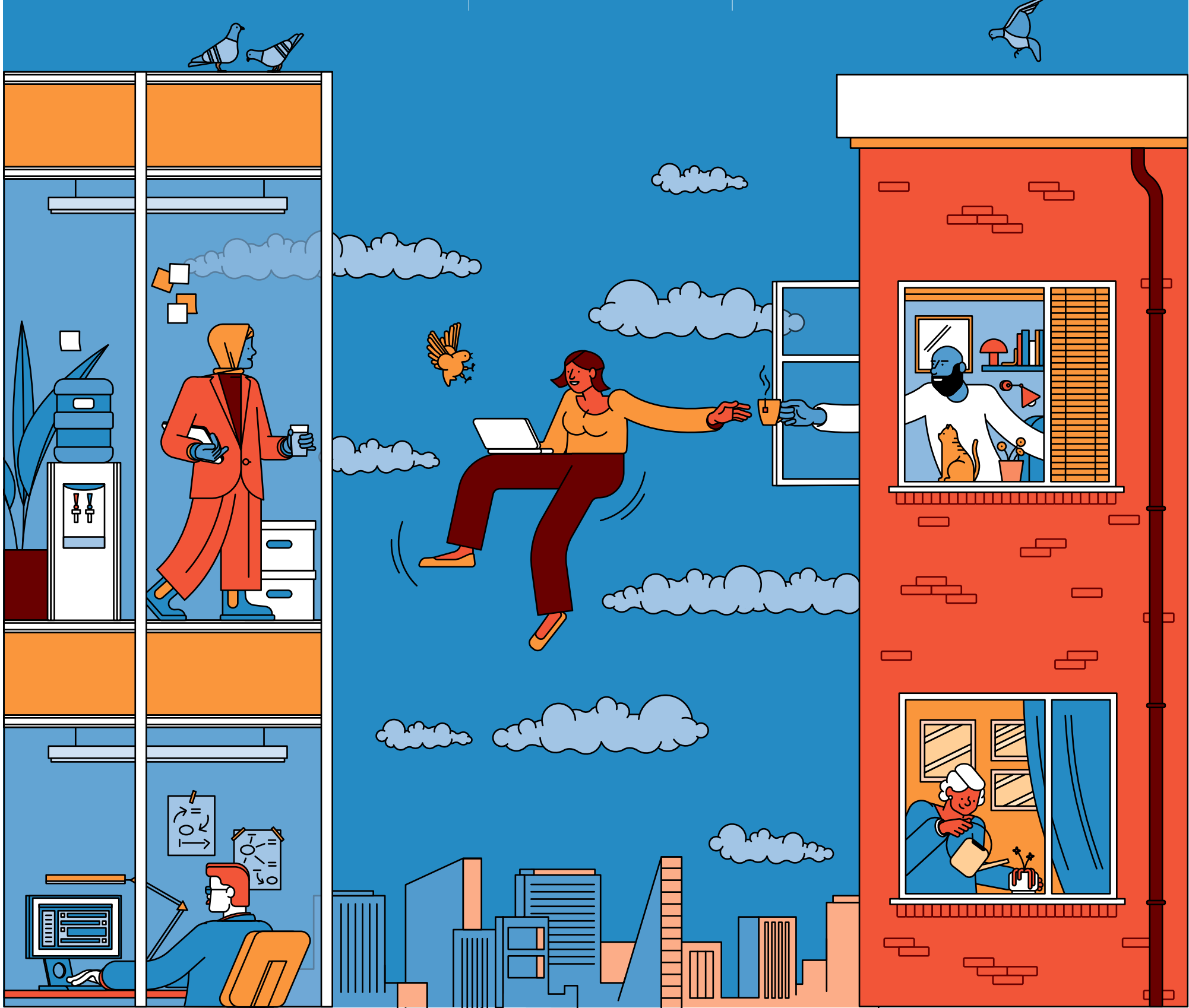


HYBRID WORKING

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TO RETURN TO BASE?



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HYBRID WORKING

Distributed in
THE  TIMES



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GEN Z

Sound advice

Gen-Z employees are fans of hybrid working, but many are starting to feel the loss of office experiences and the soft skills that come from it. How can firms build mentoring programmes that can help navigate early careers?

Sanjuna Budhani

Starting a career is an exciting time but it can also be an anxious one, especially for young people. The workplace can be difficult to navigate for those just starting out, especially in the world of hybrid working where many interactions are via a screen.

Although gen-Z workers are adamant they want flexibility in their workspace, they are also experiencing some negative effects from hybrid working, with 92% stating that they're missing out on traditional office experiences, according to research. The reduction in face-to-face interactions is leaving more and more young employees feeling disconnected from their colleagues, making it difficult to reach out for help when they need it.

Organisations have also been struggling to understand the wants and needs of gen Z, with one-third of employers finding it difficult to motivate employees. And despite 77% of gen Z opting for hybrid working, many young employees feel unprepared to enter the world of work, citing low confidence in soft skills such as presenting and influencing. Some experts are concerned that young people are starting their careers at a disadvantage.

One way that organisations typically help employees to navigate the workplace is through mentoring. Fostering supportive mentor-mentee relationships can provide safe spaces for employees to ask questions and talk through problems. But hybrid working precludes the ad hoc face-to-face time that helps employees to build relationships and learn interpersonal skills, so mentoring must be approached differently.

Organisations still have a lot to learn about operating in hybrid models. Emma Parry, professor of human resource management at Cranfield School of Business Management, says that businesses are still experiencing new challenges with hybrid working. "We're moving into the stage where people are experiencing some challenges that perhaps they didn't anticipate – and mentoring and development of younger people entering the workplace is one of those," she says.

The mentor-mentee relationship can be an enriching experience for both parties. But to be effective, mentors and mentees need to be equipped with an understanding of what a successful relationship can look like and how to achieve it.



Joanna Kori, head of people at Encompass Corporation, explains that her organisation has made mentorships a central part of its talent development strategy. Kori explains that the interpersonal interactions

that take place whether as a mentor or as a mentee are essential for career development.

In addition to ensuring personal interactions, Encompass has been able to better personalise mentor-

ship relationships by linking them to a skills and competencies framework, which clearly details expectations of relevant skills development for individual employees.

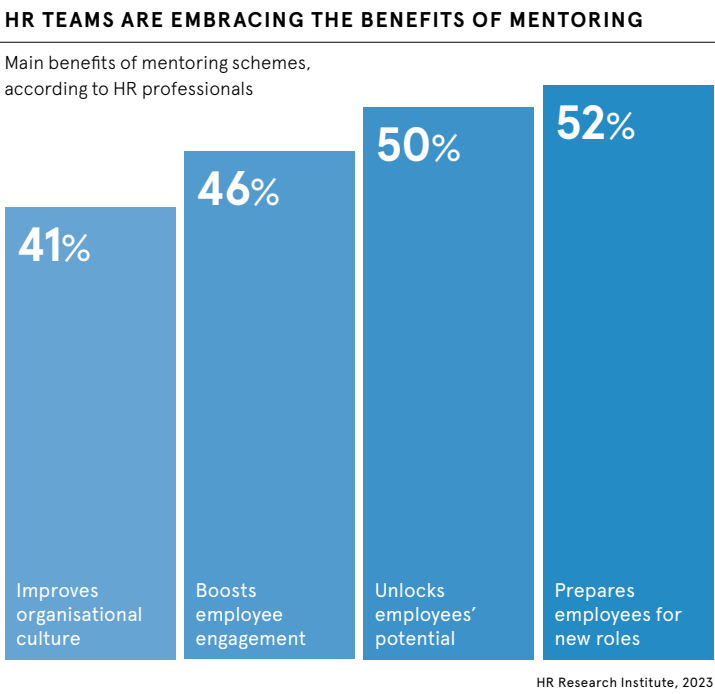
Chloe Lewis is director of client management at Alight Solutions. She thinks it's critical to maximise the time that employees are together in the office for maximum benefit. Managers need to curate activities and opportunities so that young employees can meet colleagues across the business, observe work interactions and relationships and actively learn.

Parry has worked with businesses that use asynchronous communication as part of their mentoring programmes. While platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams are useful in day-to-day hybrid interactions, mentoring platforms such as MentorCloud and Together may be more useful for effective mentor schemes. In a workplace where one in four employees say they have Zoom fatigue and more meetings than ever, asynchronous communication reduces communication overload, allows time for reflection and feedback, and can be less disruptive during the working day. Parry emphasises that it's ultimately about talking to colleagues and understanding what works for them.

When it comes to building a mentoring programme, Kori advises businesses to start small. Firms first need to gauge the interest in mentoring programmes and what mentors and mentees want to gain from taking part. Kori says that firms should then start a pilot scheme. Building any kind of programme is an iterative process, and setting up small-scale schemes means that firms can quickly collate and implement feedback. Employees who take part in these pilots can quickly become your ambassadors, encouraging colleagues to come on board.

Mentoring the incoming generation can offer an opportunity for a cultural shift at an organisation towards a better understanding of what drives gen Z. As with any culture change, it's crucial to get support and advocacy from leadership. "Leadership leaning in is what generates the right culture," says Lewis.

While senior leaders must advocate strongly for progressive mentorship programmes, they should also take part in them. Access to senior executives can provide opportunities to learn and build a sense of belonging and loyalty for a mentee, and vice versa. ●



Why organisations must give people the space to do their best work

The days of one-size-fits-all office spaces are up. Fora, London's leading premium and flexible office provider, explains how to build a successful workplace

London's office vacancy rates remain nearly double the long-term average, yet against this backdrop, premium flex office provider, Fora – which is part of The Office Group – is bucking the trend. It's investing in new city centre spaces and actively growing occupancy across its 3.2 million square foot of prime office space.

Enrico Sanna, CEO of The Office Group, explains: "The office debate seems to have become one of those polarising topics and is often categorised into a discussion over whether or not workers are sitting at their desks. At Fora, we have long championed the belief that one size never fits all, and that conformity has always led to compromise.

"By offering high-quality, flexible spaces that match individual work styles, we are providing choice on when and how our members focus, collaborate, learn, socialise and rest."

Fora has recently rebranded following a merger to become London's leading provider of premium flexible workspaces. Today, it has more than 70 premium workspaces across London, Cambridge, Reading, Bristol, Leeds, Berlin, Frankfurt and Hamburg, and has opened five new workspaces in the last year alone. True to Sanna's commitment that one size cannot fit all, each is tailored to reflect both the local character and universal needs.

"Each business is different and the needs of one might vary wildly from the other, which is why at Fora we work closely with each of our customers to create space tailored for their specific requirements," he says.

"Yet, while each of our workspaces has its own unique character and is tailored to both the local neighbourhood and individual business' needs, we also know that our members seek similar facilities that give them the autonomy to choose how they work throughout the day. That's why in our largest space, Chancery House, we dedicate over a quarter of our space to shared amenities, such as a fully equipped gym and fitness studio, as well as breakout areas and focus booths."

Chancery House has proved to be the perfect workspace for premium lifestyle apparel brand Pangaia. It was on the hunt for a location which could not only meet the immediate needs of its team, but easily scale as the business grew. The array of meeting spaces, wellness facilities, café and rooftop

terrace all amplify Pangaia's commitment to work-life balance, sustainability and environmental responsibility, matching the beliefs and real needs of its team.

Research carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) on behalf of Fora reflects how important it is to match the workspace to the real needs of workers. Some 44% of office workers in the UK feel their performance is being compromised by their current working conditions, rising to half (51%) of those under 35.

A quarter of those studied by the IES highlight that their employers misunderstand their individual workstyle, with workers requiring flexibility and different facilities through the working day and working week. This appears to support Sanna's assertion that the workspaces of today need to cater to every mode of work, with areas to focus, collaborate, learn, socialise or rest.

"Each of us works in different ways, and our work styles are as individual to us as our lifestyles," Sanna comments. "Sometimes we need space and quiet in which to focus, other times we need to burn off some energy and bounce ideas around with colleagues away from our desks. We often talk about the office in terms of the physical, the desk and chair, but I believe this is far less important than the overall experience. At Fora, we give individuals and teams the freedom to work in ways that support their individual style, empowering them to manage their wellbeing and creating a more balanced and meaningful work experience for everyone."

Giving people the freedom to perform at their best

Fora is trusted by clients such as Ocado, GSK and KPMG, which recognise that the office is not a commodity, but a vital element in creating communities, sparking innovation and collaboration, and fostering employee wellbeing. It works to help progressive business leaders provide extraordinary experiences for their employees that elevate the working day, boosting productivity, efficiency and job satisfaction.

Employers choosing a premium office approach like Fora's get to offer the flexibility of multiple locations and premium facilities to their team from day one, with the opportunity to book extra meeting rooms, presentation spaces or workspace on demand.



One such business at the cutting edge of modern lifestyles is the British Fashion Council, which worked with Fora to redefine the working experience for its employees and embrace flexible working in the post-pandemic era. It's prime Central London location in Fora's Broadwick Street workspace delivers a vibrant community, top-notch amenities and an engaging atmosphere in the heart of Soho. The move into Fora has exceeded the British Fashion Council's expectations, providing a dynamic and inspiring setting that sparks creativity and innovation among its employees.

It's not just employees demanding more of a workplace, as businesses are increasingly demanding tailored solutions that scale up or down depending on their evolving requirements.

Sanna says the flex office sector is particularly effective at providing businesses with the opportunity to adapt as their business needs change, through flexible terms and a collection of spaces they can tailor. According to Re-Leased, 10 year leases, which were considered the norm 15 years ago, now account for less than 5% of leases and Sanna says, in terms of costs, flexible arrangements needn't be more expensive.

"Signing an agreement for three years or less that maximises your use of space and can grow with you is often a more attractive financial proposition than a 10-year lease where space either lies empty for years, or colleagues are crushed into spaces that hold back their success," he explains.

"For most of our clients, we're actually providing a cost saving when compared to the traditional leases they had before,

as our fee includes everything from utilities and insurance, to our concierge service and tech support."

Sanna's ambition to grow Fora is palpable and, having already built the business into London's largest provider of premium, flex office space, he has clear plans for the future. "By leading, challenging and setting the standard for what the workspace experience should be, we are empowering people to create their best work in their own unique way.

"We want everyone to feel inspired by their place of work and are looking forward to a future where we all work in dynamic workspaces that accommodate our individual work styles. It's the only future I see."

For more information, please visit foraspace.com

FORA

“Each of us works in different ways and our work styles are as individual to us as our lifestyles



EMPLOYEE INCENTIVES

4 creative ways to get staff back in the office

While many businesses are still using the stick approach, a growing number are using the carrot instead – and finding ever-more inventive ways to lure staff back to the office

Sam Forsdick

Rollbacks on remote working are in full force. When Zoom – one of the businesses that profited the most from the homeworking boom – asked staff to go into the office two days a week, many saw it as a signal that the all-remote working life was coming to an end for those with more traditional office jobs.

Since then, HSBC, Lloyds Bank and Amazon have all updated their hybrid-working policies in an effort to get people back to the workplace. But employees at many firms have been quick to voice their opposition to proposals that require them to work two or three days a week in the office. Elsewhere, LGBTQ+ dating app Grindr saw its staff quit en masse after issuing an ultimatum (although there are also other staff issues at the company).

In an attempt to stave off employee dissent, which has regularly arisen in response to return-to-office mandates, some businesses have developed novel ways to make the workplace a desirable place to be. And the instigators of these creative solutions maintain that their efforts are paying dividends.

Doggy day care

One such business is UAP, a Manchester-based door hardware supplier. After several staff purchased lockdown puppies during the pandemic, the company decided to offer a day-care facility for its staff and their new canine companions.

This has involved converting an area of its offices and recruiting a full-time dog-minder to look after the pets.

“What matters to our team matters to us,” explains UAP content marketing executive Wendy Rushton. “Dogs are members of the family for many of our employees and they have perhaps helped them through a tough time over the two years of lockdowns. So this is just one of the ways we’re helping them transition back to the workplace.”

She observes that the introduction of the facility has had a “remarkable impact” on office attendance – which has gone from being entirely remote to 90% full-time office attendance. “We attribute much of this success to the presence of our doggy day care programme,” Rushton adds.

Art galleries and Lego libraries

Some businesses are also flexing their artistic muscles in an effort to make their workplaces more attractive. Artiq, an agency that leases artwork to commercial clients, has more than doubled its size since the pandemic to meet growing demand, going from a team of 15 to 40.

Artiq’s clients are now renting artwork to display throughout the workplace, rather than just having it in the foyer (as they did previously) to try to draw people back into the office, according to its CEO Patrick McCrae. “We’ve seen a huge uptick in clients wanting to engage their teams by letting them choose the art so they have a greater sense of ownership of the space,” he says.

The inclusion of art in the workplace has also been shown to change employees’ perceptions of the office. Research from Brookfield Properties found that those with artfully decorated offices are 42% more likely to prefer their office to their home. This has been aided by a change in perception of Artiq’s services, with clients increasingly viewing office artwork as a benefit in the same way they would gym memberships, health insurance or free food, according to McCrae.

Elsewhere, Swindon-based agency Bacon Marketing has seen employees returning to the office for a more playful reason. Its creation of a Lego library – where staff can swap sets of the popular brick-building toy that is increasingly popular with adults – was first used to improve the mental health of its employees.

But the business found that the policy also attracted people to visit the office more frequently to collect new Lego sets, which CEO Phil Bacon says has made his ask for people to be in the office two days a week more bearable for some.

Sushi cooking classes

Food is also a popular method for businesses to coax staff into HQ; 45% of employees surveyed by recruitment specialists Hays stating that a subsidised lunch would encourage them to leave their home office. Some businesses are now taking this idea further, according to Alexandra Kafka, founder of workplace wellbeing platform Oxyzn.

She claims that one client – a large tech company with offices in the UK – recently invited a sushi chef into its offices to host a cookery class. The business was glad of the impact it had on office attendance, despite the high cost of offering the one-off perk. Another of Oxyzn’s clients in the legal sector has introduced a rotating line-up of chefs, who cook food from different cuisines once a week as part of efforts to coax hybrid

“Clients are letting staff choose the art so they have a greater sense of ownership of the space

workers through its office doors. The employee wellbeing platform has also been involved in organising in-office pottery classes, baking sessions, comedy nights and rooftop cinemas as strategies to engage and motivate employees to return to work in the office.

“HR leaders are keen to find solutions to incentivise their workforce to spend more days in the office,” Kafka says. “Companies are even considering outside-the-box ideas just to get people to come back.”

Yoga Thursdays and Fitness Fridays

Another business that has shirked the mandated return is Aer Studios, a creative agency based near Bath. After surveying its employees, it found that many wanted the office to be a place to improve their wellbeing, as well as to do productive work.

In response, the business has been bringing in a personal trainer during office hours on Mondays and Fridays – the two days when office attendance was at its lowest – to help address some of the physical wellness challenges its staff highlighted in the survey.

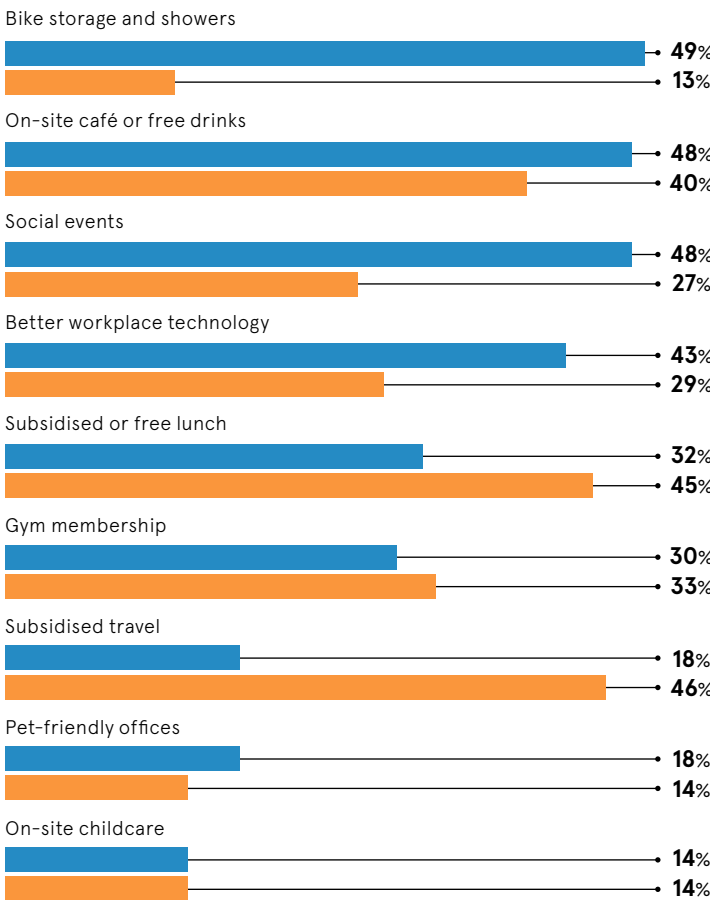
Yoga sessions are also held in the office space on a Thursday, free breakfasts are provided on Fridays and mindfulness coaching sessions have also been provided.

“While people were reluctant to come into the office after the pandemic, people had no real cadence to the week,” says Aer Studios managing director Tom Harber. “Now we have this set of specific milestones throughout the week via the personal training and team breakfasts, which give everyone the chance to catch up.”

EMPLOYERS’ RTO INCENTIVES DON’T ALIGN WITH WHAT EMPLOYEES WANT

Hays, 2023

The percentage of employers offering workplace incentives, versus the popularity of each incentive with employees



“We’re designing an experience that will make people want to leave their home and work in the office

Since introducing these changes, the average number of days that staff are spending in the office has increased from once or twice a week to three, with a growing proportion doing five-day weeks in the office. “We’re hoping to design an experience that people genuinely want to leave their home to come to work for,” Harber explains.

And the business has one more unique reason for employees to attend the office in person. Aer Studios is located just two minutes away from Real World Studios, Peter Gabriel’s recording studio complex which has hosted artists such as Beyoncé, Harry Styles and Arctic Monkeys. “We quite often see a group of cars rock up and wonder who might be in them,” Harber says. “We’re often caught curtain-twitching because you can almost see into the studios from our office.”

Although not every office can be located in close proximity to a world-famous recording studio, these examples do demonstrate that finding new and creative reasons for staff to come into the office can positively influence office attendance figures, at the same time while succeeding in avoiding an employee backlash. ●

Q&A Reimagining digital workspaces for the hybrid era

Hybrid working will intensify digital transformation. From data sharing and security, to ESG and productivity, Aurora’s head of professional services, **Dave Vavlas**, shares why businesses are moving data to the cloud



Hybrid working is here to stay – but it will evolve. Organisations understand that employees are happier with hybrid as it cuts commutes, allows people to spend more time with their families and generally improves wellbeing and happiness. Another benefit for organisations is the ability to employ top talent outside their local labour market.

When you have employees split between remote locations and in-person, establishing digital tools that provide effective collaboration becomes crucial. The time they do spend in the office needs to be complemented by the technology they use at home. Staff are far more familiar with technology since the pandemic, but it’s the business’s job to make sure their access is compliant, and that data can flow securely around the organisation when people work from different locations.

We’ve seen a sharp increase in clients going from remotely managed data to cloud-based systems. But that brings issues which don’t present when people are in an office. We work more with clients around compliance and achieving cyber essentials and ISO27001 accreditation than pre-Covid.

What are the challenges of moving to cloud-based data systems?

A Pre-hybrid working, data was kept within company walls and was easily accessible to staff. That data now needs to get from the office into scalable cloud-based environments in a cost-effective and reliable way. Companies are prioritising flexibility and security, and they are looking for long-term solutions to data sharing.

Between 2020 and 2021, our software migrations were 56% higher than between 2022 and 2023 – but the later years saw a huge rise in our

SaaS sales. In the Covid era, businesses were prioritising getting existing on-premises solutions into cloud as a short-term IT strategy because they were tied into existing contracts. Now those contracts are ending, we’re seeing massive growth in cloud-based systems as part of our clients’ long-term IT strategies.

Another challenge companies now face is to meet requirements for environmental certifications such as ISO14001 and ESG programmes. As organisations use fewer paper documents and reduce office space by working remotely and hosting data in the cloud, they can move closer to net zero. Amazon claims that using its AWS data centres can reduce carbon footprints by up to 88% versus traditional, unregulated on-premises facilities. That’s good for the environment and frees up money to be spent on growth and talent.

What should organisations look for in cloud-based software?

A Make sure your systems are flexible and can provide support for the hybrid environment. Ensure they meet the security and compliance requirements for your industry. If you want to reduce the size of your office footprint yet keep the space, consider desk booking systems. If your remote workers need to regularly print from home, our Office in a Box package offers a managed print service, delivered to their door. When your people are working remotely, how do you ensure that their time is used efficiently? Make sure any software you use has monitoring and auditing features.

Your choice of supplier should be dependable. Hybrid working has meant that our remote service teams are busier than ever but our reliability and attention to service have led to our

customers rating us higher every year, with our highest net promoter score being 73.5.

“It’s about flexibility and adapting the infrastructure people working at home had when they were in the office

Alongside this, we supply Unified Communications products that can plug and play into a user’s home network; as well as process automation tools that streamline laborious processes such as data extraction and accounts payable. All these save work hours and allow greater accessibility of data for employees.

Ultimately, it’s about flexibility and adapting the infrastructure that remote workers had when they were in the office. Remember that processes you may never have thought about before the working from home era may present difficulties when staff are remote, so look for systems that can accommodate change.

For more information visit aurora.co.uk

Aurora+

Has hybrid working killed the office?

The shift to hybrid working is causing more businesses to recalibrate their office requirements, cutting space and costs in the process. But not all firms are ready to abandon their city sky rises just yet

Sam Forsdick & Clara Murray

In 2021, Meta committed to a 20-year term at One Triton Square, an eight-storey office block near London's Regent's Park. At the time, it was interpreted as a positive sign for UK business as the tech giant signed off on a further central London lease (Meta already had 57,700 square metres of office space across two sites in King's Cross).

But in late September, with 18 years remaining on its lease and without a Meta employee having stepped into the office, the company cancelled its contract, paying a reported £149m for the early exit.

Explaining the decision, a spokesperson for the company said: "The past few years have brought new possibilities concerning the role of the office. And we are prioritising making focused, balanced investments to support our most strategic long-term priorities and lead the way in creating the workplace of the future."

Meta is not alone in re-evaluating its office requirements. In signs of further change, HSBC announced in June that it is to move out of its global headquarters in London's Canary Wharf, where its logo topped the 45-storey tower in Canada Square for decades, to smaller premises in the City of London.



VictorHuang/iStock

It is now aiming to cut 40% of its global office footprint in an effort to reduce costs and respond to new remote working patterns. HSBC's preferred new London home, Panorama St Paul's, is roughly half the size of its current address and was previously occupied by BT.

“Office vacancies will likely soon eclipse the peak of 2012 when, after the 2008 crash, demand for commercial real estate fell away

Although the moves of HSBC and Meta are two of the bigger office downsizes, they are symptoms of a wider trend. A survey of commercial real estate executives by Cresa and Knight Frank revealed that, among large companies of 50,000 employees or more, 50% were looking to decrease their office floor space.

The primary reason for this has been changes to the way we work. According to the Office for National Statistics, around 39% of the UK's adult population report having worked from home at some point over the past seven days. This is particularly pronounced in central London, where almost half of all working hours are spent in employees' homes.

"The impact of hybrid working means that a lot of firms need less

space than they had before," explains Mark Stansfield, senior director of UK analytics at commercial real estate research company CoStar. "This is coming at a time when we're at near record levels of new construction as well, so vacancies have gone up fairly sharply over the last few years across the country, particularly in London."

CoStar's research shows that 102 million square feet of office space is vacant across the UK. "That's up 60% since the pandemic started, and we're projecting that figure will rise by a further 20% over the next year and a half," Stansfield adds.

The result will likely mean that office vacancies will soon eclipse the peak in 2012 when, in the wake of the 2008 financial crash, demand for commercial real estate fell away.

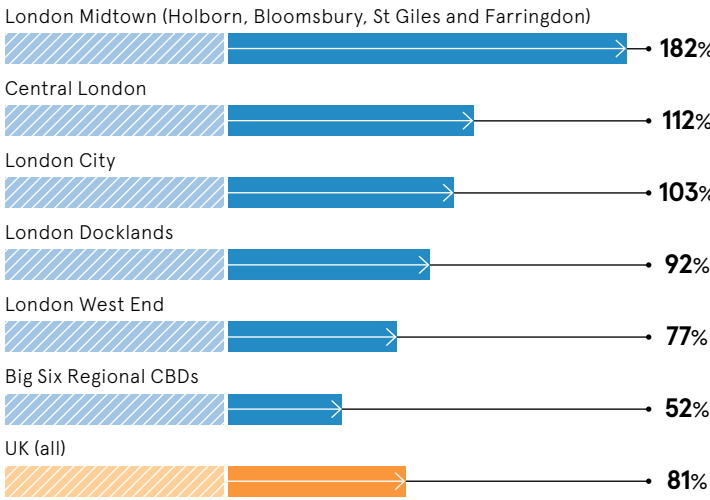
Cost is also a factor that's impacting demand and was the most frequently cited reason for office relocations in the same Cresa and Knight Frank survey. The moves of HSBC and Meta have come alongside staffing cuts and there is a clear drive from businesses to find efficiencies as inflation pushes up other business expenses.

Although vacancy rates for commercial real estate have increased across the board, some regions of the UK are proving more resilient than others.

London's Docklands area, which includes Canary Wharf, has seen office vacancy rates nearly double from 8.27% pre-pandemic to 15.87%. As well as HSBC, Barclays, Moody's and Credit Suisse are contemplating exiting the area.

VACANCY RATES HAVE MORE THAN DOUBLED IN SEVERAL LONDON DISTRICTS

Change in vacancy rate, Q4 2019 to Q3 2023



CoStar, 2023

Vacancies in Glasgow offices have also soared, with the vacancy rate more than doubling for commercial real estate over 15,000 square feet. "We're seeing different stories play out in different markets," says Lewis Beck, head of workplace for EMEA at commercial real estate firm CBRE. "Glasgow, for example, has been a real outlier, where we were seeing average attendance across 2022 drop below 20%."

In contrast, London's West End, which includes the popular dining and nightlife district of Soho, has been one of the areas where office vacancies remain the lowest. Stansfield claims that the presence of numerous bars and shops in the area is one of the reasons why the West End is showing greater resilience, as companies look to provide more reasons for staff to come into the office.

But even the most desirable office locations have seen vacancy rates rise. Despite London's West End still having a vacancy rate that's 1.5 percentage points lower than the UK average, it is still far higher than it was at the end of 2019.

Although many businesses are looking to slash their office requirements, certain spaces remain in high demand. "There has been a big bias towards the better quality space," says Simon Brown, head of UK office research at CBRE. "This means we have this odd situation in the UK where there is quite a lot of vacancy in the office market in aggregate, but there's still very competitive bidding for the best quality space, which is always in more scarce supply."

The quality of office space now ranks more highly than cost in occupier decision-making, according to Brown, and a record number of London offices in the 'super-prime' sector were rented out at more than £100 per square foot by CBRE during the first quarter of the year.

"Businesses are happy to pay what would have looked like massive rents pre-Covid to secure the best spaces," he adds.

High among the list of priorities for occupiers are location, technology, modern fittings and environmental credentials. This is proving particularly important for companies as new minimum energy efficiency standards come into force by the end of the decade.

This flight to quality is reflected in data from CoStar, which shows that vacancies among its top-rated office spaces have been declining since 2014, whereas vacancies in less-desirable offices are trending upwards.

Kraft Heinz is one company that still sees value in holding a high-quality office space. Rodolfo Camacho, its international chief people officer, claims that the office remains "critical" for talent attraction and retention.

"Our brands stand for quality so you need to be in a location that represents that," he says. "We also want to attract world-class talent and we believe that being in a central location is important for this."

The business took out a 12-year lease to take over 38,000 square feet of The Shard in 2016 and occupies two floors of the skyscraper, based near London Bridge and the foodie hotspot of Borough Market.

"Being in a location that is bubbly and exciting helps to create a culture of creativity in the office," Camacho adds. "It makes you feel more connected to the world outside."

And although the doom-mongers continue to forecast that the office market will continue to decline, employers do still see value in occupying high-quality space which is in desirable locations. This means that, despite rising vacancy rates and the widespread adoption of hybrid working, the office will likely continue to play an important role in our future working habits. ●

Q&A How to solve hybrid working data pains

Companies with remote- and hybrid-working models face tough challenges keeping their data secure, efficient and accessible. As AI adoption picks up and data becomes even more valuable, how can companies tackle these core problems? **Jim Liddle**, chief innovation officer at Nasuni, a provider of file data services, offers his insights



Q What pain points do businesses experience in maintaining hybrid and remote-working data infrastructure? How does Nasuni help solve these problems?

A A typical challenge is that companies struggle to work on the same data simultaneously across different locations or regions. Siloed data storage, however, often results in multiple copies of data, with companies needing to figure out the latest version and how to get a single pane view. Nasuni provides a global file system, ensuring the same data set is visible and accessible wherever and whenever needed. Nasuni's hybrid cloud file data platform seamlessly synchronises between all locations, providing a central control point and enabling operational excellence. It works as if employees are all in the same office so that global teams can work seamlessly.

One headache with hybrid working, particularly for enterprise IT support, is when the workflow changes because users have to work slightly differently at home. Also, the speed of access can be slow, making it difficult for remote workers to send and receive information. With large numbers of the workforce now working remotely, these are significant problems.

Nasuni enables seamless file access for users in the office and at home,

eliminating the need for a potentially slow or inaccessible VPN. This cloud-first approach ensures consistent workflows by providing the same file interface at home as in the office, with efficient cloud storage. Beyond the recognised advantages of cloud storage, such as enhanced resilience, agility, cost reduction, and on-demand scalability, companies can quickly expand capacity as needed.

Q What about challenges with security and performance?

A Security is paramount, especially against ransomware attacks. Nasuni's platform offers built-in detection and protection, preemptively blocking bad actors. Unlike traditional backups that take weeks to restore files, Nasuni storage stores files as immutable objects on a customer's chosen cloud object storage, preventing unauthorised changes. The innovative file system design allows rapid recovery, enabling companies to retrieve millions of files within minutes in the event of an incident. These security and backup features are globally accessible for remote workers.

Another challenge compliance teams face is trying to control private or sensitive information in the remote working environment. Having a single point of truth means compliance teams won't lose track of information - it all stays on the same platform rather than being sent around in emails or shared via shadow IT, for example.

Performance is another potential pain point, with companies concerned that the cloud might be too slow. Nasuni solves this by implementing intelligent edge caching for files that have gravity and need to be local for performance. This is achieved by making intelligent background decisions about whether to cache files locally.

Q How does Nasuni's 'Access Anywhere' add-on work?

A Access Anywhere is an add-on to the core Nasuni platform that optimises remote users' bandwidth and minimises latency, enabling users to access data quickly through a cloud drive at maximum performance. The result is a best-of-breed hybrid experience.

Another benefit of Access Anywhere is that it enables efficient collaboration with ensured data security and access control features, available not just through the Nasuni platform but also integrated into Microsoft Teams, for example.

Q How does the Nasuni platform help companies prepare to use artificial intelligence?

A As AI becomes more prevalent, companies will use more and more data to better support it. The net result is that data has gone from being a cost to be managed to an asset to be leveraged. Fragmenting corporate knowledge or putting it into other solutions can make leveraging AI much more difficult.

To be AI-ready, best practice stipulates that companies need to consolidate their data on one platform with a single source of truth that eases access, protection, compliance and governance. Nasuni is architected from the ground up to provide that single source.

To find out more about how Nasuni enables remote and hybrid work, please visit nasuni.com/remote-and-hybrid-work





Which solutions can provide a non-disruptive user experience, while also **enhancing performance and security.**



Download the report from the Enterprise Strategy Group to find out more.

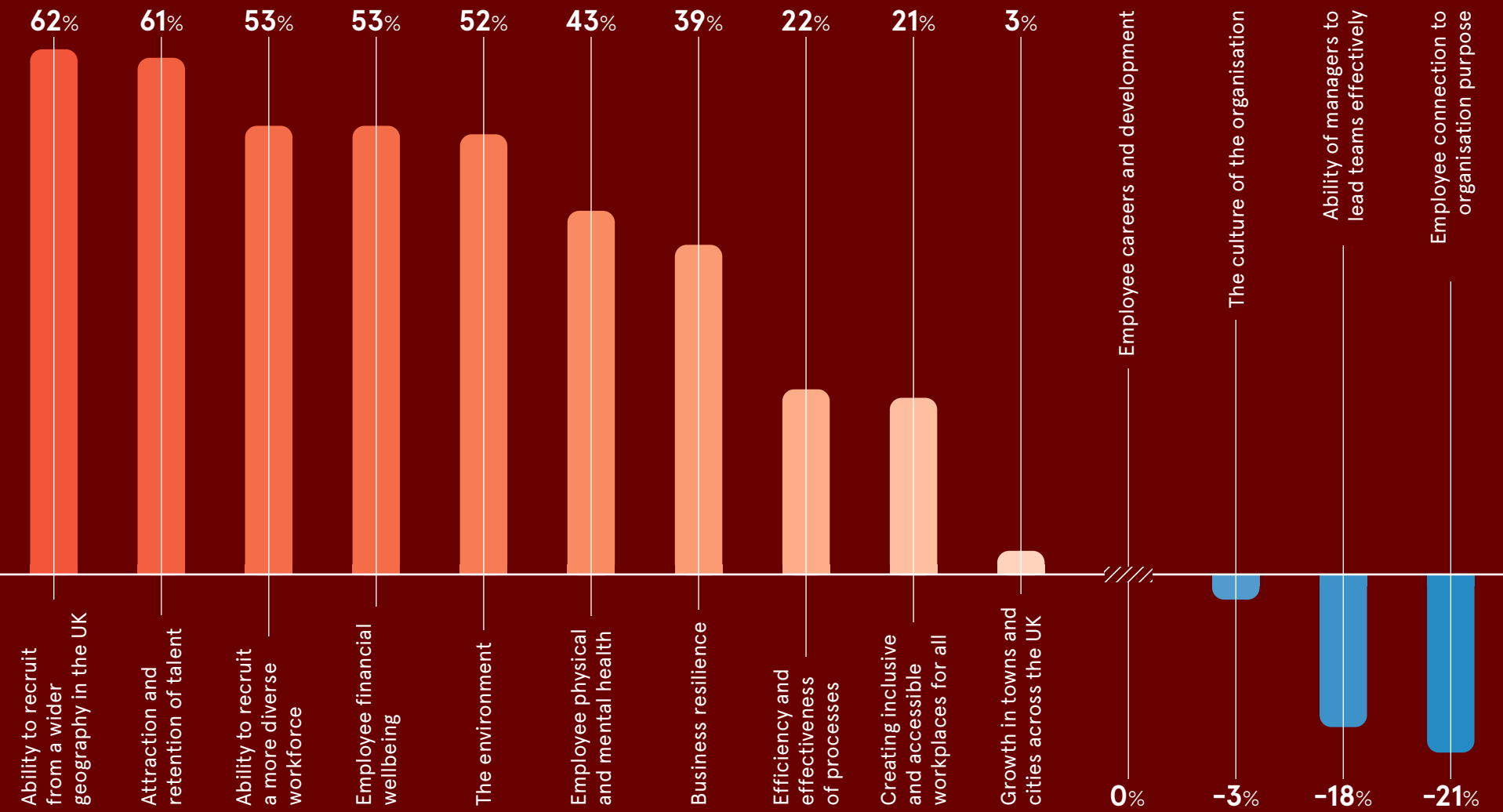


MANAGEMENT'S HYBRID WORKING CONUNDRUM

Employers in the UK are somewhat divided on hybrid working. Although business leaders seem to recognise the benefits of hybrid working for employees – and most even agree that hybrid working does not negatively impact employee productivity – many are still worried about how hybrid working may affect company culture. So, what are the competing considerations that could determine the hybrid balance in future workplaces?

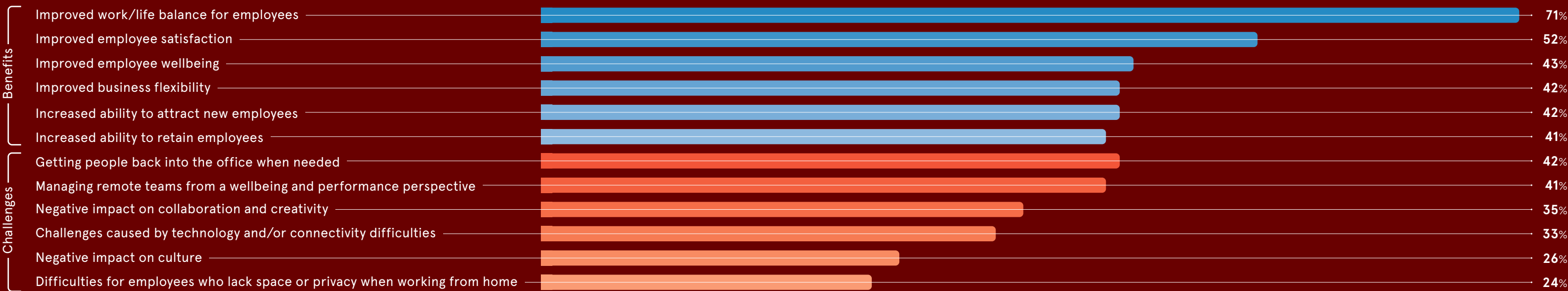
THE OVERALL IMPACT OF HYBRID WORKING

Employers' perception of the impacts of hybrid working on the following; net score, taking negative impact away from positive impact



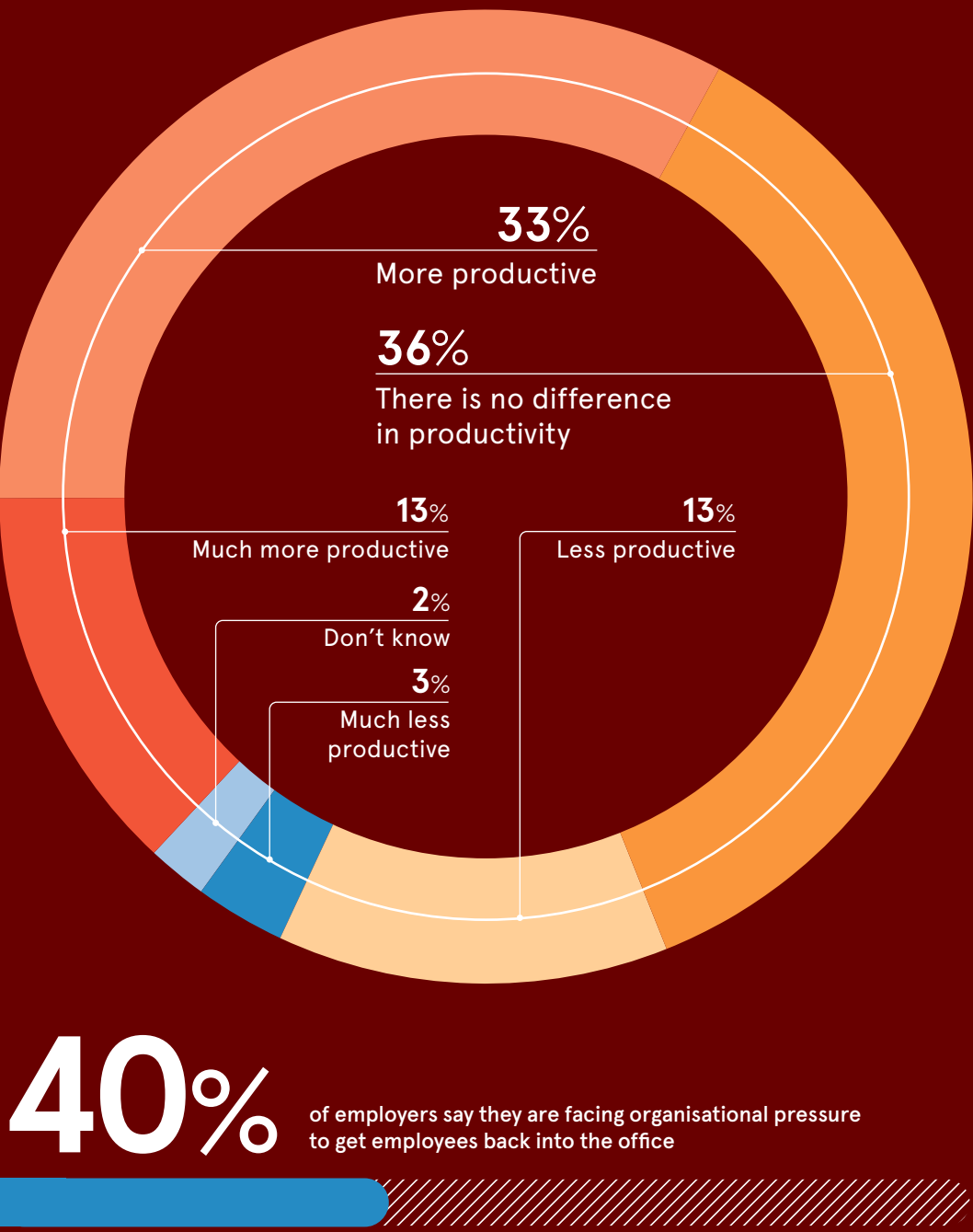
THE CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF HYBRID WORKING

Share of employers citing the following as key benefits and challenges of hybrid working



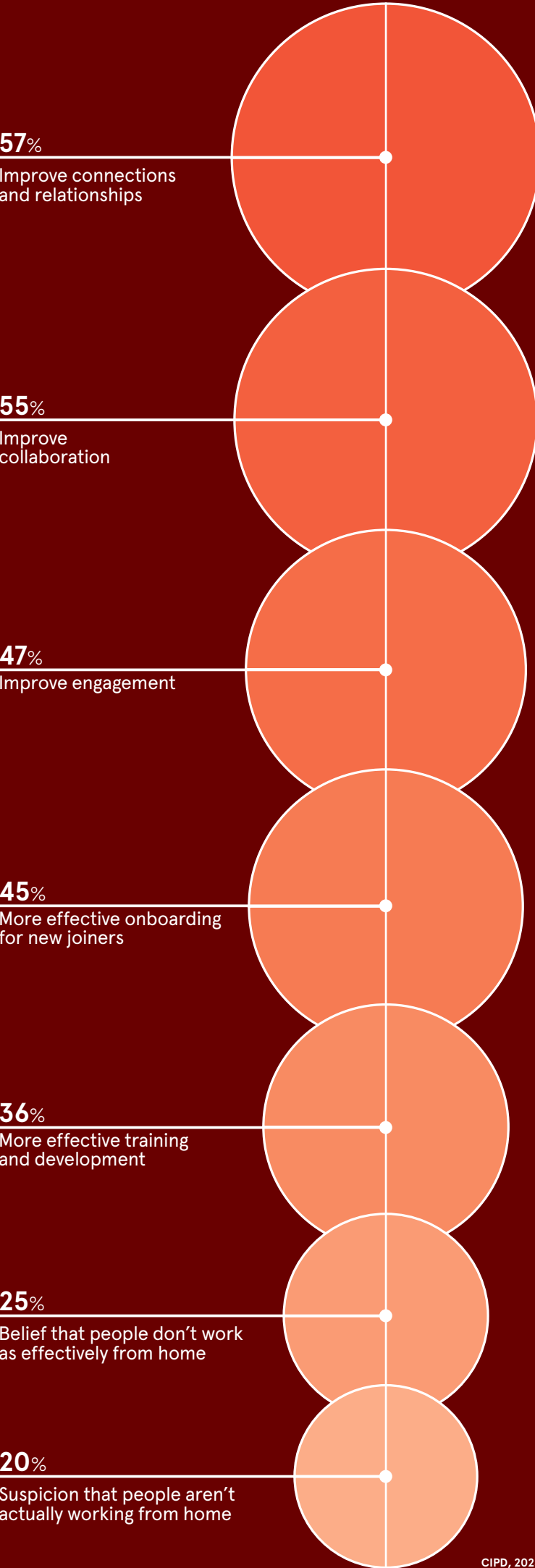
EMPLOYERS GENERALLY AGREE THAT HYBRID WORKING HAS NOT NEGATIVELY IMPACTED EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY

Employers' perception of employee productivity when working remotely, or in a hybrid setting



WHY DO SENIOR LEADERS WANT EMPLOYEES BACK IN THE OFFICE?

Share of senior leaders that want employees to spend more time in the office for the following reasons





OPINION

Zoom out: how working from home is damaging women’s prospects

The shift to remote working has granted millions of us a better work/life balance, yet proximity bias is blocking the advancement of highly talented people, affecting female workers disproportionately

Sarah Vizard

“What worries me is a world where women become less visible.”

So said entrepreneur Debbie Wosskow at the inaugural Women in Work Summit in September.

She was talking in a session that questioned whether the post-pandemic shift towards remote working in the UK has been good for women. I’d assumed that the consensus would be yes, but Wosskow offered a strong argument to the contrary.

Her reasoning was as follows: there are more men in the workforce than women, who are more likely than men to be working remotely. And studies show that people who go into the office less often than their managers are less likely to secure a promotion than colleagues who attend HQ frequently.

Wosskow urged the audience to “be very careful about where the

consequences of the pandemic and the desire for flexibility can take us”.

Her arguments are supported by government research. Figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that 79.4% of men aged 16 to 64 are employed in the UK in the second quarter of 2023, compared with 72.1% of women.

Women are also slightly more likely than men to be working remotely. The ONS surveys the population regularly on where and how they work. Its most recent findings indicate that 17% of women work purely from home, compared with 16% of men, while 29% of women are hybrid workers, compared with 27% of men. Nearly half of working men (48%) cannot do so from home, compared with 44% of working women.

There is plenty of research evidence indicating that proximity bias exists in many workplaces. For

instance, a survey of C-suite executives in the US last year found that 41% believed that remote workers were less likely to be considered for promotion in their firms. This phenomenon predates the pandemic: a study conducted in China in 2015 found that remote workers were half as likely as their office-attending colleagues to be promoted, even though they were more productive.



Be very careful about where the consequences of the pandemic and the desire for flexibility can take us

So, as Wosskow highlighted, there could be an issue to address here. Yet it doesn’t mean that the uptake of remote working, especially by women, is intrinsically a mistake.

Nonetheless, employers should be aware of the potential challenges this trend presents. When designed well and applied effectively, flexible working policies can give employees agency, reduce their stress and improve their productivity. But if this harms people’s promotion prospects and earning power – particularly those in groups who are already disadvantaged in this respect – it will simply reinforce the status quo.

The solution is to be mindful of how flexible working policies operate in reality and mitigate any impact it could have on remote workers’ careers.

Women remain overwhelmingly responsible for childcare and household chores, which may be part of the reason why they’re more likely to take up flexible working where it’s offered. New data from the National Centre for Social Research shows that, while attitudes to women’s participation in work have shifted hugely over the past 40 years, behaviour has yet to catch up. For instance, 65% of the British public say that washing and ironing is done mainly by the women in their households, versus 27% who say it is shared and 7% who say it is done mainly by the men.

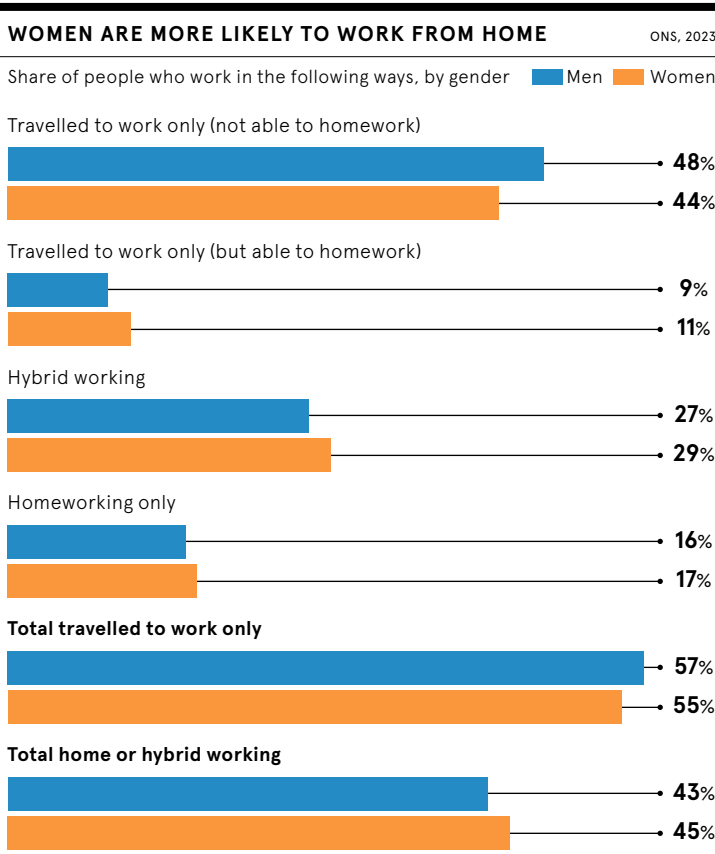
To build fairness into the system, an employer must track who is making use of flexible working policies and why, and then ensure that everyone feels equally able to access them. If women are using them more than men, it needs to consider why.

Elliott Rae, who founded MusicFootballFatherhood, a parenting platform for men, highlighted this issue at the summit from an alternative viewpoint. He spoke of a male friend who’d been offered four weeks of paternity leave by his employer but had taken only one because he knew that the other men in the firm who’d secured promotions after becoming fathers had taken only a week off.

Rae asked delegates: “What are you doing in your organisations to encourage and support dads to take up flexible work policies?”

Managers also need to be trained in how to counter proximity bias and be mindful of treating everyone equally, no matter where they work. Likewise, they need fairer systems of gauging someone’s productivity and value to the business if they can’t see that person working next to them in the office.

Ultimately, as writer and futurist Christine Armstrong noted at the summit, the pandemic gave us “the most incredible opportunity to reset work”. But that reset needs to benefit everyone. It’s up to business leaders to ensure that it does. ●



‘Hybrid working is the best of both worlds for many employees’

Despite its popularity, hybrid working is still viewed as an experiment by many business leaders. Here, Svilena Keane, editor, Engage Business Media, reflects on some of the trends that defined its evolution in 2023

The way we work has evolved tremendously over the past few years. Before Covid, remote working was a rarity and many of us hadn’t even heard of hybrid working. Now, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reports that 83% of UK organisations have hybrid working options. While we might not be surprised by this percentage today, we certainly would not have been able to predict it in 2019.

After two years of remote working, employees welcomed hybrid working with open arms. Hybrid working is ideal for many employees, enabling them to continue working in the way they had gotten used to while also offering the in-person social interactions they missed. In addition to offering ‘the best of both worlds’, hybrid working promotes employee wellbeing and supports inclusion and diversity.

With the CIPD reporting that 46% of employers say the number of employees wanting to work from home has increased between May 2022 and May 2023, demand for home-working is not a trend. To help those struggling to meet this demand, this year we held two in-person events to showcase best-practice case studies from world-leading organisations.

Both our Employee Engagement Summit and our recent Future of Work Conference featured presentations from renowned brands, revealing how they are engaging their people in the digital world. Some of the speakers our attendees had the pleasure of hearing from included Amazon, BT, Bupa, Coca-Cola, Evri, EY, GSK, HSBC, John Lewis, Lloyds Bank, Mercedes-AMG Petronas F1, NHS, Rolls-Royce, Royal Mail, Virgin Group and YouTube.

Throughout the year, our speakers addressed the importance of promoting open communication and making employees feel heard, regardless of physical location.

One of the most highly rated sessions on this subject was GSK’s presentation on their global broadcast programme. As part of this, employees can submit questions to GSK’s leaders anonymously and vote for the queries they want answered most. During their broadcasts, GSK’s leadership team answers the most popular questions first, showing that they care about what their people perceive as important.

To ensure that all employees can benefit from this programme, GSK makes their broadcasts accessible on-demand and in different formats (video, audio, transcript). In this way, their global employees can engage with the content in the way they prefer and at a time that suits them best.

Another topic that we noticed coming up repeatedly was how businesses can support the wellbeing of their employees. While remote working offers many advantages, it may also have a negative impact on mental health and wellness. This is where hybrid working and the opportunity to socialise with colleagues can tackle feelings of isolation.

In an interview, Mercedes-AMG Petronas F1 Team’s former head of internal communications, Nicole Bearne, commented on the need for social interaction: “We are social animals. We are drawn to communicate with each other. And while connecting via a video link is a good alternative when you cannot physically be in the same room as someone, there is no substitute for sitting down and having a good chat with somebody, getting to know people directly, having a bit of a laugh and building that sense of camaraderie.”

While hybrid working might seem here to stay, it is relatively new and often viewed as an experiment. Large organisations, including Amazon and Zoom, have recently required a return to office.

Have we settled on a new way of working or will we see a return to the pre-Covid workplace norms? With 2024 around the corner, we are excited to see what the future holds and how employee engagement strategies will change. ●



Svilena Keane
Editor
Engage Business Media

Q&A Building workspaces fit for the future

Companies can make the most of the hybrid-working world by modernising office spaces and establishing flexible, creative and collaborative destinations, says **Chris Davies**, chief executive at Uncommon



Q Why are we seeing the return-to-office trend?

A People have an inherent need to be together. For most individuals and companies, when we’re not in a space together, we begin to see fractures. People simply disengage. In the office, that happens less and relationships get repaired quicker.

The drive back to the office is about businesses wanting their people to be together and interact, so that they can repair and enhance their company culture.

It’s also about meeting the needs of the future of work. Technology is changing the way people work and the very jobs they do – and at pace. How can a company plan for a five-year lease on an office space if they don’t know the jobs they’ll need or the headcount they’ll have?

When I speak to company leaders who have taken on long-term office leases, they tell me that the space is too big for the first year, perfect for six months and then they outgrow it. The cost of this is prohibitive and a recipe for disaster in such a fast-moving

business environment. The solution is flexible workspaces, which can grow and shrink on demand.

Q What is the link between company culture and workspace?

A People talk about this being an office revolution, but it’s really an office evolution. The trends were all there pre-Covid and we’ve been seeing huge demand for better office space for some time.

The return to the office is about businesses thinking about work spaces in a different way. They’re now a tool that can help with the culture of their business, a way to engage their people.

An example of this is the big shift in how companies choose office space. It used to be the head of finance or property who made the final decision on an office space, now it’s the head of HR. Companies have worked out that their biggest overhead is their people. Comparatively, the cost of renting an office space is very small. They’ve realised that if they can get a 10% better office, the cost to the business isn’t much higher, but the potential return through more engaged employees is much greater.

The conversation is no longer about getting the cheapest office space possible, but rather how we get the best space for our business. That’s wonderful.

Q What does a modern office space look like?

A Things like wellness spaces or outside spaces are no longer ‘nice to haves’; employees now expect them as standard from their office space. Another key angle is the

sustainability and the environmental impact of the space you use. By 2027, offices must have an Energy Performance Certificate rating of ‘C’ or higher, rising to ‘B’ or higher by 2030.

You can’t create a modern business without considering sustainability. Your customers and clients will be aware of it and your people will ask you questions about it. Beyond being good for business, sustainability is simply the right thing to do.

At Uncommon, we spend a lot of time talking to our members to understand the value they get from our spaces and how we can improve on that. With more than 300 member companies of differing sizes, we understand that they’re all on slightly different wavelengths with what an office means to them and how they want to use it. What’s right for one isn’t for another. Our job is to evolve the space as their demands change and continue to provide a personalised experience for every person coming to us.

Fundamentally, we’re a hospitality business. We’re here to facilitate our customers’ work. Why do people want to stay in certain hotels or visit certain restaurants? You need to make people want to go to their workspaces. If they’re not exceptional, they won’t be filled.

For more, visit uncommon.co.uk

UNCOMMON

VIEWS FROM THE TOP

Location, location, location

Hybrid working has become the new normal and most business leaders are more interested in finding ways to make it work than they are in fighting the trend. But opinions on best practice differ. Here, four business leaders explain the thinking behind their organisation’s hybrid working policies

Most business leaders recognise that employees are perfectly capable of fulfilling their work duties without coming into an office. The most recent data from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development shows that more

than three-quarters of UK organisations allow hybrid working, either through formal policies or informal arrangements. But firms also agree that homeworkers are missing out on intangible benefits of office-based work, and both they and their employers could suffer as a result.

The key, according to most, is to find the right balance between home and in-office work. The debate over hybrid working is not over but its focus has shifted. For most employers the question is not whether to allow hybrid working but how to structure it.

Amy Williams

Chief executive
Good-Loop

We’re all hybrid workers at Good-Loop. We learnt a lot about how we operate during the Covid crisis. In March 2020, I was in New York looking at offices with my newly hired head of US sales. By the end of that week, Donald Trump had closed the borders and we were on an emergency repatriation flight. The next couple of months were a crash course in how to do business virtually. For two years, whether you were across the pond or across the street, you were on Zoom. It gave us this amazing opportunity to grow in the US but have UK overheads. The US market now accounts for 42% of our turnover.

I thought: ‘Well, great – we’ll just never have to open an office there.’ Then I looked back at two years of data and saw one key difference: the US had a bigger deal size – on average 2.5 times bigger – but the repeat rate was significantly lower. Although we could get on a Zoom call and talk to people over there, we couldn’t use it to build a relationship that would offer long-term value. So we opened our US office at the start of this year.

Now we have offices in Edinburgh, London and New York. These are an important symbol of what we’re building together. They’re not really

workplaces; they’re spaces to gather in. The culture in the business is ‘do your job from wherever you’re going to do it best – I don’t care where you actually sit’. But we’ve carved out dedicated space for collaboration, feedback and ideation. All those things we do in person.



Do your job from wherever you are going to do it best



Rachel Street

People and talent
development director, RPC

The hybrid working policy here at RPC is built around trust, respect and confidence in our employees. Businesses must have confidence in their staff to deliver the same level of client service, the same opportunities for career progression and the same cooperative teamwork, regardless of where people work.

After the pandemic, RPC made a very conscious decision not to have strict rules relating to the proportion of time each of us should spend in or out of our offices. To do this would ignore the individual circumstances of our people, our teams and our clients.

A key consideration for us is the health and wellbeing of our employees. It’s important that we allow for flexibility based on what works for our clients, but also for our people and the other teams in our firm.

We recognise that the character of every group, team and individual across the firm is different, and we want to celebrate that diversity and accommodate it as much as we can.

But while we are flexible on where our people work, we do believe there are benefits to spending time together in the office, where we can foster community, collaboration, innovation and learning. We also recognise that different teams will



Different teams will have different types of work demands. For some teams, individuals will be asked to come into the office on an ‘anchor’ day or even participate in a rota

have different types of work demands. For some teams, individuals will be asked to come into the office on an ‘anchor’ day or even participate in a rota in cases where there is a clear need to provide a service from within the office.

We ask our people to be flexible, supportive and open to sincere discussions with their colleagues to find the arrangement that works best for all. Ultimately, while the location of where we work may vary, RPC has been clear on maintaining who we are and what we do.

Mandy Lamb

Managing director
UK & Ireland, Visa

At Visa we believe in the power of people coming together to solve problems and share what they’ve learnt. So we’ve very much shifted towards being in a face-to-face environment for at least half of our time. That is the expectation.

I think that’s working better for us in some markets than others. It’s contextual; every territory is unique. A lot of folk in the early stages of their careers are saying: ‘I need to learn from people who are more experienced by seeing them in action. I need to be in a room with them, engaging clients and engaging the market.’

That face-to-face interaction is crucial for our business, because it’s relationship-driven. We can’t serve



We can’t serve our end customers effectively if we’re not in touch with them

our end customers effectively if we’re not in touch with them and we aren’t experiencing that human interaction every day.



Mark Lomas

Head of culture, Lloyd’s of London

The expectation here is that people work three days a week in the office, but there is some flexibility in that arrangement. This approach has served us quite well. Any manager will probably tell you that it presents a challenge in meeting your operational goals, but this is not rocket science. It just takes a bit of planning.

Flexibility offers big benefits for the talent pool and we must be careful not to lose these. A hybrid environment, for instance, is much better for recruiting disabled groups. As long as your technology is accessible, you can remove all the barriers that are associated with typical office buildings.

I believe that we need to capture the best elements of remote, agile working and then have a clear purpose for attending the office. This is often a question of what works best for each team.



Gone are the days when anyone could claim that you can’t run a successful business using flexible working

I don’t think either side of the debate is right or wrong. But gone are the days when anyone could claim that you can’t run a successful business using flexible working. Is it more complex to manage? Maybe. But I have little sympathy for middle managers who complain about it. What are you paid for? You’re paid to manage people. People are diverse, so you need to be flexible. ●

Q&A

Offices should be communities, not cubicles

Remote working has shown that people can be just as productive at home as in the office, so what is driving the return to the office? For **Rebecca McKeown**, operations director at Colony Cowork, flexibility, communication and adaptability are key



Q What effect has hybrid working had on office space?

A Hybrid working has led to workspace providers needing to be more flexible with their offering, with companies looking to be increasingly organised and efficient in their approach. Before Covid, companies rented space to accommodate everybody employed by their entire business in one office. Now, many organisations are giving up their larger traditional office spaces and opting instead for workspace that is more flexible in nature.

The past five years have shown us how much things can change, so businesses must be agile and ready to adapt. If they are stuck in long-let office space, that’s hard to do. Serviced office providers like us take the stress out of this. From providing phone booths and meeting rooms to break-out spaces and events, we have the flexibility to work with businesses as individuals and adapt to their needs. With over six locations in Manchester that are open 24/7, our spaces are designed to accommodate a modern business approach.

Q How can shared workspaces help with employee engagement?

A People want more from their time at work. They don’t just want to come into the office to do their job, they want to socialise with others and connect with a professional community that provides opportunities and ideas too.

Remote working during Covid took away companies’ connection with their people. We’re finding that more and more businesses want

their teams to return to the office to rebuild that connection and so they can speak to colleagues in-person and feel part of a network.

That’s why we’ve always invested in the community and events side of our business. Being able to offer collaborative and social events – everything from professional networking and panel talks to wellbeing workshops and music sessions – engages existing employees and helps attract new ones.

We find that the companies we work with often list the benefits we offer as part of their talent attraction package. High-quality office fit-out, premium coffee, community brunches, wellness activities and access to networking are big draws for employees.

Shared workspaces also offer companies more opportunity to attract the best talent globally. By providing flexible workspace we help to support this.

Q Colony is a Manchester-based company. What makes the region so attractive to both employees and organisations?

A As a city, Manchester has always attracted top talent and we have seen a growing number of businesses set up their second office or regional hub here. We’re also increasingly seeing international organisations choosing Manchester as a base for their first UK office.

This is due to the fact that Manchester is an exciting place for people to live, with a huge cultural offering. Neighbourhoods like Ancoats – where many of our co-working offices are located – is consistently voted one of the best places to live and work in the UK.



People don’t just come to the office to do a job, they want to socialise with others and connect with a professional community

The city has gone through major redevelopments since its days as an industrial powerhouse. Some of our venues are housed in former mills or mill worker accommodation, giving a rich historical backdrop to the modern workforces operating in these spaces today.

We seek to revolutionise these spaces and create environments where all industries feel a connection. Manchester has a great tech scene, so a lot of those kinds of companies come here but the variety of businesses in our venues is endless. There’s definitely a bright future for business in Manchester and we are proud to be playing a part in that.

For more information please visit colonyco.work

COLONY

EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

Aesthetic support: the power of art in the post-pandemic office

With hybrid working commonplace, including art in the workplace with employees in mind can do more than brighten the walls

Eva Dauberton

In the lobby of cybersecurity company Promon stands a sculpture of a man kneeling on a pedestal. The piece, acquired by CEO Gustaf Sahlman in 2018 from artist Ragnhild Prestholt, has since been affectionately dubbed Proman by employees. For Thomas Ford, Promon's head of marketing and communications, "He's part of the team. For long-time Promoneers he is a reminder of the company's beginnings. And for our new colleagues, he provides a nice slice of Promon's history."

Organisations generally tend to buy artworks to enhance their branding, public relations or investment; employees usually benefit indirectly as a result. But intentionally incorporating art into the people strategy presents multiple, definite advantages. Art can create a sense of belonging, as is the case with Proman. And it can inspire fresh perspectives.

Despina Katsikakis is president of the British Council for Offices, an industry group for companies and professionals involved in all aspects of the office space. She points to the effect of art in the workplace: "It can evoke joy, delight and curiosity. It can inspire empathy. Art can engage employees and provide opportunities to contemplate, renew and be inspired through the workday."

But is it enough to prioritise employees' needs when investing in art? What are the business advantages of such an approach, and could it help with the firm's broader strategy?

According to Gallup's *State of the Global Workplace 2023* report, employee engagement levels are higher than they were before the pandemic. But the UK has one of the least engaged workforces and 38% of UK employees who took part in the poll experience daily stress. To help address the issue, art in the workplace could prove useful.

"The reason why art in offices enhances employee wellbeing and engagement is that it brings humanity to the workplace," observes Katsikakis – and it seems that UK employees agree. A recent survey by global real estate firm Brookfield Properties, in partnership with therapy service provider The School of Life, found that 69% of respondents agree that visually appealing art in the workplace contributes to their wellbeing. Employees in offices

Thinking space: the sculpture by Ragnhild Prestholt in Promon's lobby

“

It's not just a case of art being part of the decor or an investment collection. It needs to deliver something tangible

enriched with art also report feeling more inspired by their jobs, with 39% saying this compared with 24% of employees who work in lean, functional spaces.

There is promising evidence that viewing artworks can help to reduce stress. Research by the psychological medicine department at the University of Auckland noted that looking at art generates consistent positive outcomes on stress, whether self-reported or evidenced by physical symptoms such as blood pressure.

But the benefits of incorporating art don't end there. The Wellbeing Research Centre of the University of Oxford conducted a study in 2019 that analysed data from 230 independent organisations across 49 industries. The findings suggest that employees' satisfaction with their company strongly correlated with employee productivity. Higher wellbeing at work is also positively correlated with greater business-unit-level profitability. Meanwhile, research by the University of Exeter shows that the presence of art in the office can lead to productivity gains of up to 17%.

Considering the overall positive impact on employees, it is not surprising that they are more inclined to want to work in an office which is enriched with works of art on display. As indicated by the Brookfield Properties and School of Life survey, of those with highly enriched offices, 75% said they prefer to work in the office than at home, compared to 53% of those who work in so-called leaner offices.

For Tazie Taysom, commercial director at international art consultancy Artiq, art can, indeed, encourage employees to return to the office more regularly and engage with their colleagues.

"Art can prompt reactions and conversations in the office that are

more than just water-cooler chat," she says. Zvi Noé is a founder and partner at Noé Group, an investment and asset management organisation which focuses on real estate. He also believes art can trigger meaningful discussion in the office. "We pick very bright pieces, so they're very noticeable," he says. "It often becomes a talking point."

In a hybrid working set-up, those interactions are crucial. A recent Gallup survey, *The Advantages and Challenges of Hybrid Work*, found that 60% of employees prioritise meeting and collaborating with colleagues when they go to the office.

To obtain the best results, firms can talk to workplace consultants about how to maximise the effects of art in the workplace. Another proven route is to work with galleries and non-profit organisations that specialise in office space design. But the key is to involve employees in the selection process.

The Exeter University study found that employee productivity can increase by up to 32% when workers are given the chance to have more control over their workplace environment. This insight can also help other elements of the business strategy. Involving employees in the art selection can contribute to diversity and inclusion objectives.

"We often find that law firms, for example, are trying to increase representation in their staff," notes Taysom. "One client invited their women's association to choose the art collection and, of course, they went for a predominantly women and non-binary artist collection." As well as promoting inclusivity, employees can bring different perspectives. They can suggest unconventional art forms and help showcase the company's commitment to innovation and creativity.

"Post-pandemic, we noticed that people need their office to deliver more," says Taysom. "It's not just a case of art being part of the decor or an investment collection. It needs to deliver something tangible."

Take Noé Group as an example. The company invests in art not only for its visual appeal but also for a purpose. For that reason, it has chosen to partner with the charity Project Art Works. The charity creates artwork by neurodiverse artists to furnish its office space. "Part of what drew us to Project Art Works is their ability to take something as simple and mundane as office artwork and then make it into a more meaningful endeavour."

The partnership involves visits from the artists and they commissioned a booklet that explains who the artists are and information about the piece.

"For the people in the office, it creates a different discussion point around the art. It isn't just pictures that you've accumulated. It has a slightly bigger social involvement and hopefully conveys a bit more about the culture and how we think and feel."

Art in the office can help connect and motivate the workforce; improve individuals' wellbeing; and, as part of a broader corporate strategy, convey a brand's values. That's quite a good return on investment. ●

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Ever feel out of place?

Like every decision you take reveals you're not qualified to be a leader? That's normal. Today's business world is so complex that the more you grow in your career, the less you know about your job. Raconteur clarifies the complexities of modern business with stories that help you make more informed decisions and build more successful companies.

So, stop feeling out of place.
Settle into your position.

Become a better leader at Raconteur.net

Raconteur

Stories that connect modern business.