and perform better.

Building the right tech stack.

Your workplace tech stack needs to be smarter than ever—always on, always optimizing. The right tools don't just manage space; they enable agility, fuel collaboration, and ensure real estate aligns with how work actually happens. This section breaks down the critical jobs to be done by your workplace tech stack—from portfolio intelligence to seamless communication—turning space into a strategic asset.



Workplace Management Software

Your workplace management software should be more than a tool—it should be your expert teammate, helping you master three critical jobs:

Get a demo. →



Ensure a great employee experience: Make it simple for employees to find and book the right workspace, coordinate with teammates, and work where they're most productive.

Drive efficiency gains: Stop wasting money on underutilized space. Leverage real-time data to optimize occupancy, reduce overhead, and align office footprints with actual demand.

Monitor compliance with ease: Automate tracking for health, safety, and budgets. Manage capacity, schedule sanitation, and generate reports without the headache—so leaders can focus on strategy, not spreadsheets.

Portfolio Optimization Tools

Unlock business potential. The right tools help leaders reduce waste, optimize space, and reinvest savings where they matter most.

Get a demo. →



Maximize space efficiency: Identify underused offices, analyze occupancy trends, and repurpose space to better support evolving workforce needs.

Make smarter portfolio decisions: Use AI-driven insights to assess space needs and adjust real estate strategies as business priorities evolve.

Model future workplace strategies: Simulate different configurations, such as Hub & Spoke or on-demand access, to balance cost reduction, productivity and agility.

Collaboration & Communication Platforms

For hybrid work to succeed, teams need seamless ways to connect and collaborate across multiple office locations.

[Get a demo. →](#)



Simplify coordination: Make it easy to schedule in-person meetups, reserve workspaces, and eliminate scheduling conflicts.

Unify workflows: Integrate messaging, workspace booking, and document sharing into a single platform to keep work moving.

Foster engagement: Strengthen team culture and ensure alignment with hybrid meeting solutions that support meaningful interaction.

Rollout best practices.



Returning to the office isn't a checklist—it's a seismic shift in how people experience work. It's not just about new policies or redesigned spaces; it's about rebuilding trust, connection, and purpose. After years of remote work, employees aren't just adjusting their commutes—they're rethinking how, when, and why they gather. Some feel disconnected. Others are uneasy about new routines. Many question if the office still works for them.

The companies that get this right won't force a return—they'll create a workplace people actually want to return to. That means leading with engagement, empathy, and adaptability. It means listening, iterating, and empowering teams with real choice. Because the future of work isn't about mandates—it's about making the office matter again.

Engage employees:

Involve employees to foster ownership and alignment.

Action: Use surveys, focus groups, or town halls.

Prioritize health and safety:

Ensure your workspace meets high safety standards.

Action: Sanitation protocols, capacity limits, and emergency plans.

Leverage technology:

Invest in tools that support streamlined operations.

Action: workplace management software and collaboration tools.

Communicate clearly:

Keep employees informed to reduce anxiety and gain trust.

Action: Develop a plan, updates, and open forums.

Set feedback mechanisms:

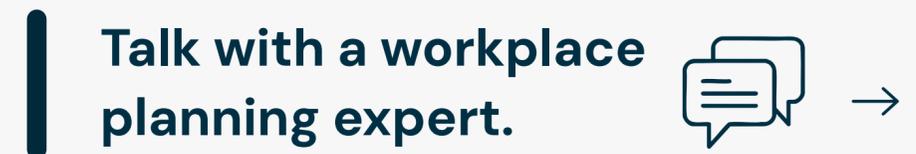
Create channels to facilitate data-driven adjustments.

Action: Use surveys or feedback platforms.

Monitor and adapt:

Regularly assess and adjust based on feedback.

Action: Track metrics like utilization and satisfaction.



Risk mitigation.

Balancing office usage with cost savings isn't a contradiction—it's a necessity. The old model of oversized, underutilized HQs is dead weight. The smart play? Flexible workspace models and real-time utilization data.

Overcommitment:

Right-size office footprint using tools like Portfolio Manager to eliminate underutilization.

Rigid lease terms:

Embrace flexible leases (short-term, managed offices, on-demand workspaces).

Less engagement:

Adopt hybrid workplace policies to maintain team productivity and engagement.

Communication gaps:

Leverage workplace technology for efficient booking and communication.



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Case study

Allstate drastically restructured its real estate portfolio, reducing office space from 8M sq. ft. to a hybrid model featuring coworking spaces and redesigned hubs.

This shift cut annual office expenses from \$382M in 2020 to \$138M in 2024.

By replacing underutilized office space with more flexible alternatives, Allstate created a work environment that fosters collaboration while maintaining cost efficiency.



Allstate.

[Click here](#) to read the full case study.

Case study

T-Mobile faced inefficiencies with its regional team office HQs. Many locations were underutilized.

By closing these bloated HQs and offering on-demand workspace in addition to dedicated flexible hubs, the company cut real estate costs by 80%. This hybrid approach allowed teams to collaborate meaningfully while eliminating wasteful real estate spending.

T Mobile

[Click here](#) to read the full case study.

Case study

By adopting a Live and Work Anywhere policy and leveraging data-driven insights, the company right-sized its portfolio, cutting expenses by 90%.

CEO Brian Chesky implemented a monthly in-person gathering week, creating a RTO strategy that works for everyone. This approach, combined with rigorous deadlines and progress checks, ensures productivity without requiring daily office attendance, saving costs while maintaining superior output.



[Click here](#) to read the full case study.

FAQs



What's the difference between managed offices and coworking spaces?

Managed offices give you private, branded space with flexible terms. Coworking spaces, on the other hand, are shared environments with open seating and communal amenities. Both have their place—it's about what fits your needs.

How can my RTO strategy be cost-effective?

Ditch the long-term lease. Flexible solutions let you adjust your footprint as your needs evolves, so you're only paying for the space you actually need.

What amenities matter most in an office space?

The ones that make work better. Think beyond desks—prioritize meeting rooms, lounges, cafeterias, and even fitness centers. A great office isn't just a place to work; it's a place people want to be.

Next steps...

**Talk with a workplace
planning expert.**



Bringing employees back isn't the goal. Building a workplace that actually works—that's the opportunity. The companies that get this right won't default to outdated office models; they'll create a smarter, more resilient way to work. It's about balancing structure with flexibility, giving employees choice while optimizing costs, and turning office space into a competitive advantage.

That's where LiquidSpace comes in. Whether it's a managed office, hub-and-spoke strategy, short-term lease, or on-demand workspace, we provide data-driven, turnkey solutions to help you right-size your real estate with confidence.

Don't wait—explore LiquidSpace today!



Beyond being the largest flexible office space marketplace, the LiquidSpace platform simplifies portfolio management and motivates in-person collaboration.

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planning expert.** →