



After COVID-19, what does the workplace of the future look like?



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After COVID-19, what does the workplace of the future look like?

Will the sudden uptake of remote working herald a radical change to our workplaces, or will we drift back to business as usual?

We are now being faced with a choice in how we respond to the COVID-19 Pandemic, with the decisions we make in the coming weeks and months likely to have a dramatic impact on how we work in the future. While there will be difficult and unprecedented times ahead, this is the opportunity to change things for the better. This impacts our ways of working, living, and learning. As a consequence, COVID-19 will change the impact we make on the environment. Just how long it will take to recover and establish a global 'new normal' remains to be seen, but we can work to change the way we work as part of this recovery.

In response to the crisis, there has been an unprecedented rise in remote working. This change is predicted by many to stay after the crisis has passed, with 45% of respondents, in study by O2, reporting that they expect long term changes to their working patterns. The rapid switch to remote working has resulted in largescale adoption of working practices and technology-based solutions that prove that remote working can work if necessary.

The challenge for leaders is to focus on how to take their organisations forward and transition from the initial emergency enforced remote working to a new permanent business as usual remote way of working, when the vast focus of their traditional support infrastructure is supportive of their impulse to return to 'the old normal'.

How we choose to examine this rapid change in working practices, and whether organisations gear themselves up to implementing these changes on a more permanent basis, will determine what the working world will look like in the years to come. For many of us, the way we worked in the past has been shaped by concepts and practices that are familiar but obviously now outdated. This has been revealed during this lockdown period. This society wide experiment in remote working has yielded unexpectedly successful results. The way we thought about work before the crisis is being investigated. Our expectations of what the workplace landscape looks like has been turned on its head, because we are thinking more carefully about when we have to work, how we value our time, and where we chose to work. It is all up for significant reassessment and change.

"I THINK THE NOTION OF PUTTING 7,000 PEOPLE IN A BUILDING MAY BE A THING OF THE PAST," – Jes Staley, Chief Executive of Barclays Bank.

This sudden, widescale adoption of more flexible working patterns and style has already resulted in a number of identifiable benefits. On a personal level it has enabled us to re-focus and re-prioritise our personal development and wellbeing, increasing our ownership of how we use our time, taking more control of our daily lives and relying less on being managed. For many of us, being more focused on our own health within the context of our community has led us to a rethink in how we prioritise not only the places where we work but also if it even necessary to travel there and back on a regular basis.

This personal assessment of our priorities has emphasised that it is no longer enough for us

to simply work for an organisation, we need to know they have changed. They must support us to navigate through not only the practical transition from our traditional past to new ways of working as well, but also shifting their focus to our personal well-being issues that are well documented as being the downside of remote working. The Human Resource and Organisational Development focus will need to establish how dispersed individuals remain a connected part of a collective effort and at the same time their wider personal ambitions and long-term career goals are realised. How salaries are structured, incurred expenses compensated and even how city 'weightings' are estimated will all need to be reconsidered.

So, what impact does this have on the centralised HQ office? In place of the traditional city centre HQs, they will become places that we visit occasionally. The purpose for them will shift from being where we go daily to work, to where we occasionally to refresh our relationships and networks, invest in our working cultures, share our experiences and plan for our futures.

Greater emphasis will be needed on managing and supporting people as they work differently. In place of simply providing employment, organisations will need to reprioritise their investment, shifting from the predictable budget allocations of rent, rates and overheads to investing more in both the individual – including less measurable returns from investment into distant communities and the environments in which their resources work.

The enforced lockdown has pushed progress at an unexpected pace and there needs to be recognition that some may find that rate of change to be challenging. Organisations will need to repurpose their support services focuses, ensure that those that do struggle with these changes are supported by combined joined up customer support and any required training in order to make this transition. Switching to remote focused work may also make it harder for workplace mentoring, internships, and career mapping. There needs to be a space where those

entering the workplace for the first time or changing career still have access to high-quality mentoring and career guidance.

“I SPEND AROUND £35M ON PROPERTY IN A YEAR, I'D MUCH RATHER INVEST THAT IN PEOPLE THAN EXPENSIVE OFFICES,” – Sir Martin Sorrell, the former WPP Chief Executive.

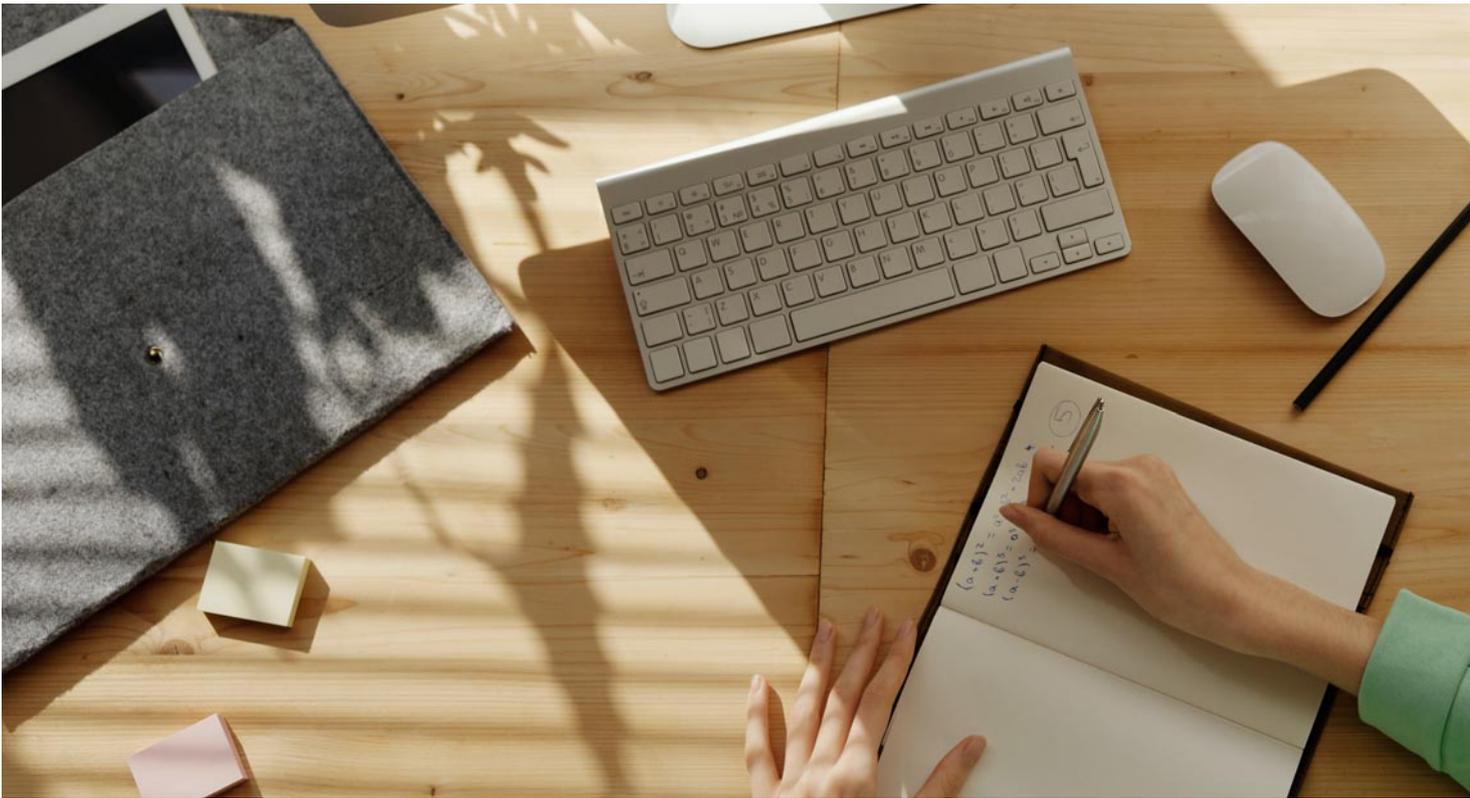
Recognition of the prospective benefits, as well as an understanding of the potential pitfalls of remote working shows that the future of work will neither be entirely remote or wholly office based. Instead the way we will approach work in the future will be a combination of the two. The work spaces of the future will be blended.

THE 'BLENDED' OFFICE

With the blended office we can completely rethink the how and where we chose to work. With a move to more remote ways of working, comes the opportunity to alter the places that work to fit with this new outlook. With less space being needed by company HQs with a reduced office-based workforce, and a shift towards more out of office-based working, there is a chance that offices and workplaces of the future will bear little resemblance to those before the crisis.

The focus now will lie in providing smaller but high-quality workspaces that will serve as satellite hubs to organisations. Physical attendance to office spaces will increasingly become less required or expected. Work will instead be based around quality, meaningful interaction with members of our teams, or face-to-face meetings with those outside of our organisations. We should begin to see our HQs and hubs as places that we attend when we want to need to, rather than feeling forced or obligated to do so. It has been shown that physically traveling to these spaces cannot be mandatory, and that our choice to attend these spaces will be dependent on what they can provide to us, and not the other way around.

We are being faced with the opportunity to forever change what workplaces of the future



look like, with the spaces that organisations occupy being smaller, less corporate and less monotonous or interchangeable. As our work moves away from the office and into more flexible approaches, the need for large, anonymous office blocks or isolated out-of-town business parks will be reduced. With tech solutions and, crucially, a rapid change in cultural attitudes towards different ways of working we could begin to see a largescale rejection of the status quo of 'how things have been done' in the past.

"92% OF THE BBC ORGANISATION IS NOW WORKING FROM HOME AND PRODUCING EXCELLENT PROGRAMMES [...] WE SHOULDN'T GO BACK TO THE OLD WAYS OF DOING THINGS." – Tony Hall, Director General of the BBC.

Without the need to provide space for a large, office-based workforce organisations could begin to shift towards providing interesting and dynamic workspaces supported by team members who can choose to work remotely or in the office as they need to. Corporate duplication and identikit office spaces that have little connection to local communities could be a thing of the past.

When we return to work, we will want characterful spaces that are convenient and easy to reach rather than return to dull offices that are difficult or costly to get to. With remote working solutions and a more blended approach to workplace design we could also be seeing widescale reduction to the amount of time we spend commuting.

As a result of this where our organisations chose to base their hubs and HQs could move away from the business district and back into the communities where we live, re-introducing a sense of local character and making the places we work be a reflection of ourselves rather than separate corporate offices.

By closing the gap between where we work and where we actually live we could also begin to reverse the trend of city homogeneity, and change the fact that many cities have started to look the same. By choosing to refocus on highlighting the individual character of the communities through where they base their workspaces there is the potential for organisations to help towns and cities to re-establish their cultural identity and what makes them unique. Why settle for drab, uninspiring office blocks and retail parks that sit alone and detached from our communities?



PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Organisation leaders need to prioritise embracing Remote Working. It's no longer an option but a necessity. Whereas they may have assumed that it was predominately the silent younger generation that were increasingly questioning their desire to work for organisations that were not embracing agile working and offering uninspiring work environments, they can expect to see similar changes of priorities becoming more commonplace throughout their multi-generational workforce. A return to 'normal' is anything but a return to the offices of the past.

If there is an opportunity to re-invigorate and transform our working spaces into places that stand out and reflect our local identity, why would we not choose to do so?

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE WORKPLACE LOOK LIKE?

Here at PLACEmaking we have been at advising our clients on new and flexible ways of working for more than 10 years. For us, and others that have been predicting and recognising the importance in progressive working ideas, there has always been organisations that embraced the opportunity for change but others put off by internal resistance to change. For some of them, whilst the advantages of remote working and less rigid approaches to working might be demonstrably able to deliver dramatic benefits, ranging from immediate financial savings to improved employee well-being and work life balance the prospect of being distracted from their central business focus and the pressure to maintain the status quo by their organisational infrastructure is simply too much. If there is a silver lining to the COVID 19 crisis, it might be that those conversations about remote working have been elevated up the list of immediate priorities.

For further information related to the impact COVID-19 has on our ways of working please see PLACEmaking's other blogs:

HOW WAYS OF WORKING WILL HAVE CHANGED AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

AI COULD BE INTEGRATED INTO THE WORKPLACE

HOW UNDERUSED AND EMPTY OFFICE SPACE COULD BE REUSED AND RE-PURPOSED

WHY YOUR TRADITIONAL WORKPLACE IS PUTTING OFF THE NEXT GENERATION OF TALENTED EMPLOYEES

OUR 10 TIPS FOR WORKING REMOTELY



COVID-19 has changed everything about the way we work, now is the time to prepare for the future



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