

# Is linking time in the office to career success the best way to get us back to work?

January 22 2024, by John L Hopkins

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Working from home introduced in response to the harsh pandemic lockdowns in 2020 was expected to be a short term arrangement with staff returning to the office as soon as restrictions were lifted.

Yet, almost four years later, most [office workers](#) are still following hybrid arrangements—splitting their week between home and office, with no plans to return [full-time](#) to the workplace anytime soon.

In what some employees consider an aggressive move by their bosses to get them back where they can be seen, some companies are now linking office attendance to pay, bonuses and even promotions.

## **It pays, for some, to return to the office**

Linking office attendance with pay has taken off after [Citibank workers in the UK](#) were told last September their bonuses could be affected if they didn't work a minimum of three days per week from the office.

In Australia [Origin and Suncorp](#), have done the same thing, as has ANZ where staff are required to work at least half their hours—averaged over a calendar month—in the office.

If these conditions are not met, it may be taken into consideration [in performance and remuneration reviews](#) at the end of the next year.

"If you are one of our people who are yet to be spending more than half your time in the workplace, we need you to adjust your patterns unless you have a formal exception in place," an [internal email to ANZ staff](#) said.

In the US, [Amazon has told corporate employees they may miss out on promotion if they ignore the company's return-to-office mandate](#), which requires employees to be in the office at least three days a week.

A post on Amazon's internal website viewed by CNBC said,

"Managers own the promotion process, which means it is their

responsibility to support your growth through regular conversations and stretch assignments, and to complete all the required inputs for a promotion. If your role is expected to work from the office 3+ days a week and you are not in compliance, your manager will be made aware and VP approval will be required."

## **Not everyone is happy**

To say the reaction to these measures has been divisive is an understatement. Up to now, some hybrid work arrangements may have been ill-defined, and [employee](#) expectations confusing.

The messaging offered here is clear, employees know what is expected of them in terms of office attendance, and the repercussions they may face if they don't meet those expectations.

And it's important to remember that these initiatives are only aimed at incentivizing workers to attend the office for part of the week, typically 2-3 days out of 5, which still represents a significant flexibility gain compared to what these firms offered before the pandemic.

## **Is showing up the best measure of performance?**

However, critics have raised concerns that linking attendance to pay could hurt high achievers who don't meet their in-office quotas—will they miss out on bonuses or a promotion simply because they don't show up to the office enough, regardless of how well they are doing their job otherwise?

Is office attendance really that important, compared to other performance and outcome metrics, and will [employees](#) feel they are being treated like school children?

There are also fears about the impact strict attendance requirements will have on diversity, with women, parents, and people [with neurodiverse needs](#) more likely to favor a higher proportion of remote working.

Additionally, monitoring and managing attendance creates additional work for managers, and could lead to regular awkward conversations about attendance expectations.

Measuring office attendance may not be as simple as it first sounds either.

If an employee is required to maintain an average of 50% office attendance and they are invited to visit a client interstate for a day, or travel overseas to present at a conference, do these count as "in [office](#) days" or "WFH" days? This needs to be established and communicated to staff in writing.

## **One size doesn't fit all**

With hybrid work arrangements there is no one right or wrong strategy. Different companies will take different approaches, based on the specific needs of their particular organization and staff, and only time will tell how successful their respective strategies prove to be.

What we can be certain of is the fact hybrid work will not be disappearing anytime soon, so the focus for 2024 needs to be how to make this arrangement as efficient as possible, rather than trying to turn the clock back to 2019.

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