



engage
workplace

Workplace21

Facilitating a safe, collaborative and connected environment for office and home working



Synopsis

Times are changing and the needs of employees are constantly evolving as a consequence.

Today's modern employee has far different expectations for their workplace than the employees of yesteryear, therefore the office environment should be flexible enough to rise to meet their continuously changing needs.

Today's employee is innovative, tech-savvy and because of COVID-19, far more concerned about maintaining a safe social distance from their coworkers than ever before. And with 80% of current employees expecting to be able to work from home at least 3x a week in a post-COVID-19 world, the modern employee is more flexible than ever before.

Businesses are under increasing pressure to provide flexible remote working as well as collaborative office space, and organisations need to keep up with the trend or risk being left behind. Retrofitting the office to meet the ever-changing needs of employees is the logical next step. Choosing the right, well-designed collaboration space and home working set-ups, that brings a company together despite differing locations, is key to ensuring your business meets these demands and stays competitive in a challenging climate.

How working from home has begun to affect a change



With so many companies extending their work from home and remote work policies as COVID-19 continues to impact the health and safety of workers all around the world, many organisations are taking this time to reinvent their existing office spaces in an effort to be more prepared for the workplace realities of a post-pandemic world. But never fear, the office as you know it is not going to disappear. Instead, with the right systems in place it will continue to evolve alongside your employees.

Interventions such as clear plastic sneeze guards have become the norm in commercial spaces, receptions and offices. But after the immediate threat of the coronavirus has passed, what will continue to be part of the new normal? One thing is certain, the designs and changes we make today need to last well in to the future and endeavour to address future eventualities.

Following the first lockdown in March 2020, we undertook a survey to explore how the enforced 'work from home' rule had affected employees and what the lessons might be for businesses in the future.

49% of respondents said they had suffered an increase in physical pain since working from home at the beginning of lockdown in March. In particular they were complaining of backache, headaches and shoulder ache. Many had to create a makeshift workplace using existing home furniture and repurposing rooms in the house; 48% said that they have created a dedicated office, 11% have been using the dining room table as their desk, 16% are using the spare bedroom and some confessed to sitting on the sofa or even in bed!

How working from home has begun to affect a change

The seating position at work has always been considered of vital importance, ensuring not only good health and well-being, but also productivity. Employers are duty bound to assist and allow time for the setting up and using of workstations to achieve good posture which is one of the best ways of avoiding discomfort. But only 41% of respondents in our survey had received advice regarding their home office set-up from their employers and 30% were lacking the equipment they needed to fulfil their role and be fully productive.

Marc Holl, Head of Physiotherapy and Clinical Development lead at Nuffield Health commented on the survey and said: “People can only do the best that they can and accept it’s not going to be a perfect working environment. However, you want to try to mimic a typical office working environment. Working on the sofa or bed wouldn’t be highly recommended because you are going to naturally slouch into what I call ‘Netflix positions.’”

In the survey 46% said they were more productive at home. It’s no surprise then, that 60% said they always made time for lunch away from their desk and 10% said they use their lunch break to take a walk or go for a run.



Do we need an office anymore?

Vocal proponents of home working now declare that there is no need to return to the environmental and personal rigours and expense of commuting.



But we argue that this neglects critical lessons from generations who believe in the workplace as our second home. It is the place in which we feel safe for a large proportion of our lives. The place where we solve problems, create solutions with like minds and form bonds that last a lifetime.

Let's not also forget that for a multitude of businesses, there is no choice, for example some employees must work from a central point in order to comply with data security. If for other businesses the home working experiment has exposed an alternative, they must decide whether the cost savings outweigh the benefits of bringing their people together under one roof. If they decide to maintain the role of the office, they must ensure they can persuade staff to leave their home desks and return to the fold. But how?

The office is the physical heart and soul of a business representing its cultural aspirations. Without this, you have a fragmented collection of individuals loosely connected by the name of a brand. More often than not, compelling intelligence about a company is derived from a visit to the office and buying decisions are made accordingly.

The office grants us the ability to interact face-to-face whether formally behind closed doors or impromptu meetings in break-out areas. Our body language, vocal interjections and camaraderie contribute to collaboration. We refer to this as 'social capital'.

New talent will make their decisions based on company values and how these are demonstrated. They will be attracted by the unspoken chemistry that runs through every office; challenges, opportunities and shared victories. Businesses make progress through their ability to innovate. Innovations come about when people collaborate. All the video conferencing tech in the world will never fully replace this human need.

The differences between our personal space and our working space, our digital and lived worlds and our work and play, have become more fluid. But how can a business capitalise on the opportunities that this presents for a better normal? Using the information we gathered from our survey, and our observations of a flexing workspace, here are our suggestions for how to set up your office to achieve future success in this continuously advancing world.



Seven lessons that we believe businesses should be taking from the pandemic

LESSON 1



**The office is not a
one-size-fits-all
environment.**

Lesson 1

The importance of flexibility. Businesses have been able to break through the barriers that the office is a one-size-fits-all environment. Instead, there is a great opportunity for two different flexibilities; physical flexibility and parental flexibility.

Physical flexibility means inspiring new locations adapted for certain tasks, types of working, and projects etc. These would include stand-up desks, lounge-like areas, quiet focused areas and communal space.

Parental flexibility would be easier with a hybrid way of working, with staff having certain days in the office and others remote; a great leveller when it comes to gender parity and an opportunity to be more creative with the office space when there are flexing numbers staff using it.

In fact, in a recent survey conducted by Engage Workplace 61% of respondents preferred working from home than in an office and 80% said that they felt they had developed a good work-from-home routine.

The pandemic has certainly normalised the once frowned-upon working from home choice and has highlighted that this doesn't necessarily equate to a drop in productivity or quality.

LESSON 2



45% of respondents in our survey said they were getting more work done in a shorter space of time.

Lesson 2

How to foster greater efficiency. Whilst 45% of respondents in the Engage Workplace survey felt they were working longer hours from home than in the office, some said that they were getting more work done in a shorter space of time because of the ability to have a quieter and more focused period of time in which to do it. This is the perfect opportunity for businesses to dedicate an area in the office to create a quiet space where people can focus, reflect and relax without interruption and distractions.

LESSON 3



Employees are going to be expecting high-tech set ups in order to compete.

Lesson 3

The future is most definitely digital. Employees are going to be expecting high-tech set ups in order to compete in the working world. Headsets, correctly positioned screens for video conferencing, good lighting and fast speed broadband. This needs to be a consideration for both office and remote working.

LESSON 4



Respondents working home were more likely to make time for lunch or go for a walk or run.

Lesson 4

The importance of mental health and well-being. Much has been discussed during the pandemic about the effect of being isolated on our mental health. In the survey conducted by Engage Workplace, many respondents were combatting this with time dedicated to enjoying their down-time. 60% said they always made time for lunch away from their desk and 10% of them said they use their lunch break to take a walk, walk the dog or go for a run. Businesses should be re-structuring the working day in order to accommodate time for exercise. They should consider communal eating areas where employees are encouraged to step away from their desks and in certain businesses, a space dedicated to gym equipment would enhance the mental health of their employees.

LESSON 5



Virtual meetings are no substitute for in-person engagement, mentoring, collaboration & brain-storming.

Lesson 5

We missed people! Whilst many people enjoyed the freedom to work from home, virtual meetings and conferencing are no substitute for in-person engagement, mentoring, collaboration and brain-storming. A real trend to emerge is the need for safe collaborative spaces; comfortable areas in which to solve problems, generate ideas and build relationships.

LESSON 6



Remote work spaces within local towns and city regions could address the long and costly commute to work.

Lesson 6

A real opportunity to rethink the design and use of the workspace. Creating a spacious and comfortable working environment is an important part of encouraging people back into the building but in turn, creating remote work spaces within local towns and city regions, instead of business parks or city commercial centres, could address the growing awareness of an employee that has not missed the long and costly commute to work. This would offer alternatives to large crowded office buildings with the freedom to work in ways that suit their needs while also meeting HQ objectives. Supporting the centralised HQ with more remote satellite offices can foster engagement and develop a network with other business's in a thriving co-working environment and at the same time reinvigorate the local high street and community spirit!

LESSON 7



Businesses must adapt their workplace with spaces that are designed to be vibrant, collaborative and productive.

Lesson 7

Talent attraction. Businesses that act on adapting their workplace to the new way of working, with policies that their employees agree on and spaces that are designed to be vibrant, collaborative and productive, will attract the very best talent.

The benefits of using Engage Workplace

A great office design can transform your business and the relationships within it. We help employers to create a different kind of space, somewhere that inspires and changes the way everyone works.

We give your office a sense of community that inspires teams to work together, where ideas flourish, and collaboration is second nature.

Engage Workplace and our Total Engagement methodology brings together expertise in office design, refurbishment and fit out, as well as a wealth of experience in leadership, change management and employee engagement. Through strong relationships with our key partners and suppliers, we are able to deliver commercially focused health and well-being solutions, leading to a more engaged and motivated workplace.

Taking a Total Engagement approach to people development and the working environment, leads to more productive and successful outcomes. These areas are inextricably linked; development in one area has a direct impact on the other. An increase in turnover will often lead to a greater demand for resource and training and consequently, a change in workplace capacity. Strategic development may not always result in dramatic changes across both areas however, it is important to consider the potential impact and subsequent needs arising, to ensure that any changes are embraced to maintain levels of engagement and to achieve sustainable success.

Our five Workplace21 predictions



01 Floorspace

Floorspace will be of critical concern. Whilst social distancing is at the forefront, every square metre will count in order to keep people safe and maximise productivity. But as time moves on, the more flexible approach will inevitably result in offices needing less desk space but more space given over to cultural dynamics; breakout rooms, communal working areas.

02 Location

Property location will be a top priority. Lease renewals will be re-considered with the business strategy in mind, such as workforce pressure to reduce commuting time. HQs may be decentralised into regional hubs and business parks that lie beyond the city walls may find that they occupy some prime alternatives for big businesses.

03 Office Design

Our future first impression will want to be a home-from-home feel. A cafe co-working space with a strong emphasis on making people feel included. Traditional workstations will become less popular and replaced with standing desks, 'common rooms' and breakout space to stimulate group dynamics, encouraging agility and creativity. Traditional desktop tech will become obsolete with laptops and smartphones delivering all the agility needed. Video conferencing booths will assist those working remotely to connect into the workplace as well as allow a cost-effective way to conduct distanced meetings. A surge in environmental care will encourage employees to choose alternative commuting methods and so showers and changing rooms will be expected.

Our five Workplace21 predictions



04 Wellbeing

The recession and its imminent threat to employment has seen employees working extended hours to establish themselves as indispensable and secure their long-term future. Combined with wider societal anxieties around Covid-19, this has brought wellbeing of employees very much into the spotlight. The business that will do well are the ones that will be asking; “what more can we do for our people?” Techniques used to shape a happy space will be paramount; natural materials, carefully considered colour and living plants will enhance our senses and reduce stress levels.

05 Culture

Tangible cohesion will inspire the highest levels of productivity. Trust has been at the heart of the pandemic working culture; from employees trusting in employers to protect their jobs, to employers trusting that employees are working well from home. Likewise, workers must be able to trust their leadership to thoughtfully create and maintain their workspace, its maintenance and cleanliness.



Closing

The 'office of the future' will be shaped from lessons learned today and with a healthy environment in mind. We call this Workplace21, the future of our working environment.

Our lives will be forever changed due to COVID-19 and its implications, and now is the time to embrace remote working, collaborative well-designed office spaces and hybrid teams.

We now know the deep connection video and other forms of technology can provide. We know that employee expectations have shifted. We know that remote work can be just as productive as being in-office. And we know that employers need to pay attention to the lessons learned in order to maintain employee

productivity, and to continue to retain and recruit top talent.

Businesses will forever more have a workforce with different needs, and companies that will ultimately succeed will embrace and benefit from it. It's time to rethink the way we work, where we work and the products, tools and strategies currently in place, or need to employ to better support remote work and hybrid teams.

The successful business leaders will be those that attribute value to their company's social culture and re-model their offices into real destinations; space to thrive, learn, grow, to converge, inspire, innovate and collaborate.

Reach out

Thanks for taking the time to read our white paper. We hope you found it insightful and useful. Reach out to us with inquiries and questions, we'd love to help. [Call 01822 855 558](tel:01822855558), [visit our website](https://www.engageworkplace.co.uk) or info@engageworkplace.co.uk



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