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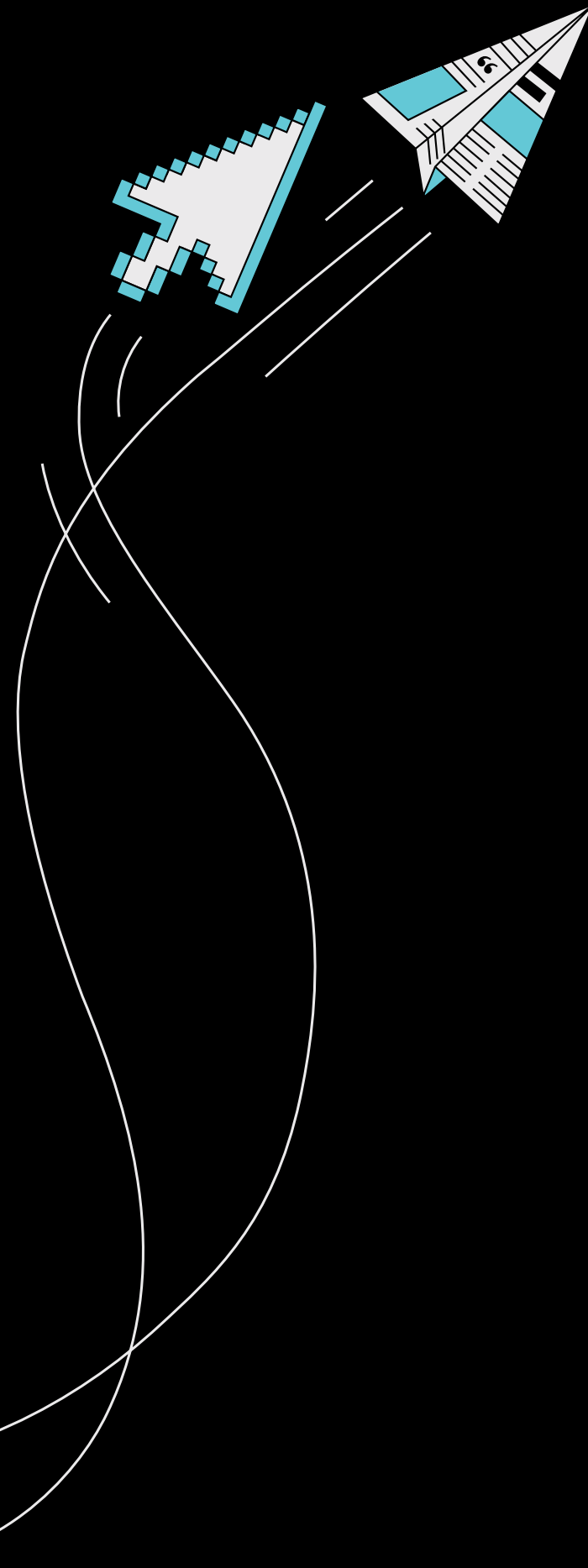
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WELLBEING

Why domestic violence is an issue of concern to employers

The number of cases rose significantly after the UK's first Covid lockdown was imposed. As remote working continues in many sectors, firms are being urged to do more to address the problem

MaryLou Costa

Soon after the government announced the first UK-wide lockdown in March 2020, Sandhya Iyer, managing director of personnel consultancy The HR Dept, received an unusual request from a client.

It had an employee, nearing the end of her six-month probation, who was struggling to do her job to an acceptable standard while working at home. Iyer found this odd, as the person in question had been performing well until that point. Rather than immediately starting a formal review, Iyer spoke to the employee, who revealed that her partner was subjecting her to domestic abuse.

He had been violent, smashing electrical appliances, and he had even confiscated her laptop to prevent her from working. Despite the government's work-at-home edict, Iyer and her team made a special case for her to return to HQ. They activated an employee assistance programme, enabling her to access therapy services from the privacy of a meeting room.

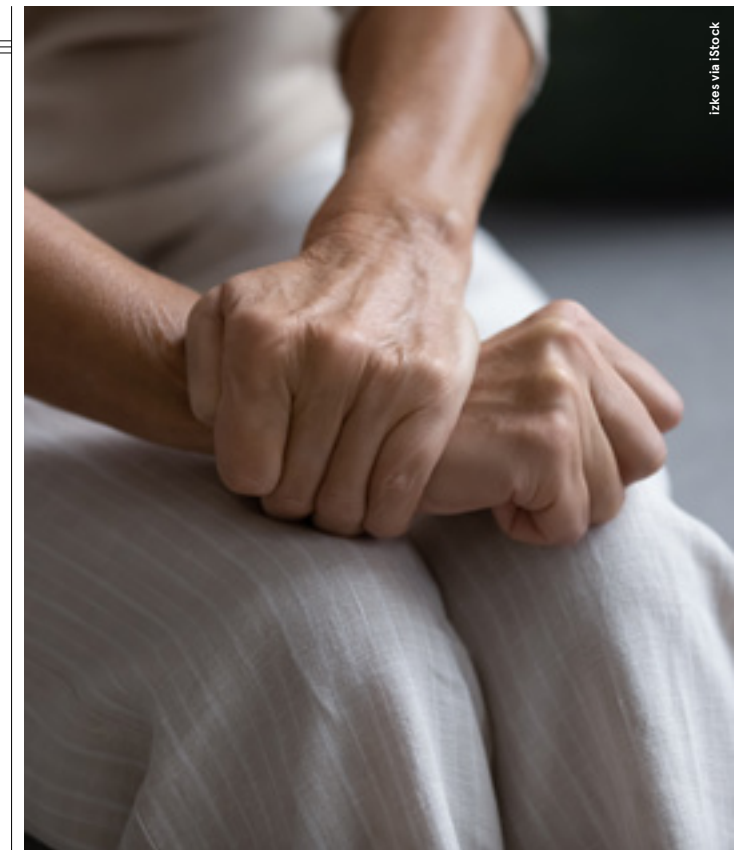
With the company's support, the employee was eventually able to leave her abuser and keep her job.

Taking that experience into account – and the belief that even the smallest employers should have a policy in place to support victims of domestic abuse – The HR Dept partnered with Sharon Livermore, an ambassador for the Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse. Livermore's previous employer had made her take five days' annual leave to attend the trial of her abusive former partner.

In March 2021, 'Sharon's policy' was published as a guide for UK employers of all sizes. The first thing the document does, Iyer says, is to make employers aware that domestic violence has a significant impact at work too.

And, since the pandemic brought the mass convergence of home and work lives, more businesses are recognising the part they have to play in both recognising and tackling domestic violence. In the year to March 2021, the number of domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police in England and Wales increased by 6% year on year, ending a long-term downward trend. The BBC branded the upsurge an "epidemic beneath the pandemic".

Iyer explains: "This is about having a policy that encourages staff



Governments in other jurisdictions, meanwhile, have been legislating to ensure that such support is given. In the US, for instance, Missouri became the 35th state to oblige employers to provide a minimum period of unpaid leave to victims. The Australian government is offering paid support, with activist groups calling for statutory support from employers too. New Zealand mandated paid leave for victims of domestic abuse back in 2018.

"This goes hand in hand with being a responsible business and helping to support local services, which are under massive strain, as a lot of the budgets have been cut for charities that focus on this kind of thing," Lewis says. "So what can your business do to give back and lend its support?"

She adds that employers can also make a difference by acting as a less intimidating alternative to the police. Lewis is speaking from experience, having worked for nearly three years as an enquiry officer with Thames Valley Police.

"Some people might not connect with a uniform or feel that they can trust it. But, if you have a good manager and employer, they can kind of hold your hand through the process," she says.

Work may also be the only space in which a victim feels safe enough to speak up about their experiences, especially if they are being monitored by their abuser in other areas of their life.

Just because the Covid restrictions have eased, it won't necessarily lead to a decline in the number of abuse cases, Lewis warns.

"It's not something that tends to go away in a relationship once it's been there. And, if the numbers stay up, there won't be enough support, so people in this situation will be waiting a long time for help," she predicts. "We wanted to remove any friction, help them get to the front of that queue and pay for legal support. It's not a lot of money for us as a business, but it is something that would be hugely impactful for anyone who needs it."

Lewis and her team are all too aware of the impact of domestic violence on the victims' wellbeing and performance at work. They also have the worst-case scenario in mind.

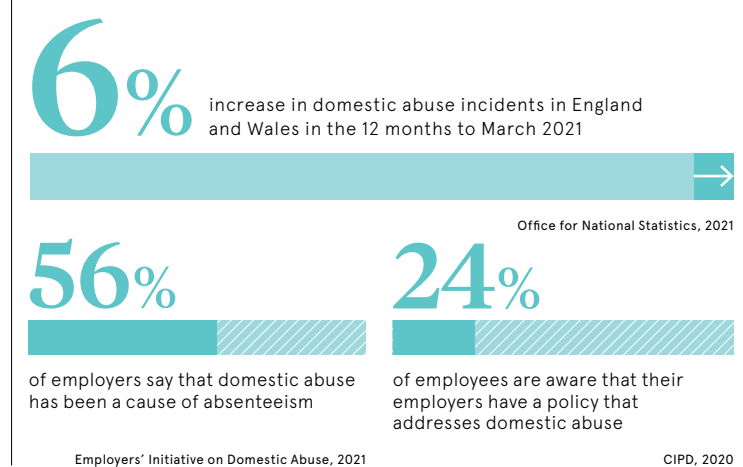
"If one of your employees were to die as a result of domestic violence", she says, "what impact would that have on your company?"

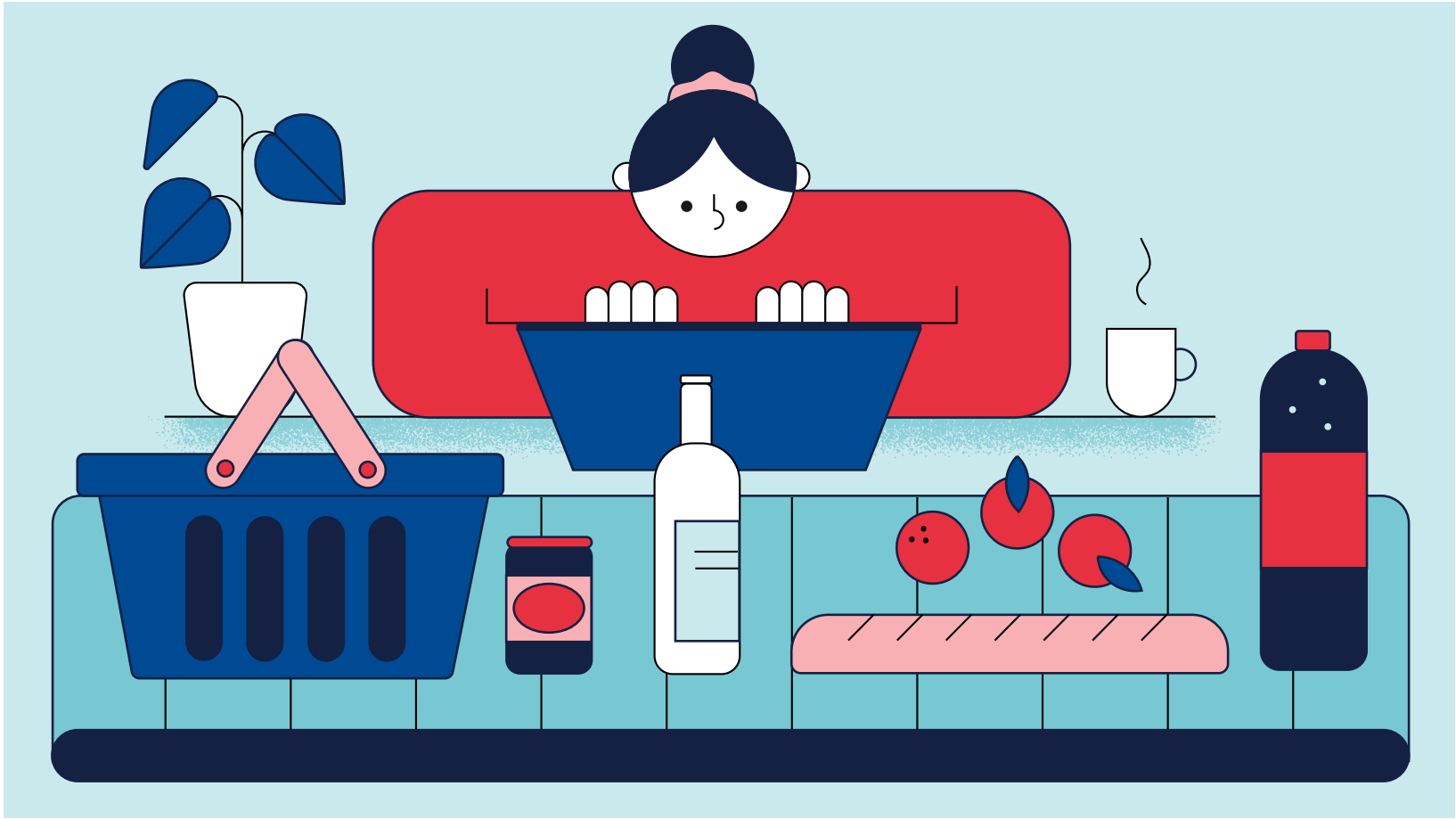
to come forward to their employers and say: 'I have this problem. Could you please help me?' We have to figure out how to support these people in a way that doesn't treat their cases like a normal performance matter. It's almost giving them the benefit of being treated as a protected characteristic."

Corporate policies on domestic abuse should be as common as workplace health and safety guidelines, especially given the rise of remote working. So says Catrin Lewis, head of global engagement and communications at Reward Gateway. Having worked at the

employee engagement platform for a decade, she has expanded her role over the past two years to become the firm's main point of contact under its support policy for victims of domestic abuse.

Created in May 2020, this package includes paid leave for victims to seek legal advice and financial support to cover those expenses as well as the costs of securing new accommodation. Reward Gateway's move is in line with a growing voluntary corporate movement in the UK, which has seen big companies such as Vodafone take the lead by offering paid leave to abuse victims.





MODELLING

How a manufacturing concept from Japan could pep up hybrid working

Suntory Beverage & Food GB&I has benefited in several respects from mixing a dash of *gemba* into its working week. Might other companies prosper by following its example?

Sam Forsdick

As employers and employees alike adjust to hybrid working patterns, many have found it challenging to strike the right balance between home office and head office. While many people have enjoyed the flexibility offered by this model, there are fears that it's having a detrimental effect on cultural cohesion.

Suntory, the 123-year-old Japanese consumer goods company best known in the UK for drinks brands Lucozade and Ribena, has added a third place of work to the mix. Its subsidiary in the UK and Ireland, Suntory Beverage & Food GB&I, is asking its staff to work three days a week at home and two days at HQ, one of which can be in *gemba*.

The concept, which translates roughly as 'the true scene', refers in this context to the location where real value is being created. The term

is rooted in the *kaizen* ('change for the better') approach of continuous improvement that was popularised by Toyota, a leading exponent of lean manufacturing. Senior executives at the auto giant are encouraged to undertake 'gemba walks' in which they step away from their desks and visit the factory floor to understand the problems facing assembly-line workers and seek out potential improvements.

Suntory has picked this method up and taken it several steps further. Unlike Toyota, it requires all 700 workers, not just senior managers, to practise "purposeful *gemba*".

The company's COO, Carol Robert, explains: "For us, this is really about being where the action is happening. For some, that could mean talking to people on the factory floor, or it might even mean following shoppers in supermarkets."



Through *gemba*, you spend more time on things that the customers actually want, rather than looking inwards and trying lots of things that they don't

she will always pick up "nuggets of information" from speaking to store managers about the latest shopping trends that she wouldn't have identified from looking at all the data gathered by the company.

The benefits of this approach became evident early in the pandemic when Robert's colleagues noticed that rival firms were selling larger multipacks in supermarkets. As consumers were having to spend so much time at home during the lockdowns, they were buying their drinks in bulk. Suntory responded by producing cans of Lucozade in packs of 12 and 24.

"If we'd waited to obtain the data to tell us to do that, we'd have been too late," she recalls.

With the aid of *gemba*, Suntory has also developed closer relationships with customers. During the lockdowns, it identified that many were seeking a healthy caffeinated drink

Robert reports that consumers' behaviour has changed radically over the course of the Covid crisis, which means that it's become more important than ever to keep abreast of their evolving preferences.

"Being closer to shoppers enables us to be more agile and adapt more quickly to changes in our market," she says. "Similarly, the people working at our factories can inform us which lines are running well. They are able to tell almost immediately whether a product is going to be a hit or not, even before we have the sales data."

Robert's most recent day in *gemba* involved visiting supermarkets and convenience stores to see whether Suntory's competitors had got anything new on their shelves and, if so, how these were selling. She says that

to help them maintain their focus while studying and working at home. This resulted in the development of the Lucozade Alert range, which first hit the shelves in September 2021.

"If you become too internally focused as a business, the market can change around you at a real pace and you'll soon find that you haven't kept up," Robert says.

She adds that *gemba* incorporates a far wider range of actions than being consumer-centric. "This is about connecting all the dots between consumers, your customers and your employees – and about how you get meaningful insights from each."

Robert believes that any business can find applications for it, although some may have to break old habits in the process. "People are accustomed to being busy all the time at work, but those are the types of things that get in the way of *gemba*," she says.

Adopting the approach has been a learning experience for the firm. It has found that the more deeply that people get involved in the process, the more they realise how beneficial it is in focusing the business on the factors that matter most.

"Through *gemba*, you spend more time on things that the customers actually want, rather than looking inwards and trying lots of things that they don't," Robert says.

After two years of having to work in relative isolation, employees can also benefit from leaving their desks and making external contacts, she adds. "It is much better for our wellbeing for us to be out there with curious minds, meeting new people outside the company."

One of the chief aims of Suntory's hybrid working policy is to empower people to find the right balance. To this end, it has removed core hours, meaning that there is no period of the working week when everyone must be on the premises.

That change has been "liberating" for everyone in the organisation, according to Robert, who adds: "We are trying to encourage people to be less busy and more effective."

After all, being too busy prevents people from reaching their *gemba*, which is, by definition, the source of true value to the business. ●

Five elements of *gemba*

- The literal translation of *gemba* is 'the true scene'. In a business context, it refers to the place where value is created – the factory floor, for example.
- One of its principles is the pursuit of operational excellence through the 'five S's':
 - 1 Seiri** – to sort things out. This element refers to creating a more streamlined and efficient workplace by removing any items that are surplus to requirements.
 - 2 Seiton** – to set things in order. When a new system is introduced, this process is applied to assign each tool its own place so that it will be easily accessible when it's needed.
 - 3 Seiso** – to scrub. This element relates to keeping a workplace clean and also to taking pride in keeping everything in order.
 - 4 Seiketsu** – to standardise. This applies to all processes, wherever they occur in the organisation. Only once these first four steps are completed will the company move on to step five.
 - 5 Shitsuki** – to sustain all the efficiency improvements that have been made.



How to build your workplace for a hybrid future

The new norms are currently being written – here's how to get one step ahead and ensure employee engagement

In just a few short years, hybrid work has gone from a nice to have to a need to have. More than half of UK workers say they'd consider leaving their employer if the option to work in a hybrid manner was taken away from them, according to YouGov data.

While the idea of mixing time at home and in a physical workplace, alongside colleagues, is still in the early stages of evolution, workers have voted – and they've said it's here to stay. "A large number of people who work in offices have got used to the idea that they can also be productive working from home or a café, or even a different country," says Steve Vatisdis, executive chairman at workplace analytics company HubStar.

Employees want a say in their working schedules but need to know that the time they do spend together in a collective workplace is going to be time well spent. They want the right tools, employee experience, and evidence for collaborative opportunities.

Concurrently, that means employers need to meet that demand, building a modern, hybrid workplace and culture that allows workers to thrive – with all the halo benefits that brings. Happier workers are more content workers, and more content workers are more likely to stay with a business, despite more competition among employers than ever before. But that costs money – and is challenging for businesses already scrutinising their bottom line.

Employees find themselves in a difficult halfway house. The business case for keeping offices is apparent: you need a physical workspace to which your staff can commute in order to realise the benefits of collaboration and community that result in better employee retention. Yet hokey-cokey employees – with one foot in the office, and one foot out of it – mean that costly real estate can often lie fallow, silence ringing around the corridors of a company.

Balancing operational efficiencies with employee wellbeing and

Commercial feature

empowerment is a difficult thing to do. It's compounded by the fact that every employee has differing perceptions and expectations of the new world of work, and that many of the old pressures, including the need to meet environmental goals, remain. Yet staff recruitment, motivation and retention remain major factors employers need to consider. "Staff experiences at work affect what you do; they affect turnover; they affect collaboration," says Vatisdis. "They're at the core of the performance of any company, business or organisation."

The team at HubStar have spent 30 years helping large companies make better use of their space and real estate – a mission that has become more important than ever as the workplace goes hybrid, and senior business leaders consider the role their land and office portfolio plays in their companies going forward.

There is a place for the physical workspace, says Vatisdis, but it needs to be explained and presented to employees and employers in a much more cohesive, sensible way, given the changing face of work. There was a time, pre-pandemic, when businesses could rely on tradition to make the case for

their workspaces and their economic value to a company's bottom line. Workers came into the office every day because it was what had always been done; businesses kept costly workplaces on the balance sheet because it was the norm.

Now new norms are being rewritten – and both business leaders and rank and file employees need to be convinced of the value of the physical workspace. "The world has started recognising the inevitable, there's going to be significant change, and there's a chance to bring about a change for the better if we do the right things," says Vatisdis. But in order to make the case for a new, improved office that works for everyone, you need to be in a position to understand that case yourself.

HubStar provides that by designing, building, selling and servicing technology platforms that deliver an ever-improving workplace experience in a hybrid working world. It uses data to help businesses work better, achieving sought-after objectives and utilising workplaces in a better way than before the pandemic. Vatisdis says that businesses that build their workplaces for the hybrid future of work are those that use data-driven tools and platforms that manage workplace utilisation intelligently while also respecting the choices and privacy of their workers. "Without intruding in any way into any kind of privacy, you can still have a reasonable idea on an anonymous basis of what goes on," says Vatisdis. "You can inform the decisions people make in terms of when and where they want to come, and give them a chance to also make longer-term plans."

Businesses that utilise this data can work with their employees to provide a way of work that meets their needs, while also ensuring the company runs

smoothly. Rather than dictating when workers come in, it provides options for employees to choose from. "And at the same time, it provides awareness of what other teams are doing for collaboration," says Vatisdis. "It's able to adapt to what the constraints are, and when there's more or less space on a minute-by-minute basis, as other people make their decision."

Take something that was once seen as simple in the physical workspace that has become more challenging in the hybrid one: organising a team meeting. Fifteen people who want to collaborate with each other can mean an awful lot of mails bouncing back and forth, and results in siloed thinking without many opportunities for informal collaboration – the kind that sparks the most innovative thinking.

Using data-driven workplace platforms like HubStar enables those meetings to be better organised, taking into account when workers who need to collaborate together are likely to be in the same physical space, and suggesting times that work. "The hybrid workspace becomes more moulded around your needs," says Vatisdis. People don't feel compelled to come in, which has a positive impact on productivity. "Information has been shared effectively about how this can work," he says. "It's about being able to actually influence things that reduce stress, and gives employees satisfaction that we're actually making something happen rather than being carried along in the river."

For more information, visit hubstar.com/hybrid-work-solution

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ALL-REMOTE WORKING

Everybody cut footloose!

Some businesses that have become globally distributed organisations have developed a missionary zeal for the ultimate in remote working. What benefits has it conferred that make them such passionate advocates?

Tim Cooper

The no-office movement is gaining momentum. More and more companies are abandoning their physical premises and going fully remote.

San Franciscan tech companies Automattic and GitLab have been prominent pioneers of the approach. They pride themselves on their globally distributed organisations, empowering employees to live and work anywhere they wish to.

'Globally distributed' has come to define what many believe is the workforce of the future: mainly remote and spread across several time zones, ensuring round-the-clock productivity and availability to customers and clients.

Distributed businesses don't coordinate team members around a specific time zone. Instead, they use asynchronous communication (async). It means replacing inefficient real-time meetings with collaboration tools and collaboration tools and transparent audio/video recording and documentation. This enables employees in different time zones to work together effectively without having to be 'always on'.

Experts in this field expect the increasing adoption of async collaboration to have a big impact on employers and employees over the next few years. One of them is Betsy Bula, who

works in Raleigh, North Carolina, as GitLab's all-remote evangelist. She thinks that, while many firms operating remote and hybrid teams are biased towards one time zone at present, they will start hiring the best people for the job, regardless of location, as their async practices mature.

This should improve employees' career opportunities and work/life balance, according to Bula, who believes that employers will benefit in several respects. The fully distributed model enables them to find talent wherever it exists, thereby improving their diversity, for instance. It will also help them to become more agile, innovative and resilient in times of crisis.

Working from her base in Glasgow, Nicola Hamill Phillips is global HR leader at Automattic. She believes that there is "a misconception that running a distributed team is challenging. Having people all over the world enriches our decision-making. We find that our team members, with the flexibility they have, can be more productive and lead more fulfilling lives. That's one reason I love it so much here – I'm drinking the Kool-Aid."

But the globally distributed model is not without its disadvantages, even for organisations that have been using it from the start.

Bula acknowledges that the warning signs of excess stress can be harder for managers to detect among a distributed team, for instance. Business leaders therefore need to cultivate an open, non-judgemental culture when it comes to protecting employees' mental health. They must encourage people who are struggling not to soldier on without telling anyone.

"Managers should not celebrate working long hours or allow that to become the norm," she stresses. "They should be trained in how to prevent burnout."

But the biggest difficulties tend to concern communication. Bula explains: "When working async and relying on written communication, workers may feel disconnected because they're not getting enough social face time with their colleagues. A written message can be misconstrued or fail to give the recipient all the information they require."

GitLab and other distributed organisations counteract these problems with a variety of methods designed to ensure that their people always feel connected and included.



Visuals: Dineen via iStock

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There is a misconception that running a distributed team is challenging. Having people all over the world enriches our decision-making

Two crucial aspects of supporting distributed workforces are intentionality and transparency. In a conventional central office, face-to-face interactions happen naturally. In a distributed team, you must actively promote informal communications that build camaraderie.

At GitLab, for example, new recruits are encouraged from day one to make time for social interactions to help them get to know colleagues outside their immediate team.

Hamill Phillips says that intentionality is also about ensuring that everyone is included in decisions. Everything should be documented transparently to promote inclusion.

"Another benefit of this is that people feel that messages are not being filtered by management," she says. "They can see the original information for themselves."

The all-remote, globally distributed model doesn't preclude employees from meeting each other in the flesh. Instead of convening in an office, they will travel to convention centres or other suitable venues to participate in summits and local co-working days.

HR services provider Growmotely has a team of 22 who are based in countries ranging from South Africa

to the Philippines. Based in Austin, Texas, Sarah Hawley is the firm's founder and CEO.

"We work completely async, except for one all-company meeting each month. This gives everybody the freedom to work and live in the most effective ways," she says. "We don't often get to see each other in person, but I'm currently sharing an Airbnb in Croatia with five of my Europe-based teammates, which is fun. My early challenges with async concerned unwinding my conditioned beliefs about work needing to be done in a fixed place from nine to five. Once I let those go, I could discover how and where I work best. My quality of life increased exponentially after that."

For enterprises with a globally distributed workforce, establishing a strong culture and set of shared values becomes critical.

Bula says that there should be no unwritten rules in a remote culture. Leaders should demonstrate the values they want everyone to share, advocating transparency, flexibility and a work/life balance that's good for people's mental health, she adds.

Hugo Stride is co-founder and MD of marketing agency Opus Growth Partners, which has team members in the UK, the US and Ukraine. One of the biggest hurdles he's faced in building a distributed model has been developing a cohesive culture without the unifying experiences of in-person working.

"There is less scope for the safe correction of misunderstandings, which is built into an office environment," Stride notes. "This can be mitigated to an extent with clear guidance and regular informal communications. But we are devoting more time and effort to replicating the intangible benefits our team would get from a centralised office."

Katy Peters, global head of marketing at technology firm Valamis,

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We find that our team members, with the flexibility they have, can be more productive and lead more fulfilling lives

works in the US while most of her team is in Europe. She describes the arrangement as a "boundary-setting superpower" that enables her to work half of each day without distraction. But differing cultural expectations about the time people spend both at work and off work can sometimes "fall unevenly on cultures that don't set boundaries".

Another potential problem is that in-person teams tend to be "tighter" than remote work teams, Peters adds. "This factor can widen cultural gaps and create issues with your global sense of belonging."

The transition to remote work tends to be more straightforward for a knowledge-based business in the service sector, but firms in traditionally co-located industries can adopt the model at least partially. For instance, a manufacturing company may always need some people working together at a certain production site, but staff in other departments, such as HR and marketing, can operate anywhere.

But even some tech companies that are adopting the distributed model aren't convinced that they will ever go fully remote. For example, New York firm Stack Overflow has increased the proportion of remote employees in its workforce from 40% to 85% across 14 countries since the pandemic started.

But CEO Prashanth Chandrasekar, who's based in San Antonio, Texas, says that not all employees want to work at home. "When we surveyed employees last year, we found that some were craving office space, while others loved their home setup," he reports. "Also, what works well for a sales team may be different for an engineering team."

Variations in employment legislation and tax regulations are other common challenges for firms to consider when building globally distributed teams.

Pieter Manden, head of trust and employer compliance at WorkMotion, says: "Hiring and employing people in a country where you have no physical presence is hard. For example, how do you determine a competitive offer in that country? You will probably also have to find a lawyer, payroll company, accountant and banker. It is possible, but it's probably not worthwhile if you're hiring only one person."

But proponents of the model believe that overcoming such challenges is worth the effort, given the benefits of globally distributed all-remote working. Uptake looks set to grow as companies have to cast their nets more widely to find the skills they need. If they get their way, it could even become the norm. ●



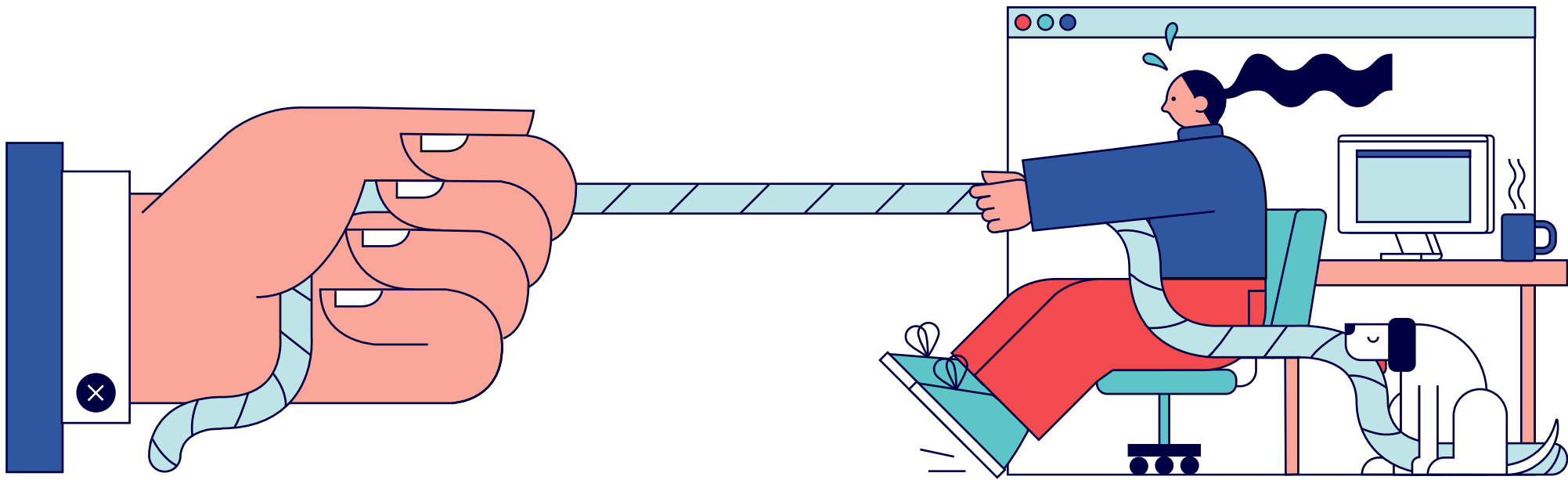
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HR STRATEGY

When WFH turns into a tug of war

As some employers seek to impose a full-time return to the office, disgruntled workers are starting to vote with their feet. What can HR do to balance their conflicting interests?

Cath Everett

As the disparity between what employers and employees want from hybrid work grows, the practice has arrived at something of a crossroads. Most companies have come to accept that some sort of hybrid model is appropriate and have been experimenting with various methods. But a growing number of firms have hit the headlines recently by rejecting the concept entirely. For instance, the CEO of Goldman Sachs, David Solomon, urged all staff to return to the office on a full-time basis as soon as the firm was able to open its US premises after an omicron-enforced closure at the start of 2022. The fact that only half of the 10,000-strong workforce at its Manhattan headquarters turned up on reopening day spoke volumes about their thoughts on the matter.

Jacob Rees-Mogg, minister for Brexit opportunities and government efficiency, similarly caused consternation a few weeks later when he left notes on civil servants' empty desks with the message: "Sorry you were out when I visited. I look forward to seeing you in the office very soon." He also warned that he would consider selling government buildings if employees failed to make enough use of them. Rees-Mogg's rhetoric aroused a strong response from the Public and Commercial Services Union. "Evidence shows that hybrid working improves workers' wellbeing and boosts productivity," it said in a letter to the minister, accusing him of "deliberately prioritising your ideological approach to Covid safety over civil servants' welfare

and the quality of public service they deliver". An October 2021 research report, *The Great Executive-Employee Disconnect*, highlighted several other cases in which firms had tried to impose higher levels of office working against most employees' wishes. Published by Slack, a provider of remote communications tools, it was based on an independent international poll of more than 10,000 executives and employees. The survey revealed that 68% of executives wanted to work at HQ for all or most of the time – and 59% of that group expected their staff to follow suit. By contrast, 76% of employees wanted flexibility in where they worked and 93% wanted flexibility in when they worked. Such findings indicate that "we're at a delicate moment", according

to Alexia Cambon, director of research in Gartner's HR practice. Now that it's possible to plan a full-time return to the office, "employers must decide how strongly they want to mandate this", she explains. "Asking people: 'What is your time worth?' is a very personal question. This is also about who should get to answer that question – is it the person living with the consequences or those who believe they know what's best for other people? It's hitting a nerve." Until recently, productivity used to be the key factor for advocating a return to the office. The received wisdom is that high performance is easier to achieve when everyone is located in the same place, because this makes it easier for them to collaborate and innovate. But an emerging argument in favour of summoning everyone back to base centres on the cultural damage that remote working could have on an organisation. "Much of the drive by leaders to get employees back to the workplace is based on a fear of not being in control and of people taking the mickey," argues Mike Thackray,

principal consultant for organisational development consultancy OE Cam. The problem is that many people are reluctant to lose the enhanced work/life balance they gained when they were obliged to work remotely at the start of the pandemic. They also consider themselves more productive at home and resent the implied lack of trust, he says. Such factors could become corrosive in the longer term. As Dr Janet Ahn, chief behavioural science officer at MindGym, warns: "Distrust and resentment can quickly become toxic, creating an environment where employees don't want to be, productivity and performance sink, and morale and wellbeing hit rock bottom." Moreover, in sectors where skills shortages are widespread, the danger for employers is that workers, with the balance of power shifting in their favour, simply vote with their feet should the desired flexibility not be forthcoming. A research report published in March 2022 by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) called *Work After Lockdown: no going back* has indicated the most popular hybrid working models among employees in the UK. Unsurprisingly, absolute flexibility tops the list. In second place is attending the office only when specific tasks necessitate it, as opposed to going in for an arbitrary number of days each week. Claire Campbell, director of HR research and consulting at the IES, says of the findings: "Although some workers, especially younger people, have been desperate to

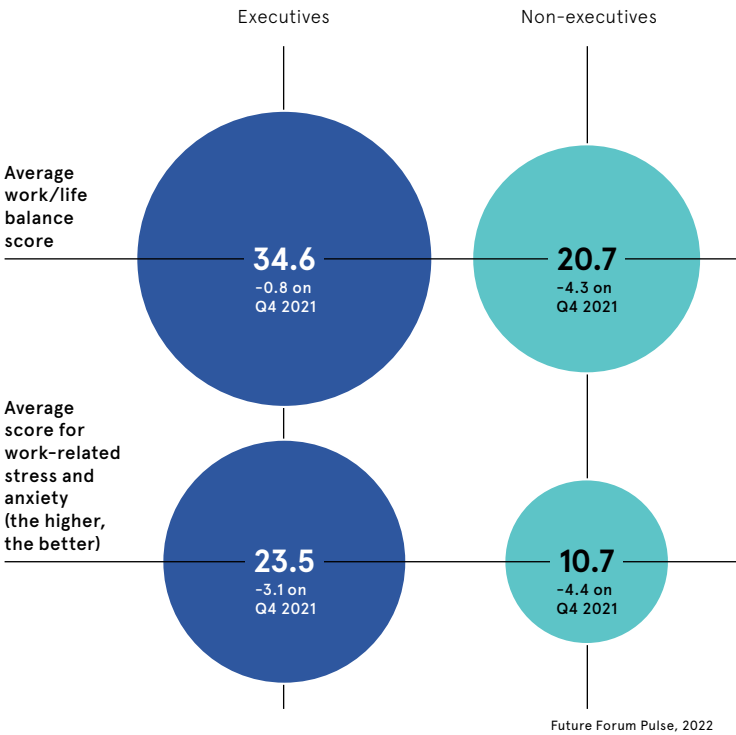
return to the office, many employers feel that they've had to push quite hard to get employees back there, even for part of the week." Given all these factors, how can HR chiefs ensure that both business leaders and employees are as happy as they can be if compromises are necessary? Cambon believes that it's important for all parties to end their "obsession" with location-based flexibility. Instead, she argues, the focus should be on deciding how, when and where people work based on the tasks at hand and the needs of teams and their members. Success has to be measured by outcomes rather than inputs. "The most important question we can ask ourselves here is how we can get the work done in the best way based on teams' and individuals' circumstances," Cambon stresses. "So you need to ask teams to look at the work they're doing and where they are in a project's lifecycle to see the days on which it makes sense for them to be together. Think of the office as just one possible tool in the toolbox." Campbell agrees that it's crucial to get employees involved in this decision-making process rather than subjecting them to rigid arbitrary policies. "HR has a role to play in developing some guiding principles and also in encouraging teams and their managers to discuss what's right for them. This will have a positive effect on their wellbeing and productivity," she says. "It might not look the same across the board, though, so people will have to learn to be comfortable with that." As part of this process, other key roles for HR will be to recruit more empathetic managers and help existing ones to develop better people skills. Such qualities are becoming increasingly important in a hybrid working environment to create the trust and psychological safety required to get the best

“Because employees can shape their own experience, they’ll be better adjusted in terms of health and wellbeing, which leads to higher performance

out of employees and ensure that teams work together effectively. On the one hand, this is "about ensuring that leaders develop a clear understanding of what outputs they're seeking and also the confidence to handle ambiguity", according to Thackray. On the other, Cambon says, this is about adopting a more tailored approach to people management. It may take more effort than handling traditional, homogeneous ways of working, but the potential benefits will make it worthwhile. "Because employees can shape their own experience, they'll be better adjusted in terms of health and wellbeing, which leads to higher performance," she says. There is a danger is that the complexities created by adopting this new model may fuel a further management backlash against hybrid working if they are deemed too hard to handle. But Cambon urges employers to hold their nerve. "We are still very much in the experimental stage and will be for some time," she says. "Things will need tweaking as the work continues, but the best starting point is to roll out an employee listening strategy, because companies will live or die based on their people. ●

THE EXECUTIVE-EMPLOYEE DISCONNECT

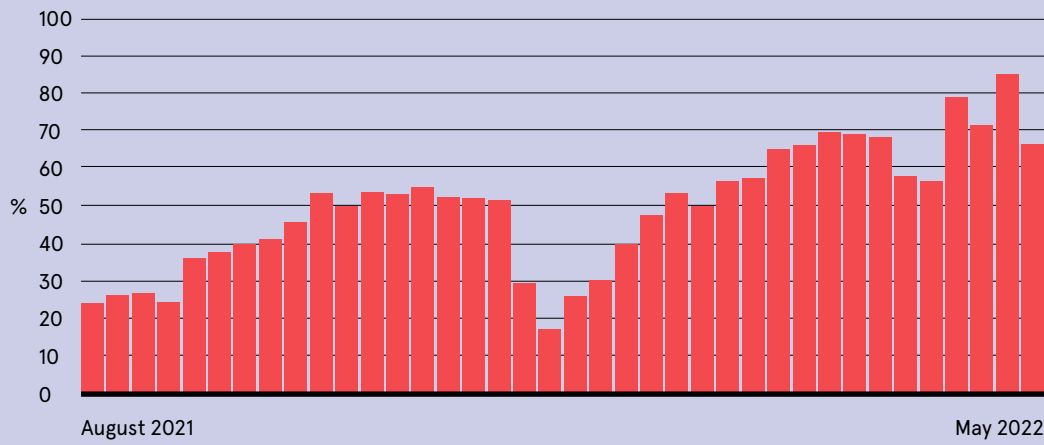
Executives' employee experience scores versus non-executives' scores in Q1 2022



Future Forum Pulse, 2022

OFFICE UTILISATION IN TODAY'S HYBRID WORKPLACE

Desk bookings show that the average hybrid worker is only coming into the office twice a week yet overall utilisation is increasing due to office downsizing



SMEs' hybrid work demands agile desk booking

Traditional tools and processes, used by smaller businesses for managing desk and meeting room spaces, are no longer fit for purpose. Post-Covid office management requires adaptable and smart booking systems

Since the relaxing of coronavirus rules, many businesses have settled with hybrid working, a move that has often increased productivity but greatly complicated office management. For SMEs, efficiently allocating workspaces and meeting rooms has become a major challenge. Typically, smaller businesses have needed to juggle ever-growing spreadsheets to allocate seats to each of their employees and to set meetings. Others rely on expensive enterprise systems that pre-date the pandemic; but those tools tend to incorporate a labyrinth of unnecessary functions and are priced beyond the budgets of most SMEs. "It's become incredibly complicated for anyone assigning desk space to keep track of who is in and when, and ensure they can work efficiently when they arrive," explains Tony Gibson, co-founder and managing director at the technology company Clearrooms. "The systems that have typically been available are just not fit for purpose when there are so many factors changing constantly."

In the wake of the pandemic, appetite for office space varies greatly by industry. For example, many legal firms typically expect staff to be present wherever possible, while digital startup teams are generally operating remotely. Most small businesses are somewhere in between, but hybrid working has become so widely established that employees now expect to make last-minute decisions on their attendance. "This can create big problems when someone turns up and they can't have the desk they want, or there isn't a space for them at all," Gibson explains. "It can also be near impossible to arrange meetings when it's unclear who will be in an office." Dedicated tech businesses are supporting smaller companies in dealing with the challenges of hybrid working. Among them is Clearrooms, a system created to enable SMEs to assign desk space more easily, to know who is in and when, and to set meetings when the right people will be present. The system allows managers to set simple automated rules on desk allocation, while employees can intuitively book spaces whenever needed. Businesses typically use Clearrooms first with a free trial, uploading their office plan and setting any rules they need. They can quickly integrate the platform with other management systems, such as calendars, single sign on and access control. Staff can then easily log on and see the available desks and who is in, in one step choosing their workspace or setting meetings. The system is priced per desk, not per user, so most companies will pay much less, especially when members of their staff only work in the office occasionally.

"Hybrid working has changed so much that businesses need software that reflects their current ways of working and that adapts to their varied, emerging requirements," explains Alex Wight, Clearrooms' other founder and its chief technology officer. "Smaller businesses can no longer manage space with old spreadsheets or expensive and complex enterprise management platforms." Looking ahead, there is huge potential for desk- and room-booking software to become smarter and more responsive, Wight notes, with functionality extended to update employees as available office space changes. "We are working on proactive assistance, so users receive notifications based on factors such as a desk becoming available, or 80% of a team due to be in the office so a meeting can be set," he says. "It's about making sure the technology is at the forefront of the hybrid, adaptable ways that SME teams operate." The scope and scale of change to ways of working, provoked by the pandemic, means SMEs are wise to avoid juggling workspace spreadsheets, or worse, costly enterprise systems that become unwieldy. In order to effectively assign desks and meeting spaces, many are turning to dedicated software that is agile, responsive and can be quickly implemented to support positive, effective workspaces.

To find out more about agile desk and room booking for SMEs, visit clearrooms.com



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The average number of emails an office worker receives every day
EarthWeb, 2022

office must keep pace with their changing preferences. Moreover, offices should be markedly different from remote workplaces. Although much time, money and effort can be required to make a success of hybrid working, culture should be the true key to progress.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the findings of a survey published by digital IT consultancy Ricoh Europe in March suggest that underinvestment and poor planning have reduced the effectiveness of firms' return-to-office policies. The signs are that employers throughout Europe have been struggling to adapt. Of 3,000 workers polled on Ricoh's behalf in France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK, 36% said they had felt pressured to return to the office, while 44% agreed that their firm's culture had suffered during the lockdowns. Pertinent to the debate on office-based work, 48% considered themselves "more productive when working remotely".

Molly Johnson-Jones, co-founder and CEO of Flexa Careers, says she has been heartened to see that some organisations have understood recent changes in how employees view working in the office. But she argues that most of them need to do much more in this respect to attract and retain talent.

"The fact that we need to indicate when we are 'in the office' signals how people have come expect to work remotely for some, if not most, of their time," she says. "For many companies we work with, office work is now reserved purely for the tasks and conversations that face-to-face meetings make easier. Having ITO days for this kind of work can help to keep teams connected, maintain a sense of structure and boost staff wellbeing."

Johnson-Jones points to research published in April by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development indicating that remote work is more likely to boost an employee's productivity than reduce it.

Flexibility is crucial, which means that dictating when employees have ITO days is likely to prove detrimental, she stresses.

"On days when coming into the office isn't going to give workers any of the benefits mentioned – perhaps when they want to focus on deep work – they must not feel bound to do so. This is when companies risk tipping into creating a culture of presenteeism," Johnson-Jones says. "ITO days are helpful only if they are kept flexible. Employers must recognise that remote and office-based work are complementary

MANAGEMENT

How to avoid 'the worst of both worlds'

The bestselling author and former Twitter VP, Bruce Daisley, feels that many firms may be allowing hybrid workers to waste their precious time at HQ. He's not alone

Oliver Pickup

On 1 April, Bruce Daisley, author of *The Joy of Work*, posted a whimsical observation on LinkedIn that would ignite a serious debate about the modern workplace. He questioned whether an 'in the office' (ITO) message should supersede the traditional 'out of office' auto-reply (OOO). Given the timing of his post, the biggest fools are employers that fail to adapt, because the old normal is no longer fit for purpose.

"Heard a brilliant thing today," he wrote. "One firm says they don't want workers in the office spending all day on email. The suggestion is that everyone should put their 'in the office' message on and deal with email from home."

Daisley, who served as Twitter's vice-president in EMEA from 2015 to 2020, explains that he made the comment after he'd got wind of complaints from several employers that their hybrid workers were spending too much of their time in the office catching up on their emails, participating in video calls and completing other tasks that they could perform just as well while working remotely.

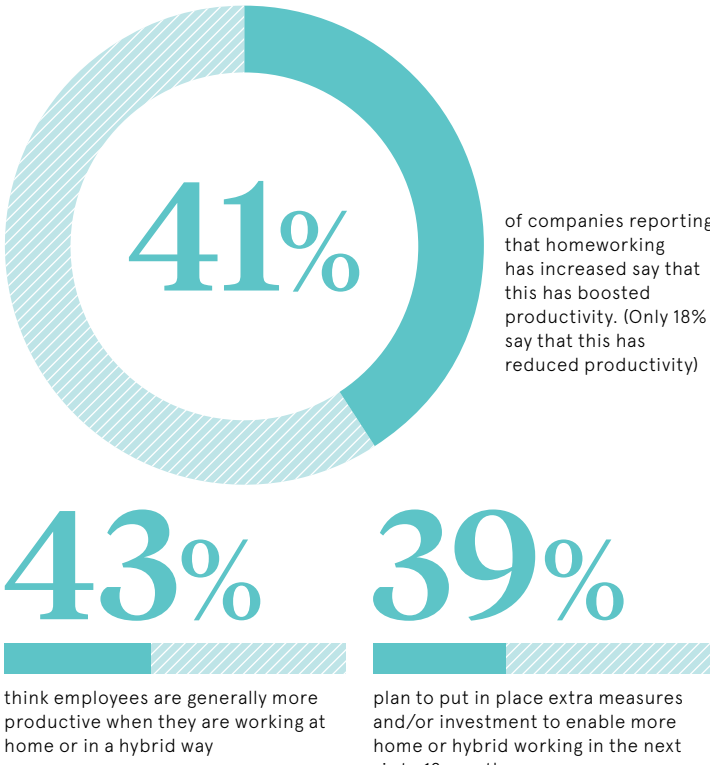
"We've spent two years reflecting on the best way to do our work and then we've sleepwalked into a horrible solution," says Daisley, who argues that the onus is on employers to decide which activities are most suitable in each setting. Observing that people often confuse being busy with being productive, he adds: "Hybrid working isn't the best of both worlds; it's the worst. We need to redefine our cultures. The more intentional we become about what we are using the office for, the better. The office is a brilliant resource, but we don't need to use it for everything."

The argument is that the Covid crisis has generally tilted the balance of power at work towards employees, so the evolution of the

Hybrid working isn't the best of both worlds; it's the worst. We need to redefine our cultures

DOES HYBRID WORKING BOOST PRODUCTIVITY?

Percentage of organisations that say the following



“Employers must recognise that remote and office-based work are complementary and also that it’s no bad thing if one occurs more often than the other

and also that it's no bad thing if one occurs more often than the other."

Just over three-quarters (77%) of employers are planning to redesign their offices to increase the number of open-plan areas and collaboration spaces, according to new research from Poly, a US provider of telecoms tech. This finding tallies with Tim Oldman's belief that the 'hotelification' of the workplace is a growing trend. He is the founder and CEO of Leesman, a company that helps enterprises to assess the employee experience provided by their workplaces.

"Employees will treat offices differently because they are using them nomadically, booking in for a conscious stay," Oldman notes. "Offices therefore need to be beacons of warmth and hospitality to motivate people to visit them."

He makes an important point about the feeling of sanctuary that returning to the office can offer to people whose remote workplaces are far from ideal.

"In a typical knowledge business, up to a third of employees do not have a separate space at home that they can designate for work," he explains. "These people risk being a forgotten minority, whose needs are overlooked by those further progressed in their careers who are privileged enough to have a private room to use at home."

Of the idea that ITO is becoming the new OOO, Oldman confirms that "it is already happening, but

on a small scale. We aren't yet at the point of this becoming a trend, but we are experimenting with post-pandemic practices."

Stuart Templeton, head of Slack Technologies in the UK, offers a different take. He believes that "all businesses should be introducing and prioritising a digital headquarters: a place that serves as the main hub for collaboration, communication and connection between teams, wherever they are. The digital HQ doesn't mean the office will disappear; it will be used for social, collaborative and dynamic activities."

A digital HQ might be too futuristic for some. But what's clear is that where and when work takes place should be hugely different from the norm before the pandemic struck. A recent survey of 10,000 knowledge workers by Future Forum, a research consortium supported by Slack, has found that schedule flexibility is more important to them than location flexibility.

"Whatever work is done in the physical office, employees need to have a say in when they're there," Templeton argues. "Employers that don't act accordingly will pay the price. Workers who are unsatisfied with their level of flexibility are three times likelier than those who are satisfied to say that they will 'definitely' be seeking a new employer in the coming year."

He adds that if you're "coming into an office daily just to stare at a screen, something's gone wrong".



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MANAGEMENT

Results game: why flexibility requires managers to modernise their methods

Empowering employees to ‘own’ their work and be judged on outcomes rather than inputs could be the key to improving productivity and increasing engagement in hybrid workforces

Jon Axworthy

Dan Price, the Seattle CEO known for cutting his own pay to fund increasing the minimum salary at his company, Gravity Payments, to \$70,000 (approximately £56,000), revealed on Twitter last October that he’d asked his employees where they wanted to work.

The poll he had asked them to complete offered three choices: HQ, hybrid or home. Only 7% indicated that they were keen to return to the office full time, while 31% preferred the hybrid option. The remaining 62% wanted to work remotely.

His response? “Sounds great. Do whatever you want... As a CEO, what do I care? If you get your work done, that’s all that matters.”

The results of Price’s survey seem to be roughly in line with the preferences of the global workforce. The latest research suggests that many employees, having had a taste of remote working, are not keen to return to HQ full time, even though this is what many employers would prefer.

“Our data shows that employees expect to be offered hybrid working. They will leave, or not join an



employer in the first place, if that’s not available,” says Nick Gallimore, director of innovation at business software provider Advanced. “This poses a major problem for organisations that want to retain key staff. They must think very carefully before, say, proposing pay cuts for remote employees. Such measures are likely to be deeply unpopular.”

The research suggests that employers could be setting themselves up for a fall if they cling on to the command-and-control approach of office-based work. It also indicates that firms urgently need to find effective new ways to measure the contributions of remote workers. A report published by EY after the UK’s first nationwide Covid lockdown was lifted in 2020, *Physical Return and Work Reimagined Study*, found that 49% of the 700-plus employers it had polled were already looking to do this.

“As businesses struggle with the great resignation and a battle for talent, shifting to focus on working force output and satisfaction is a

“**A more task-based approach empowers people to work flexibly and it shows that they’re trusted to get the job done**

It’s made them realise why there was so much dissatisfaction with the way we worked before Covid.

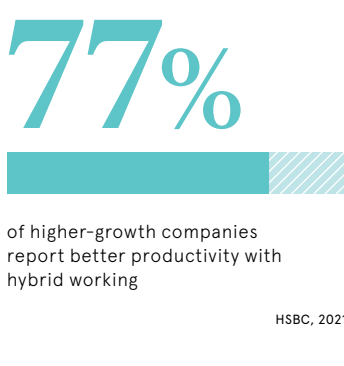
Engaging with hybrid working means that firms are becoming flatter and more dispersed, with a less visible workforce. Their focus when measuring performance therefore needs to shift to a task-based model of outcomes, such as customer satisfaction or time to market.

The best way for organisations to understand output is to apply high-quality performance management methods, according to Gallimore. He argues that one of the problems afflicting many firms in this respect is a lack of clarity on what outcomes are most important to them and then articulating how each person’s individual goals feed into achieving these.

“If each employee has clear goals that define expectations of their output and are linked to business objectives, this will free the organisation to empower people in terms of where and when they work,” he says. “This way, measuring output

must,” says Nicola Downing, CEO of IT consultancy Ricoh Europe. “A more task-based approach empowers people to work flexibly and it shows that they’re trusted to get the job done. Organisations could then look at introducing certain ‘mutual’ hours where colleagues work at the same time in the same place to promote collaboration.”

Price’s reaction to the findings of his poll also highlights the fact that many business leaders have come to accept that much of what a given employee is achieving isn’t apparent from looking at their time sheet.



it becomes even more problematic in situations where employees are more widely distributed.

This places even more responsibility on their managers to set clear objectives, according to Dr Adam Hickman, senior workplace strategist at Gallup.

“Good managers not only establish expectations and give employees a voice in the process; they also help people to understand how their role expectations align with team and organisational objectives,” he says. “When employees have this sense of purpose, their engagement soars, even when they’re working at a distance.”

Goals also need to be aligned with tangible outcomes to make it absolutely clear to everyone what progress looks like, Hickman adds.

“Everyone likes to have something to show for their hard work, but this can be especially helpful for hybrid workers when you can’t always see the tasks they complete each day in person,” he says.

Focusing on outcomes in this way should also help hybrid workers to organise their time better, as they’ll be able to quantify how much work a particular task is likely to require. This should then enable them to achieve a better work/life balance, which will again make for a happier workforce, according to Gallimore.

“What people want from their employer has changed significantly over the past few years. In particular, there’s been a rise in demand for better work/life balance,” he observes. “By helping employees to clearly understand the outputs that are important to the business, you can free up enough choice around those outputs – for instance, where, when and how people prefer to work – to enable them to find the balance they’re looking for.”

The chance to engage with hybrid working not only liberates employees; it frees organisations from the traditional office-hours metric of productivity, which was at best myopic and at worst a serious limiter to growth and success. ●

Targeted learning is essential in a hybrid working world

With demands for digital skills rapidly rising post-pandemic, not only do ways of work need to evolve, but also ways of training to deliver the skills required to thrive. Advanced hybrid learning will be essential to build the digital capabilities needed for the future

Large and mid-sized businesses may have been on five or 10 year digital trajectories prior to the Covid crisis, but those plans dramatically changed once the pandemic hit. Suddenly required to rapidly deploy digital strategies, organisations must now develop a greater range and depth of technology skills from nearly all employees, bringing hugely increased demand for training.

Core digital skills are in focus as companies seek to ensure all staff can excel in their day-to-day roles. Beyond these, more advanced topics such as agile development, cloud computing, data analytics and cyber security have risen up the corporate agenda, with executives expecting large numbers of staff to be able to apply these capabilities.

Given a doubling of tech-related job posts in 2021, and a lack of available talent, businesses across industries are struggling to recruit relevant personnel.

This means rapid improvement of technology and digital skills is paramount, but in many organisations learning methods have not kept pace with the changes to business models, leaving development departments with poor results. “People’s jobs are changing dramatically, and this often means they need to reskill or upskill. In the worst cases, the companies not already making swift digital transformation will need a huge leap in employee capabilities,” explains Ben Sweetman, director of learning design at the technology and digital skills provider QA.

He continues: “We’re all very aware of how much the world of work has changed. There is a place for in-person training and for digital learning, but the new normal means it often doesn’t work to have either of them alone.”

“**Given the skills demands and new ways of work, there is a need for staff to learn in the ways they choose**



Some businesses tackle this by splicing the two together, but they risk duplicating large amounts of information and overlooking important elements, such as the learner experience. The results are poor standards of learning among staff, leading to a failure to fill existing skills gaps and build the necessary digital capabilities for the business’ future.

While many companies have been quick to recognise the value of blended learning in solving some post-pandemic challenges, often it has not been deployed in a manner that delivers effective employee development or that meets long-term strategic needs. As a result, there has been a growing emphasis on having dedicated pre-prepared and live materials in one place, with flexible learning that reflects the hybrid work setup. A large number of employers are turning to QA’s Total Learning method, which is focused on ensuring effective, measurable reskilling and upskilling workplace outcomes.

“Given the enormous demands on organisations to create an employee base with a range of digital skills, and the changing ways of work in which people operate much more flexibly, there is a need for staff to learn in the ways they choose. Proper hybrid learning that delivers this is worth far more than the sum of its parts,” explains Sweetman. Total Learning works by offering users a short initial virtual session, followed by simple self-paced

digital content in a variety of formats, ahead of live virtual classroom events.

Crucially, Total Learning courses culminate in sessions where people can apply their new skills in practice, such as working through agile development, or bringing together different elements of cloud computing including storage and security. “Successful skills development isn’t simply about imbibing knowledge, but practically applying it to real world environments”, notes Sweetman. “Total Learning is giving employers greater ability to track skills development among their employees, while learners are achieving higher pass rates for the courses we offer.”

As businesses adapt to the uncertainty of the post-Covid working world, they are not only ensuring hybrid working is effective, but making sure hybrid learning is too. Such investments are providing the skills needed to operate effectively, while continually upskilling employees in ways that are enjoyable, beneficial and highly applicable to their roles.

To find out more about learning in the hybrid work world, visit qa.com/total-learning

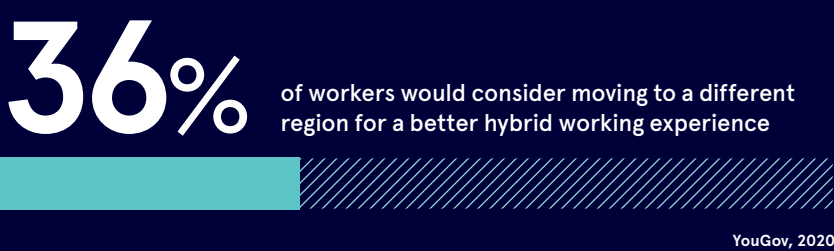
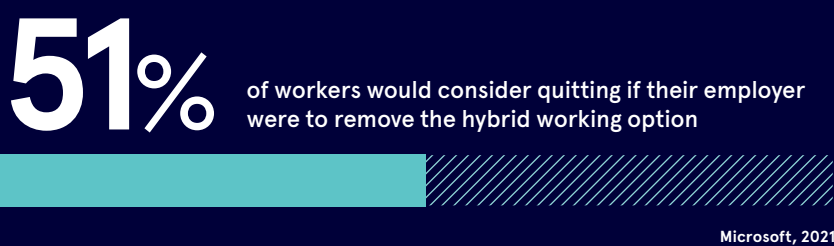


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HYBRID WORKING ACROSS THE UK

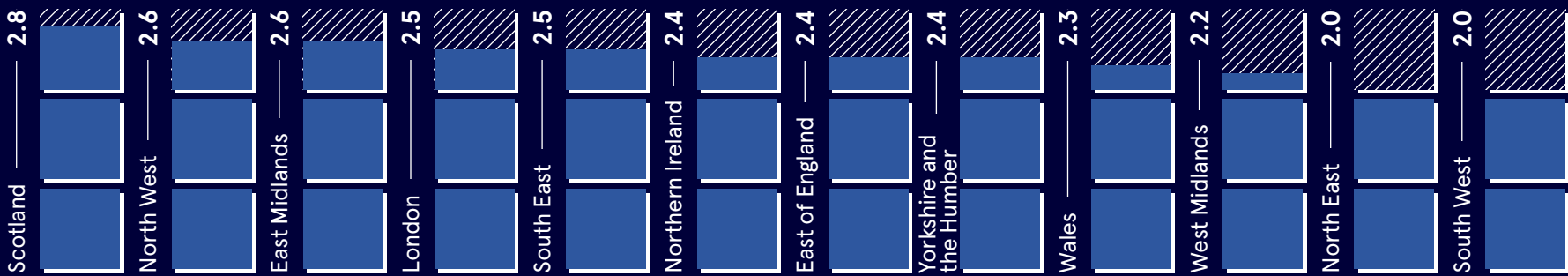
Most organisations in this country have accepted that allowing staff some flexibility in where they work is the new normal. As many employers strive to achieve the optimum combination of home and office working, regional variations are emerging. This is what hybrid looks like around the nation



AVERAGE REMOTE WORKING DAYS EACH WEEK BY REGION

Number of remote working days expected by employees in each region

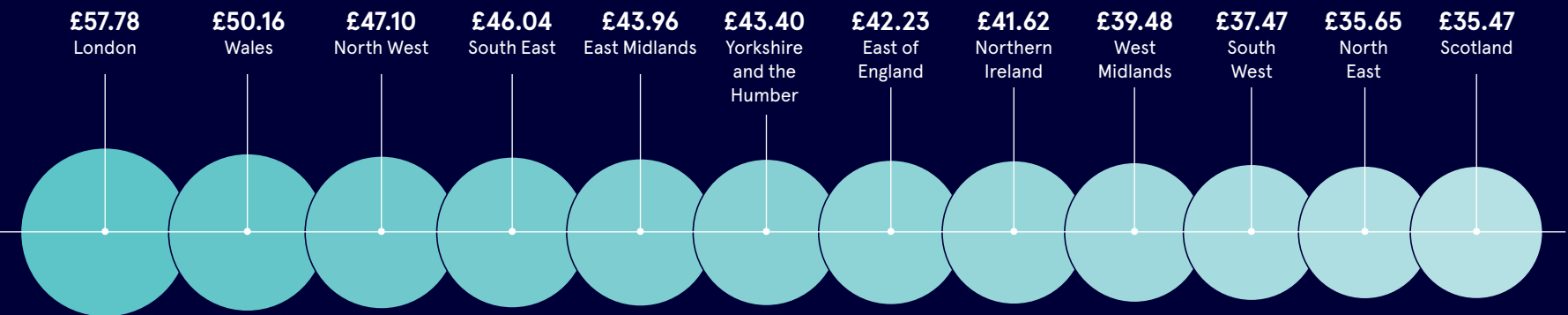
Virgin Media O2 Business, 2022



REMOTE WORKERS IN LONDON SAVE WELL OVER £200 A MONTH

Average amount of money an average worker in each region saves every week owing to remote working

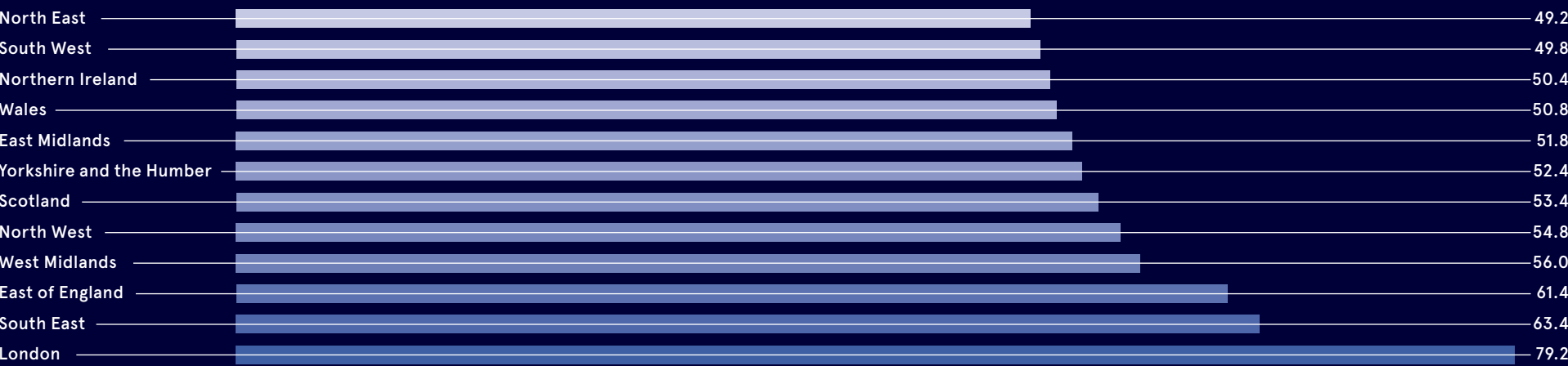
Virgin Media O2 Business, 2022



HOW LONG IS YOUR COMMUTE?

Average daily commute to work for employees in each region (minutes)

Finder UK, 2022



THE NATION'S BEST AND WORST CITIES FOR HYBRID WORKING

Total scores out of 100, based on ratings of the six factors below

Startups Magazine, 2021



Why employee recognition is so vital

Recognition at work isn’t just a ‘nice-to-have’, it’s a business imperative

It’s an employee’s market out there. In the midst of a big work/life shakeup, employees are starting to wonder if the grass is perhaps a little greener elsewhere. To beat the great resignation, organisations need to be making a big effort to keep their talent at the centre of everything that they do.

Perhaps one of the easiest and most impactful ways to show your employees you care and boost employee engagement is to give them some appreciation and recognition. It’s not rocket science, but many organisations struggle to get this right, especially in the new hybrid world where much of our interaction happens through a screen.

It’s not internet connection that helps people really show up for work, it’s human connection. We need that connection for businesses to run smoothly, and to ensure that everyone feels like they are valued for who they are and what they do versus just the output from their work. Recent research from Gallup and Workhuman shows exactly that. Bringing the human connection to work in the right way can mutually benefit everyone.

Bringing back meaningful connections

In hybrid and remote working environments, small, meaningful encounters are scarcer and, for many organisations, work has become more transactional. Dr Meisha-Ann Martin, senior director, people analytics and research at Workhuman, explains: “Things that we used to do, just as a matter of us interacting with each other, don’t happen as organically anymore. We need to be more thoughtful about how people experience work and to carefully curate some of these things that used to just happen naturally.”

One example is birthdays. When everyone was in the office each day, birthdays were naturally and casually celebrated, bringing a simple but important element of human connection to work. Now, they often go unnoticed if employees are largely working remotely or don’t all congregate in the office – and people miss it. Martin

explains: “Now, we need to use technology to curate those experiences because they’re not happening by chance.”

The same, she says, is true of appreciation. “There are less thank yous in our lives right now. As such, we need to carefully and thoughtfully infuse more appreciation into people’s lives. Our research keeps telling us over and over that it matters, particularly when times are tough, and times are still tough two years later.”

Getting employee recognition right Recognition not only makes people feel good, but it builds affinity and helps boost the employer brand. Martin says: “What we see over and over again is that people who are recognised are more engaged, and they’re more likely to stay within with an organisation.” In fact, new Gallup research shows that employees who strongly agree that their recognition needs are fulfilled are three times as loyal to their organisation.

However, it’s not enough to just throw out a few generic thank yous here and there. Getting employee recognition right matters. “Employees need to feel like the appreciation they’re receiving is authentic, that they’re getting the right amount of recognition for what they’re contributing, and that they’re not being overlooked,” explains Martin. “They need to feel that gratitude is embedded into their workplace culture – where they’re being recognised, where they’re seeing other people being recognised, and where they’re empowered to recognise other people as well. And lastly, that the recognition is personalised, so it’s about them and what they specifically bring to the table.” That last point is crucial, because if praise feels impersonal and insincere, you may actually be doing more harm than good.

Clear, specific praise also helps boost performance, Martin adds. “When you’re appreciating somebody, be very specific about what it is that you’re appreciating, as it can operate like positive reinforcement. When you do that, people know exactly the behaviour that you want repeated,

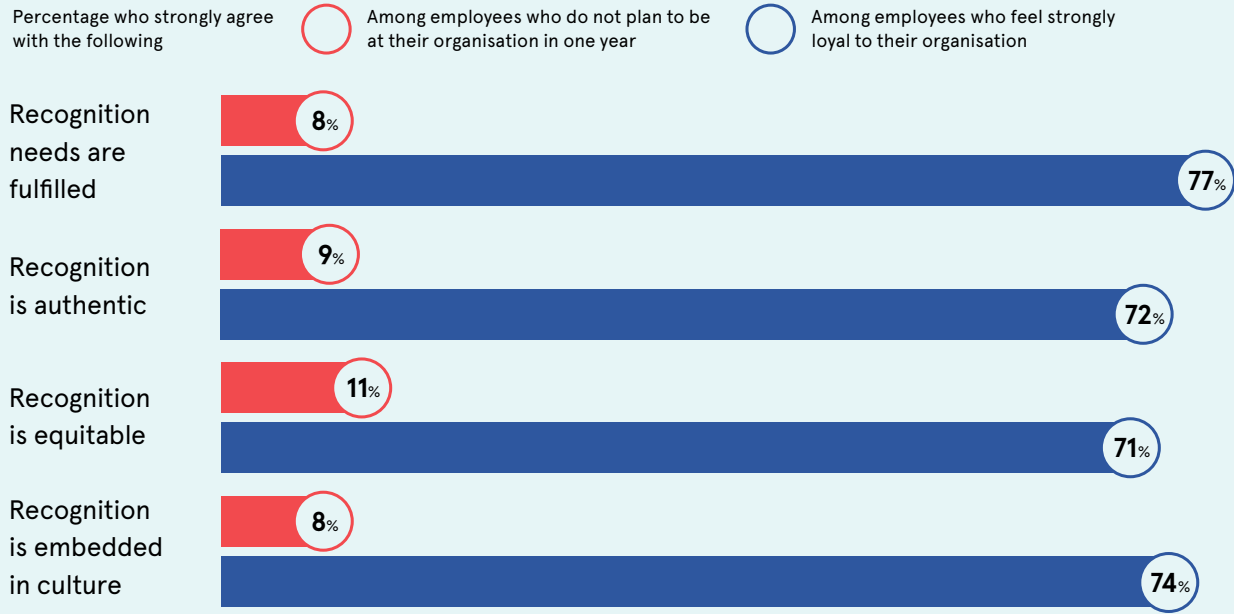
Are organisations appreciating their employees enough?

Many employers still have a long way to go when it comes to recognition

Organisations aren’t prioritising recognition



Appreciated employees are loyal employees



Recognition not only prevents future loss, but it actually pays for itself and then some

And so, in that way, it functions as a performance-enhancing tool.”

One thing to bear in mind is that not everyone will want to receive recognition in the same way. “Some people are more private and some people are okay with public [recognition]. It is interesting to consider what people want and need, but our data shows that people are not asked how they prefer to receive recognition nearly enough,” says Martin.

She adds that technology can help with this. “If you’re using technology to enable these experiences, people can

indicate their preferences there. And all of a sudden, you don’t have to remember, you don’t stumble, because you can’t remember who likes what.”

Martin also notes that social recognition, recognition in a social media-like feed, in particular, can be a great way to celebrate employees as people are used to them being tools for recognition and they don’t feel as public or intense as in-person praise.

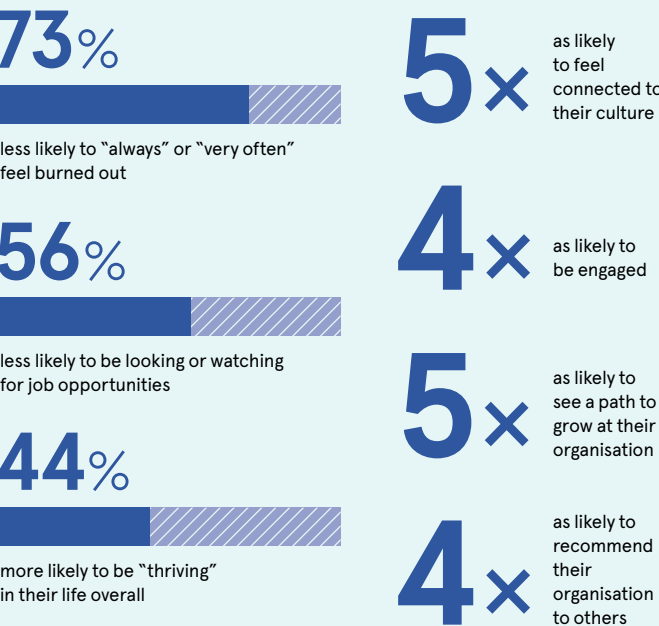
Embracing the ripple effect

Martin recalls how she took this positive technique and applied it to her own life. “What really surprised me is the impact it had on my personal life and my personal relationships because it becomes a habit. I started telling people, friends and loved ones exactly what I appreciated about them. This habit transforms your space and your relationships wherever they occur, at work or your personal life.”

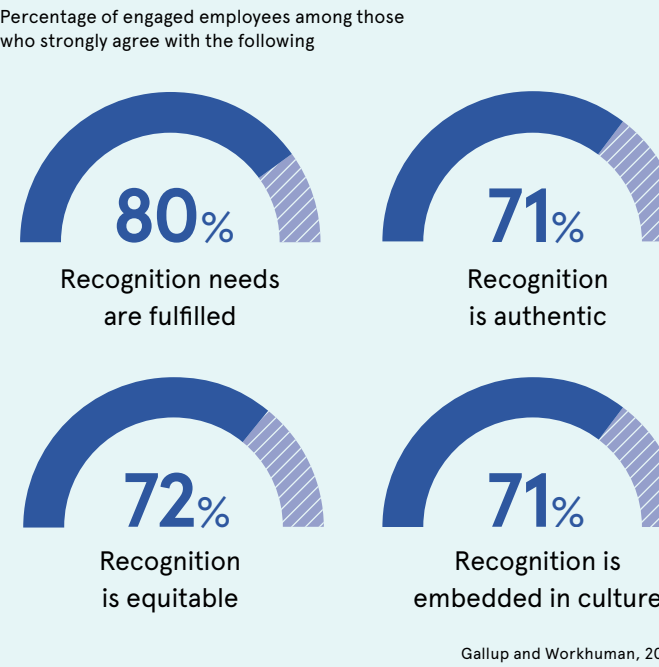
If we can’t escape the lines between our work and home lives becoming blurred, why not let some of the positive things bleed through? “We told ourselves this lie. We said ‘professional and personal,’” says Martin. “The pandemic taught us that those two distinctions don’t really exist. In fact, the more I can just be myself at work, the better I am at my job and the better I am in real life.” The Gallup research states that when recognition hits the mark, 44% of employees are more likely to be thriving in life.

Martin adds: “It also makes a difference particularly for Black and Hispanic people who may not necessarily feel like they belong. When those aspects are present in an organisation, they’re more likely to see a path to grow in that organisation, they’re more likely to feel like the organisation cares about their wellbeing, and they’re more likely to be thriving as well. So it’s a great way to make a

Recognition matters. When it hits the mark, employees are:



Appreciated employees are engaged employees



difference to work culture but also in the lives of people as well.”

Embedding a culture of recognition

It can be tough for organisations to rebuild and improve their cultures in a post-covid world and prioritise employee experience and wellbeing. “The reality is, managers are people and they’re going through a tough time just like the rest of us,” says Martin. “Nobody anticipated that all of this was going to happen, so we’re trying to react to this and make sure everybody else is okay while simultaneously making sure we’re okay. It’s hard.”

So how can organisations embed a culture of recognition? “The first and one of the most important things is signalling that it’s important, which means from a practical perspective, investing in it, having a set budget, and an official recognition program,” says Martin. “One of the biggest mistakes I see people make in this space is considering this

type of investment a sunk cost, when it is really an investment to prevent a future loss.” According to the research, creating a culture of recognition can save a 10,000–employee company up to \$16.1m in turnover costs annually.

Martin continues: “Recognition not only prevents future loss, but it actually pays for itself and then some – you can consider it a revenue-generating investment. Investing in recognition upfront, making the program known throughout the organisation, and then having senior leaders be power users, sharing gratitude and appreciation often, those are the signals to employees that appreciation and recognition belong here and that it is important to us.”

Find out more at spr.ly/6009z3yWx

workhuman*

Q&A Boosting employee experience at Version 1

Reka Fasi, HR consultant at IT services company Version 1, describes how a partnership with Workhuman helped them build a consistent and personalised approach to recognition



Q Why was it important to you to improve employee experience?
A Empowering our people and enhancing our employee experience has always been a top priority, especially for our senior leadership team, which is committed to continuously making the company a great place to work.

As an IT services company, it’s our people who set us apart from the competition. We’re constantly looking for ways to improve the employee experience so we can attract and retain the very best talent out there and ultimately deliver the best service possible to our customers.

Q What were some of the challenges you were having bringing the human element to work and prioritising employee recognition?

A Over the last four years, we’ve grown from 1,200 people to more than 2,000 and our teams are now more spread out across the world. We’ve also acquired 13 companies in this time. This expansion has been great for business, but it does present a challenge from a recognition standpoint. Different territories, business divisions and, of course, the pandemic – when the vast majority of us were working from home – created a whole new set of challenges.

We could see we needed a more consistent and personalised approach; one that aligned to – and helped promote and continue to bring to life our ‘Core Value’ behaviours, and one which was truly inclusive of all our people, wherever they were based.

Q What are some of the changes you’ve implemented?

A In 2020, with the help of Workhuman, we introduced a new global peer-to-peer recognition programme named CallOut. This is a digital and mobile platform which anyone in the company – whether in the office, at home or hybrid – can use to call out the excellent work of their colleagues.

CallOut plays a strategic role in Version 1’s business. The platform empowers our people to recognise their peers when they behave in a way that is aligned with our overall goals or for excelling in their role. Showcasing these contributions provides inspiration to others to behave in a similar way. This creates a cascade effect that is invaluable as we continuously look to enhance our already well-established positive culture.

Q How have employee experience and engagement improved? What results have you seen?

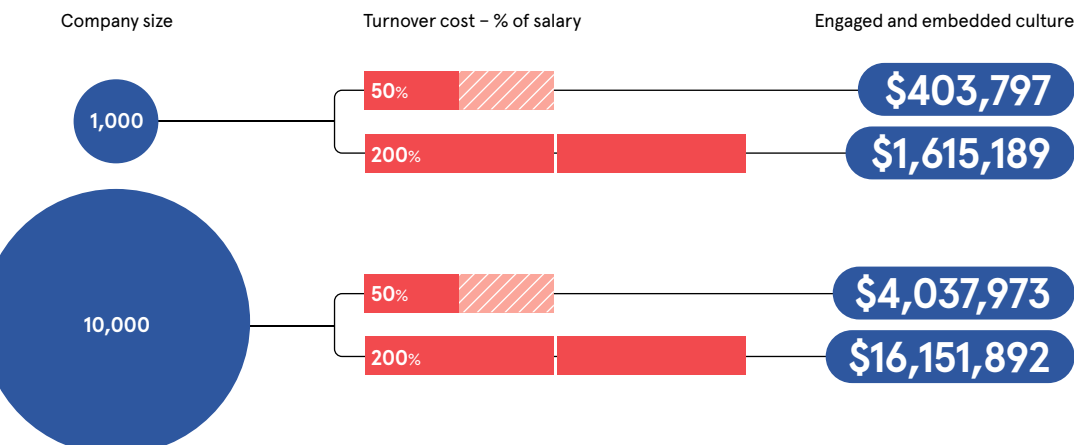
A In the first full year, we saw a huge amount of activity on the CallOut

“As an IT services company, it’s our people who set us apart from the competition

platform. Some 87% of people were recognised for their contribution, so we are already ahead of Workhuman’s best practice target of 80%.

What’s more, more than half of our employees have recognised their peers. When we benchmark this against other companies in the tech sector, we can see we are already outperforming the majority of businesses. Version 1 is a data-driven organisation. We’re constantly reviewing the rich data points that CallOut provides to identify exemplary teams and individuals, and allows us to tap into areas that need a little more support. This recognition data is pivotal to the continued success of Version 1 as it is helping us improve the employee experience right across the board.

COST BENEFITS OF A CULTURE OF RECOGNITION



INSIGHT

‘Remember that what the office means to each individual is extremely varied’

A Q&A with **Richard Kauntze**, chief executive of the British Council for Offices

Q How has the rise of hybrid working forced us to rethink the purpose of the office?

A We need to remember that alternative ways of working are nothing new. Long before the pandemic, average office occupancy rates were below 60% in the UK. This was already leading many employers to rethink their office spaces. It led to the creation of informal break-out hubs and hot-desking systems, for instance, which accommodate more free-flowing office occupation. We also saw this in the rise of serviced office spaces such as WeWork.

As people’s reasons for being in the office change, it will have to add clear value. Put simply, it must be better than home. The central workplace will need to become an inspiring destination – a ‘social condenser’ that aids cultural connection, knowledge exchange and collaboration.

The engaging essence of the office lies in its provision of space where all levels of an organisation can connect, share knowledge and build relationships. Impromptu interactions between colleagues across the office floor are more likely to occur. This can help junior staff to become more visible, gain confidence and learn valuable lessons. In return, senior staff are exposed to a broader range of ideas and interpretations from their junior colleagues. The physical proximity of functions pulls together a greater range of perspectives and creative thinking.

Q In what ways must the office environment change?

A Office spaces will need to be equipped and designed in a way that clearly shows their added value. We have to make way for more collaborative spaces that foster social inclusion and organic conversations, but it’s important not to lose the quieter, private areas necessary for concentration and high productivity. Being mindful of diversity and employee choice will be key to delivering spaces that give their occupiers what they need.

We’ve seen a mix of environments working well in the London office of Boston Consulting Group, which introduced a collegiate campus-style layout that aids socialising and group work, alongside quiet library areas and private working pods. We expect to see more offices investing

in outdoor spaces fit for work, meetings and relaxation. Some organisations may even look to occupy hubs outside busy city centres.

Office designs will also need to accommodate varying preferences when it comes to factors such as light, sound and temperature. A great example of this is Googleplex’s inflatable walls, which create sound-proof privacy barriers on demand throughout its open spaces. As flexibility becomes a must, the ability to adjust office spaces instantly, as opposed to annually, will place new demands on landlords.

Q What other factors should firms consider when drawing up hybrid working policies?

A Remember that what the office means to each individual is extremely varied. Our data shows that employee choice is key to higher workplace experience scores. But we should also recognise that there has been a range of remote-working experiences across the workforce.

For those fortunate enough to have well-equipped spaces at home, fully remote working may, initially at least, have been an attractive option. But, while a lucky minority have been able to sit in ergonomic chairs at large desks in home offices flooded with natural light, others have been trying to keep up in loud and busy shared environments with poor internet connectivity, hunched over small laptop screens on their kitchen tables. The modern central office, by contrast, should be a healthy and well-equipped environment that provides a vital level playing field in which all occupants can thrive. ●



Richard Kauntze
Chief executive,
British Council for Offices



RELATIONSHIPS

‘We’re going to see a wider variety in the deals that employers offer their employees’

Lynda Gratton, professor of management practice at London Business School, knows only too well that predicting the future of work is a tricky business. But, having tracked two years of Covid-driven upheaval, she thinks she may have a blueprint

Sam Forsdick

The unwelcome arrival of Covid-19 in the UK forced the hands of many businesses, for which the stark options were to go remote or go bust when the first lockdown was imposed. But, now that all restrictions have been lifted, companies have been left wondering what comes next.

For some, the answer has been to lapse into old habits. Several banks and insurers, including Goldman Sachs, Standard Chartered and HSBC, ordered staff to return to HQ soon after the government scrapped its work-at-home guidance.

But Lynda Gratton, professor of management practice at London Business School believes that reverting to our old ways would be to miss out on a unique opportunity

to redesign work. She points out that “ideas of how work should be done were formed during the industrial revolution and we haven’t really moved on since then. This is a fantastic chance to revise them.”

Gratton, whose book *Redesigning Work* (Penguin, 2022) offers a framework for organisations looking to adapt to the Covid revolution, claims that companies have become more experimental in response to the fundamental shifts they have experienced during the pandemic. Our assumptions about work have changed, as have our habits. For instance, many of us have ditched the daily commute and are spending more time with our families.

“Changes in people’s habits, aspirations, skills and networks will

combine to prevent us from returning to pre-pandemic ways of working,” she says. “We’re going to see a wider variety in the deals that employers offer their employees.”

The great resignation is one of the clearest manifestations of this, she adds. People are expecting more from their employers, so firms must improve their offerings to fill vacancies. These enhanced deals between employers and employees can be seen in the growing number of benefits offered to staff, the upsurge in flexible working and the adoption of the four-day week by some organisations.

It’s a situation that Gratton describes as “work’s Model-T Ford moment”. Where once only one model of the car was available to

buy, further models were developed when the market exploded, giving customers the choice of three variants. In the same way, the pandemic has spurred market forces into increasing the level of competition among businesses, giving employees a wider range of options as to where, when and how they’re expected to work.

So, while certain companies are asking staff to work back at the office full time, others are allowing people to work wherever they want for three months a year or even offering them sabbaticals.

“People now have a choice about where they work, which is absolutely brilliant,” Gratton says.

As businesses rewrite their deals with employees, she encourages employers to be as imaginative as possible about what they can offer. She cites the example of Unilever’s so-called U-work policy, which permits employees to adjust their working hours to fit around all their other activities.

Under the personalised work model, members of staff earn a monthly retainer and can improve their earnings by taking on assignments. Crucially, whether or not they are working on an assignment, they continue to have access to all their typical benefits, such as health insurance.

Such flexible working models are proving increasingly attractive for employees, reports Gratton, who adds: “An organisation offers flexibility and what the individual gets in return is autonomy. This gives them the capacity to make their own choices about how, when and where they work. This is a major driver of employee motivation and engagement.”

Traditionally, employers might have used pay to attract and retain talent, but Gratton thinks that they have relied too much on this tactic.

“It’s interesting that law firms and investment banks – many of

which have asked people to go back to the office full time – have had to increase their salaries as a result. Although money will always be important, if flexible deals are available, it won’t be the main point of differentiation.”

The demand for flexibility can also be seen in the push for a four-day week. Although Gratton thinks more businesses need to think more creatively about how they structure their working hours, the introduction of a three-day week-end may be too prescriptive.

“In a way, the most unimaginative way to introduce flexibility to your working hours is to bring in a four-day week,” she argues. “It can be a great starting point, because there’s a big advantage to having agreed days off. But there are other ways to provide more autonomy.”

For employees who have no option to work from home, offering flexibility in terms of time will be even more appealing. Gratton suggests that this could involve offering compressed hours or a shorter week. “We have to be more creative with time for people who have no autonomy as to their place of work,” she says.

There has been some cultural fall-out resulting from the changes to how we work. Many business leaders have lamented that the switch to working at home has limited interactions between colleagues and caused the loss of so-called watercooler moments.

Although Gratton understands why organisations are concerned about the cultural ramifications, she believes that, after two years of being away from the office, we have generally developed an unrealistic view of the work that’s performed there.

She points to a pre-pandemic study that tracked workers’ eye movements in open-plan offices.

“It found that people walked to their desk, switched on the computer, plugged in their headphones

“Our ideas of how work should be done were formed during the industrial revolution and we haven’t really moved on since then. This is a fantastic chance to revise them

and worked through their emails. The idea that people were having spontaneous discussions was not the reality,” Gratton says.

This means that the office is yet another aspect of our working lives that needs to be reimagined.

“If you do a lot of focused work, much of it can be done from home,” she adds. “The office should therefore become a place for collaboration and important discussion. Companies need to think carefully about what they want people to do in the office, then intentionally design for those experiences.”

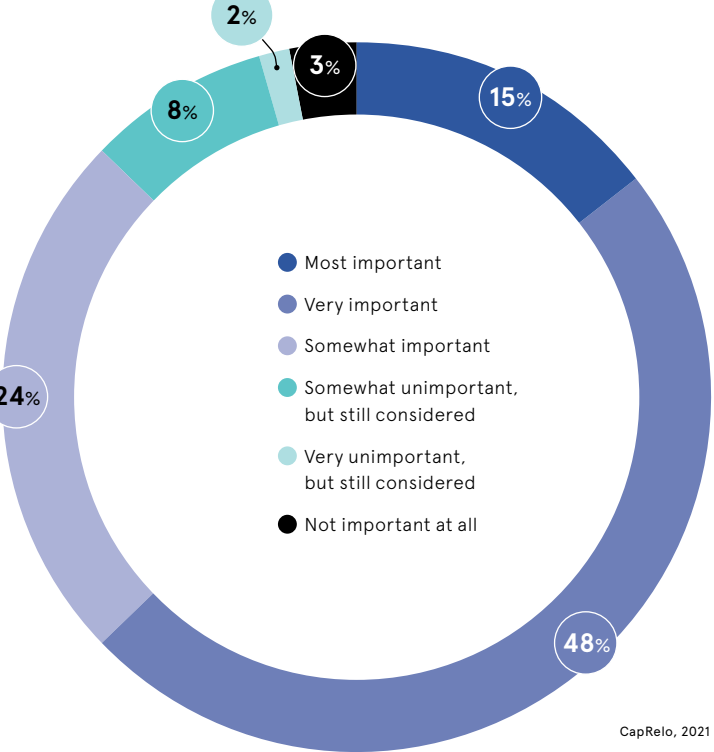
She also predicts that a new set of time management tools will be created to aid better coordination between many people with conflicting schedules.

“New apps will allow you to say who’s going to be in the office and when,” Gratton says. “Just as we had to learn how to work from home, now we need to relearn how to work in the office. That will require new skills, new habits and new technologies.”

Above all, she hopes that organisations will embrace such changes and capitalise on the unique opportunity these have created to reimagine how work is done. ●

HYBRID WORKING IS A PRIORITY FOR MOST PEOPLE

Share of employees ranking the ability to work remotely as a factor in their future choice of employer



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Could flexibility be a casualty of the cost-of-living crisis?

People want to split their working lives between home and headquarters – and most employers seem prepared to accommodate their wishes. But there’s a chance that spiralling fuel and energy bills could jeopardise such arrangements

Tom Ritchie

The hybrid model has emerged as the number-one choice for workers in the knowledge economy. Research published by McKinsey in April found that 85% of people who were dividing their working hours between home and the office wanted to continue doing so.

Part of its popularity can be attributed to the cost reductions that people can achieve, particularly on transport. MoneySuperMarket has estimated that the average UK office worker would be £576 better off each year by commuting three days a week rather than five.

But the financial picture is rarely as clear as it might seem, according to Peter Cooper, director of people partnering at HR software firm Personio.

“It’s difficult to generalise about the impact of hybrid working on

employees’ wallets, because their experiences can vary a lot,” he says. “While working from home might enable you to reduce your costs of commuting and having lunches out, say, the extent of those savings will depend on myriad other factors.”

For instance, further price increases in domestic energy will encourage more people to work at HQ rather than spend excessive amounts to heat their homes. On the other hand, spiralling petrol and diesel costs will have the opposite effect on employees who drive to work.

A survey of nearly 3,000 workers by recruiter Randstad UK in April found that 45% were thinking about asking their employers to let them work more time remotely in a bid to mitigate price inflation on the fore-

courts. Conversely, a poll of nearly 1,900 workers by Electric Radiators

UK in November 2021 found that 49% of remote workers were considering a return to full-time office work to reduce their domestic gas and electricity bills.

Such inflation affects employers too, of course. For instance, a poll of small and medium-sized companies published by smart meter provider Smart Energy GB in October 2021 found that 30% were thinking about closing their offices during the winter, as some were facing a 250% increase in their energy bills.

Businesses shouldn’t make hasty decisions in this respect, according to Cooper.

“If there’s one thing that we’ve learnt over the past couple of years, it’s that people policies shouldn’t be reactionary, created on a whim in response to sudden surges in employee demand,” he says. “So, while



colleenoworm via Getty Images

rising energy bills are a clear concern for many employers, it’s important for them to take time to understand the issues that really matter to their employees. This ensures that any policies are properly considered and sustainable.”

But that can be easier said than done for many employers, because of the uncertain ground that they have found themselves on. Companies that have adapted quickly to hybrid working often don’t have steady procedural or legal precedents to draw on.

“This is a typical conundrum concerning how culture and work

modelling have moved more quickly than people-related laws,” observes Charlene Brown, co-founder and managing director of employment law firm Howlett Brown. “On the face of it, it sounds quite simple: work from home partly or work from home fully. But it’s far more complex from an employer’s perspective – there are so many potential problems to take into account.”

For instance, businesses that adopt remote working may need to conduct health and safety assessments at employees’ homes, as well as contribute to any energy costs incurred on company time. For

those that have retained a central office and adopted policies such as hot-desking, health and safety checks on those premises become more difficult.

In Brown’s experience, firms eager to bring staff back to HQ have far outnumbered those that are happy to retain a high level of remote working. She believes that employers will continue with hybrid working for the foreseeable future.

“I think most companies are engaging in it purely to retain talent and ensure the right culture, as opposed to managing any kind of legal risk,” Brown says.

As living costs in the UK are expected to increase even further this year, what can businesses do to preserve hybrid working?

N-21, a group of media agencies based in Newcastle upon Tyne, recently announced a flat annual salary rise of £1,500 for all staff.

“We set it as a fixed amount, rather than a percentage of salary, because we all know that people on lower incomes tend to suffer more,” explains its CEO, Neil Robbins. “In the end, it came down to doing the right thing. We sat down with our finance team and worked out that we could help, so that’s what we did.”

With employees spread across north-east England, as well as in the US and Australia, N-21 saw an obvious business need to give them the flexibility to work wherever they wanted. As such, there’s no expectation for people to attend the office for a set number of days each week. Robbins believes that the universal pay rise underlines the business’s commitment to flexibility.

“We try to create an environment that simply enables people to choose what works best for them,” he says.

For companies that cannot afford to follow N-21’s example, a greater focus on supporting employees’ financial welfare is required. So says

“On the face of it, it sounds quite simple: work from home partly or work from home fully. But it’s far more complex from an employer’s perspective

Joanna Bean, people director at Cushon, a fintech firm that helps employers to do this with products such as a pension that invests only in net-zero environmental projects.

“This is about implementing the tools that employees can access from anywhere to support their financial wellbeing, as well as their physical and mental wellbeing,” Bean says.

While there is no legal imperative to provide such support, it could become a crucial part of talent retention alongside a commitment to flexible working. A survey of 2,000 workers published in September 2020 by financial wellbeing platform Nudge Global found that only 33% thought that their employers were doing enough to support their financial wellbeing.

Cushon helps its clients’ employees to manage their money more effectively with a suite of tools. For instance, it provides articles and webinars to guide people through their immediate budgeting concerns and build towards achieving longer-term financial security.

Unsurprisingly, Bean reports that the popularity of these services has increased in recent months. “I don’t think you can get too basic with your support,” she says. “If everyone understands how to budget better, you’re halfway there.”

While businesses may have to provide more immediate support and perks such as shopping vouchers and immediate advice about regular outgoings, she argues that a holistic approach to ensuring people’s financial wellbeing is needed.

“How do you save better? How do you budget better? What are the pensions available to you?” asks Bean, who believes that further increases in the cost of living might require businesses to be even more flexible. “If you look at the whole picture, people will notice a difference in their take-home pay.”

Like N-21, Cushon doesn’t mandate a set number of days for its employees to attend the office. This policy accommodates the varying routines of staff in its three locations, two in Greater London and one in Belfast. Even with different needs, and potentially different drains on resources based on location, the best approach remains the same, according to Bean.

“There’s no real group opinion anymore,” she says. “You can’t have a one-size-fits-all approach. It just won’t work.” ●



Taking a people-led approach to hybrid work

The pandemic has left many people considering their motivations for working. Ornella Chinotti, expert advisor EMEA, and Sarah McLellan, senior director, European professional services at SHL explain why companies should accommodate their employees’ shifting mindsets

Just as the pandemic changed our lives, it also reshaped our personalities and had a profound effect on what motivates us as human beings. It has left us with a need for meaningful and manageable employment, searching for people-led organisations where we feel valued and recognised for contributing, enabled by the newfound ability to work in a hybrid world.

SHL, a global provider of objective people insight, has used its vast quantities of people data to take the temperature of the global workforce over the past two years and establish how organisations are better equipped to take advantage of a hybrid work model. This model provides individuals with the sense of belonging, purpose, inclusion and recognition they now prioritise.

kitchen tables, some individuals experienced missed milestones, while others had to cope with health concerns or roles that required different rhythms of work. With data from its Occupational Personality Questionnaires (OPQ), an established and proven measure of personality, SHL found a 5% decrease in adaptability and an 8% decrease in resilience.

These factors are prompting individuals to recalibrate their expectation of work. Data from SHL has shown that over the past two years motivators are no longer linked primarily to salary and career advancement. Based on SHL’s data set of almost 200,000 people who completed its Motivational Questionnaire between 2020 and 2022, individuals are more likely to be de-motivated by demanding workloads, valuing balance and family time. High-stakes work with a risk of failure is replaced by a desire for more secure tasks that bring with them recognition. The SHL data has also shown that women are more likely to be de-motivated by both excessive hours and work with a higher risk of failure.

As hybrid working practices evolve, SHL’s data has revealed how vital it is that organisations understand what motivates the individual, not the workforce. Considering the seismic shifts in motivational drivers, organisations must seek to re-build workplaces, taking particular care to lay the core foundations of trust, safety, connection and inclusivity in work culture before looking to enable high performance, challenge and business-growth focused cultures.

SHL’s insight also suggests there should be a focus on any imbalances, in particular the ongoing goal to build truly

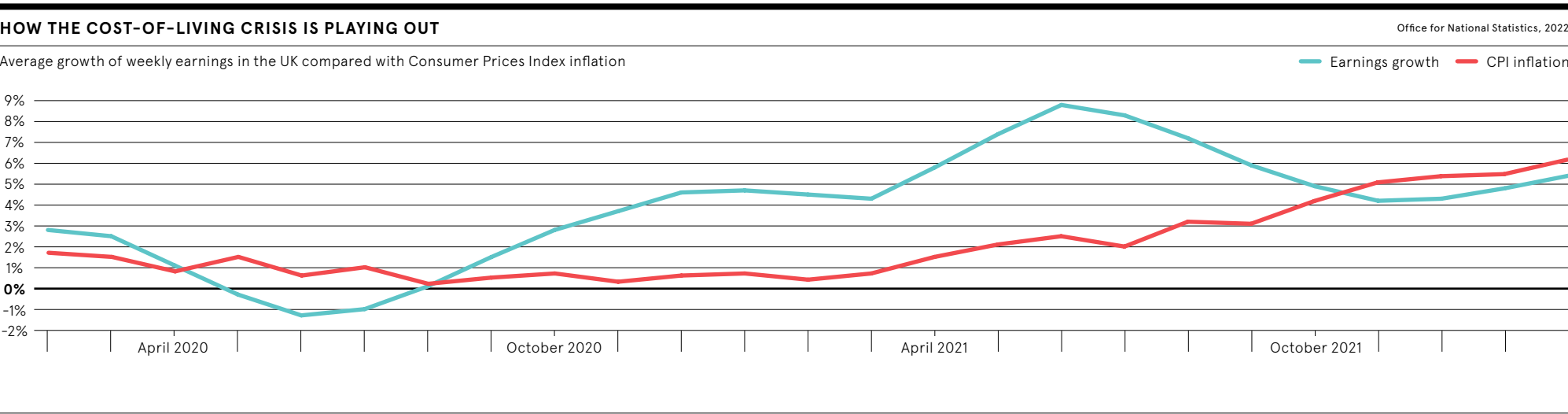
inclusive organisations. For example, the clear shift in motivators between women and men in their attitude to work immersion and tackling risky tasks is an issue organisations need to be mindful of and urgently act upon, putting in place clear steps to close any gaps in representation in the future.

Leaders and managers have an important role to play in establishing people-led organisations. There is a need for them to exhibit new skills and behaviours with greater emphasis on empathy and facilitation, and focusing on outcomes, not individual tasks. Understanding individuals, their capabilities, preferences and motivators is a key starting point for organisations building people-led cultures. Those who can put in steps now to capture objective insight in a scalable and dynamic way will find themselves leading and thriving, while others scramble to catch up.

SHL is uniquely placed to facilitate and drive the future of hybrid work, thanks to its ability to understand the individual objectively, scale this through technology and realise that as work has fundamentally changed, so have we, as human beings. Failing to acknowledge and understand this shift will result in a failure to evolve and a missed opportunity to use the power of people insight to re-frame not only how we work, but what we’re working for.

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SHL’s insight found that the pandemic has left individuals feeling depleted. As office doors shut and laptops opened at

LEGISLATION

Balancing act: the law moves in favour of hybrid work

Some companies are steadfastly resisting employees’ demands for greater flexibility. Proposed legislation may oblige them to reconsider, but market forces could compel them to do so even before that’s enacted

Alison Coleman

It appears that the work-from-anywhere workforce is here to stay in the UK for the foreseeable future, given the ongoing risks of further waves of Covid infection, coupled with skills shortages in many industries. That’s only because many employers have chosen to allow some form of remote working to continue after the full relaxation of lockdown restrictions. Not all organisations have done so – and employees have very few legal rights to demand such flexibility.

Although it was introduced in late 2019, the employment bill that’s currently before Parliament is unlikely to be enacted any time soon, as it wasn’t mentioned in the latest Queen’s Speech. But, once the changes proposed within it are finally in the statute book, could this give employees more of a say in where and when they work?

A significant change that has been under consideration during the bill’s consultation period is to allow new recruits to request flexible working from the start of their employment. At present, only those with at least 26 weeks’ continuous service have the right to ask their employer to provide it.

“One of the aims of the bill is to give employees more confidence and negotiating power to request agile working, enabling them to perform their role flexibly from the outset,” says Rhys Wyborn, a partner and employment law specialist at Shakespeare Martineau. “It won’t grant employees an automatic right to work flexibly, but they will be entitled to request to do so immediately upon starting their new role.”

Once it’s enacted, the bill could change the legitimate business reasons for refusing a flexible working request listed in the Employment Rights Act 1996. There are eight of these, including the extra cost

burden that allowing such a request would impose; an inability to reorganise work effectively among the applicant’s colleagues and/or recruit more people to do any extra work created; and a detrimental impact on performance and responsiveness to customer demand.

The legislation could also require employers to come up with alternative arrangements wherever it’s appropriate, notes Debbie Coyne, senior associate in the employment team at Aaron & Partners.

“This would encourage parties to cooperate to find a compromise, thereby promoting a stronger working relationship,” she says. “For example, an employer could look to make a change for eight months if it can’t support a permanent switch, or it could suggest an alternative flexible pattern to that proposed by the employee.”

What will these proposals mean for hybrid working? Coyne says: “While they are likely to encourage employers to think more openly about flexible working and encourage a two-way conversation, they don’t make flexibility the default position or create an entitlement to it.”

Ministers have said that the legislation in question will be introduced when parliamentary time allows, so next year is a possibility. But change could be achieved through smaller vehicles, such as government-backed private members’ bills.

Labour MP Tulip Siddiq has put forward such a bill, which has progressed to its second reading in the Commons. Her flexible working bill proposes to confer the right to flexible working from day one (except in exceptional circumstances) and require employers to offer flexible arrangements in employment contracts and mention in their job ads the types of flexibility that they could support. Few private members’



Vladislav Zolotov via iStock

“An employer that’s going to put its foot down about flexible working is more likely to shoot itself in that proverbial foot

bills become legislation, but they can indirectly affect what gets enacted by highlighting issues of concern.

“The specifics of what all this would look like in practice are not fleshed out,” stresses Christopher Hitchins, employment lawyer and managing partner at Katten Muchin Rosenman UK. “For example, will it be harder than it is under the current law for employers to refuse a flexibility request? Will they be subject to sanctions if they do? We don’t know yet. But it does seem clear that there is a movement to nudge the

existing law on flexible working, which was initially brought in to help workers with childcare responsibilities and later broadened to cover all employees. This would continue the trend of revising the legislation in line with developments in practice.”

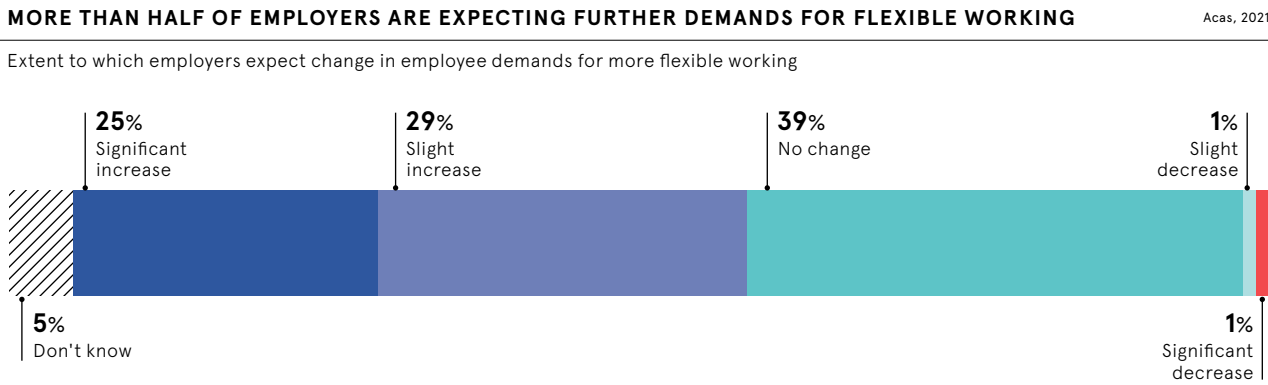
Once the employment bill does become law, it won’t technically transfer power from the employer to the employee. Requests will be subject to the needs of the business and, as such, the employer will retain the final say. But Pieter Manden, head of trust and employer compliance at HR tech provider WorkMotion, argues that the forthcoming act will affect the balance of power.

“There will be a limited number of justifiable reasons why an employer can deny a request,” he says. “Clearly, ‘wanting people to work in the office so that their managers can watch over their shoulders at any time’ is not among them. In my view, an employer that’s going to put its foot down about flexible working is more likely to shoot itself in that

proverbial foot. At some point, its employees will vote with their feet and join organisations that have adapted to the new reality.”

Given that hybrid working is becoming well established and the tight recruitment market is weighed in their favour, jobseekers should feel more confident about negotiating how and where they want to work before they join an employer. They would be better off doing this than accepting an arrangement that doesn’t suit them and then asking to change it on day one in the job.

According to a survey published last year by recruitment website Reed.co.uk, the ability to work flexible hours has become the second-biggest factor after a pay increase motivating people to stay with their employer. Regardless of any legislative reform, it’s clear that hybrid working is no longer considered a mere perk by jobseekers, so employers that fail to accommodate their preferences will struggle to recruit and retain the talent they need. ●



Will there ever be a one-size-fits-all approach to hybrid working?

Most employers are committed to some form of hybrid work model post-pandemic, but misaligned expectations with employees prompt a more considered approach

For years working from home carried a stigma in the UK, labelled by most organisations as unproductive, difficult and unrealistic. Though the rise of cloud-based technologies was slowly increasing its prevalence, a company was seen as flexible if it merely allowed employees to work from home once a week or leave the office early on a Friday.

The pandemic transformed perceptions. Forced to embrace home working to maintain operations through lockdowns, companies and employees began to see it in a new light. In a study last year by Prolific, 76% of working adults in the UK reported an improvement in their perceptions of working from home, suggesting the stigma had all but diminished.

Despite the steep learning curve, by and large the remote working experiment showed that employees were productive and felt empowered outside of a traditional office-based structure. Leaders subsequently opened dialogue with their employees on how the workplace should look post-pandemic, with many committing to embracing hybrid work.

The global war for talent has been an additional accelerant. In the first quarter of this year, there were more job vacancies than unemployed people in the UK for the first time since records began. Employees have a louder voice than ever and many are using it to demand a better work-life balance.

“The workplace is no longer static. Offering remote work when feasible

makes sense,” says Kate Garbett, vice-president UK and Ireland at staffing and talent solutions company Adecco. “It can be a powerful way to grab the attention of candidates who value this flexibility and it can also let employers tap into underemployed

demographic groups. These include people with caring responsibilities or priorities out of work, like parents or older workers.”

While flexible working describes a working arrangement that gives a degree of flexibility on how long, where, when and at what times you work, hybrid working simply refers to the split between working from an office and working remotely. It is important to understand this distinction because mislabelling one as the other can cause confusion.

Hybrid working is clearly outstripping other work models but employers are cautious about managing employee expectations. According to CIPD research, 63% of UK workers want to work from home more than half the time. While over half of companies recognise the importance of flexibility to attracting and retaining people, many also still see the value of office working for innovation, collaboration and nurturing young talent.

“Our working environments must continue evolving beyond the initial changes we saw when the workforce began to return to the office this year,” says Niki Turner-Harding, Adecco senior vice-president, UK and Ireland. “Business leaders have an opportunity to take stock of the strategies that worked well during the pandemic, embracing both the hybrid model and the renewed function of the office.”

In pockets, this re-evaluation is already underway. Some companies have dramatically reduced their desk space, committing to ‘digital HQs’. And countries such as Scotland, Belgium and Spain are launching pilot schemes to trial four-day working weeks. But there is no silver bullet to executing hybrid working successfully.

One person’s ideal proportion of office and remote working could be substantially different to someone else’s. Deciding on the right mix requires considerable thought, dialogue and flexibility across the business, understanding how different job families within the same organisation can co-exist.

One size will never fit all and striking the right balance will be key to navigating this transition. Deteriorating mental health, meanwhile, is a major issue running in parallel. This can be tied both to a leadership deficit and to young leaders experiencing burnout, as well as the blurring of home and work life.

In Adecco’s study, 51% of managers said they found it difficult to identify

when staff were struggling. Though 71% percent of workers said having the right support for mental wellbeing at work will be important to them, 67% of non-managers admitted leaders aren’t meeting their expectations for checks on their mental wellbeing.

Leadership development, coaching and resources for managers on how to deal with and respond to situations are crucial. Companies must also commit to providing better wellbeing resources to their employees within the new hybrid working mode. Building pro-wellbeing working environments, culture and skills will be particularly important.

Adecco is leading the way in enabling organisations to adapt to the changing world of work and ensure the future employability of people against this evolving backdrop. It has not only navigated clients through the pandemic with innovative ways to attract, onboard, retain or reskill talent, but is also now supporting them on their hybrid working journey.

“We work with our clients to ensure we are providing up-to-date market insight so they can understand the market and have effective talent strategies in place,” says Sandeep Bhandal, Adecco vice-president, UK and Ireland. “We also work with them on their employer brand, so they are effectively communicating why someone should join their organisation, and on creating a high-quality candidate onboarding experience so new hires are able to really embrace the culture from day one.”

“No one has perfected hybrid working yet. It will take time to understand and there is no blueprint. However, we know that people are the heart of businesses and therefore taking the time to understand how they want to work and what will keep them happy and effective in their roles is key when defining a plan for the future. Trust, adaptability and personalisation must remain as businesses seek to solidify their ways of working.”

Adecco offers new routes to sourcing talent and provides insight into trends at a regional level. To find out more, please visit adecco.co.uk/hybrid-working



THE NEED FOR A NEW EMPLOYER VALUE PROPOSITION



of home workers are classified as administrative or back-office jobs (as opposed to industrial or consumer-facing), meaning a one-size-fits-all approach won’t work



work from home an average of three days a week, meaning they expect flexibility from their employer

Adecco, 2022

WAYS COMPANIES CAN IMPROVE COMPANY CULTURE

Percentage of staff who say they want the following



regular team meetings



recognition with the wider team for good work



want an environment of inclusivity or a clear sense of belonging

Adecco, 2022

DEALING WITH MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SHOULD BE A TOP PRIORITY

Percentage of staff who say the following



of managers did not find it easy to identify when staff were struggling with overwork or burnout



feel their mental wellbeing has become worse



say having the right support for mental wellbeing at work will be important to them in the future



suffered from burnout in the past 12 months

Adecco, 2022

RESEARCH

A word from the wise

No one ever said that going hybrid would be easy. Those who’ve made a success of it so far have some hard-earned insights to offer firms still grappling with the transition

Katie Byrne

Although hybrid working is hardly a ground-breaking concept, it’s still a relatively new alternative to the office-based nine-to-five structure that millions of enterprises have relied on for many decades.

Of course, the pandemic-enforced lockdowns gave the corporate world a taste of how it could work. Now that the Covid crisis seems to be easing, many companies are converting to hybrid models. After all, in an era where workers have quit in their droves and companies are struggling to recruit and retain talent – finding ways to bolster staff satisfaction has become more important than ever to employers.

Unsurprisingly, such arrangements are proving popular with employees. Glassdoor.com named ‘hybrid’ as its word of the year for 2021. The recruitment website revealed that users writing reviews of their former employers mentioned the word 1,290% more times that year than they’d done in 2020.

Several prominent organisations have adopted hybrid working recently, including online writing assistant Grammarly, LinkedIn and the Bank of England, which is working towards a system whereby employees spend at least 40% of their time in the office from June.

Grammarly, a business founded in 2009 by three Ukrainians, was valued at \$13bn (£10.5bn) at the end of last year. The company announced its move to what it calls a “remote-first” model in September 2021. Working from home (WFH) is the focus, with its offices in Kyiv, New York, San Francisco and Vancouver rebranded as “hubs” for face-to-face collaboration.

Writing on the Grammarly blog, CEO Brad Hoover explained: “We believe this balanced approach gives our team members the best of both worlds: plenty of focus time as well as in-person collaboration that fosters trust, unlocks creativity and accelerates innovation.”

While some businesses sound as though they have hybrid working

nailed, more recent adopters may be concerned about how making the move could have an impact in important areas such as productivity and morale.

Jo Owen is the author of 2021’s *Smart Work: the ultimate handbook for remote and hybrid teams* (Bloomsbury Business). His first advice to them is: “Don’t panic – everyone is figuring out how to make hybrid working work and everyone has teething problems. It’s natural.”

The Covid lockdowns gave many businesses an unexpected opportunity to sample remote working, given that they had little option but to try it. Organisations that had previously operated exclusively in the bricks-and-mortar workplace were forced to head online, with many soon realising that elements of WFH were actually more effective than their traditional processes.

Software firm Salesforce found that the number of time-consuming emails sent by its staff each week fell by nearly half, for instance, as its newly formed remote teams started using collaboration tools such as Slack instead.

Early in the pandemic, the company introduced staff wellbeing surveys to help decision-makers “understand how our employees were feeling and address ‘pain points’ as we moved from our offices to our homes and then to reopening”, recalls Jenny Shiers, senior director of employee success at Salesforce UK. “We learnt that almost half of the workforce wanted to come to the office only a few times a month, but also that 80% of our employees wanted to maintain a connection to a physical space.”

Claire McCartney, senior policy adviser on resourcing and inclusion at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, concurs. She would advise any company that has recently adopted hybrid working to go further and consider routinely seeking the views of all parties that could be affected by the move.

“The key is to obtain regular feedback and then update your ap-



proach to hybrid working based on that information,” McCartney says. “Gather it from your customers and clients as well. Check that they are all happy with arrangements and make any adjustments required.”

Similarly, it’s crucial to keep an open mind, particularly during those important early few months, says Lizzy Firmin, HR director at Essex law firm Ellisons Solicitors, which has successfully adopted hybrid working.

“Don’t set anything in stone. See how things go and keep talking to people about it,” she stresses. “If you need to make minor adjustments and/or give more clarity as you go, then do that. People like to have some guidance, but the key is to provide them with a framework without being too prescriptive.”

Jen Scherler-Gormley, head of HR in the UK and Ireland for Cisco Systems, agrees that it’s important to be flexible and responsive when finding your feet. The technology conglomerate is a seasoned exponent of hybrid working, with half of its employees already operating remotely before the pandemic.

“It’s all about the learning process,” she says. “You can’t just create a one-off perfect hybrid model. Circumstances may change in a few weeks, months or years. Keep your approach flexible, not fixed.”

If you’ve found that cliques are starting to form in parts of the business because of its adoption of hybrid working, this may require some delicate management. Ill-

feeling can arise between people who can work from home and those who can’t – or between those who want to and those who don’t.

It can even be a point of generational conflict. A recent survey of 4,000 professionals published by recruiter Robert Walters has found that, while flexible working is important to people from gen Y, respondents from generations X and Z tend to be dismissive of millennials who are “playing the family or long-commute card too much”.

“One of the big risks of hybrid working is that it will create two tribes that will despise each other,” Owen warns.

But this risk can be managed. He recommends adopting a “middle-out approach. Let each team decide how they want to manage hybrid work. Trust your teams to make sensible decisions. Most will. This

ensures that everyone is committed to the solution and it creates a level playing field where it matters most.”

Understanding what qualifies someone’s role for more or less time in the office is also important, as is relaying this clearly to your team.

“Organisations need to create transparent policies and principles about eligibility for hybrid working,” McCartney says. “It won’t be possible to treat everyone the same way, but it is important to have some parity of opportunity when it comes to flexible working in general.”

She recommends that businesses consider hybrid working as “one of many” possible approaches. Time-flexibility options should be made available for employees who aren’t able to make the most of working from home.

Whether your team is still testing out hybrid working or has been doing it for a while, maintaining a sense of community is essential. As Scherler-Gormley notes, “you can’t just assume that connections are happening organically”.

The key challenge for sustainability consultancy Evora Global has been “getting the balance right”, says its co-founder and MD, Chris Bennett. The business, which began developing its hybrid model after the UK’s last lockdown restrictions were relaxed, has since entered the “extended roll-out” phase.

“People like working from home, but relationships grow in the office,” Bennett says. “It’s where those incidental conversations happen that

help teams to develop. I want my staff to feel that they’re in the best possible place to be productive. Everyone is allowed to work from home, but many choose to come to the office. We have more than doubled our headcount during the pandemic, so we were meeting a lot of people for the first time when the office reopened.”

Building a sense of camaraderie, especially between colleagues who haven’t met in the flesh, is likely to require more work than a management team might be used to in this respect. The opportunity to bump into someone in the kitchen or bicker about what station to listen to on the office radio is almost non-existent, meaning that engineering opportunities for team connections might be required.

“I think that people are happier with the hybrid approach when it comes to striking a good work/life balance,” Bennett says. “But, at a deeper and more subtle level, the forging of social bonds is slower.”

A global survey of professionals published in January by recruitment firm Robert Walters found that two-thirds of respondents were “highly likely” to leave their jobs in 2022 unless they received more face-to-face contact with their leaders. With this in mind, it’s vital that managers hold more meetings simply to check in with each of their team members and see how they’re getting on. Such straightforward measures can help to alleviate problems ranging from career frustrations to feelings of loneliness.

Scherler-Gormley believes the success of any hybrid organisation

will depend on flexible and empathetic leadership.

“The best leaders will get closer to their team members and connect with them regularly,” she says. “The weekly drumbeat of one-to-one check-ins is a key hybrid working ritual of ours. Employees share what they loved and loathed about the previous week, what their priorities are for the week and what support they need. Listening to your team members and understanding them as individuals should be a priority in every organisation.”

HR chiefs should keep an eye out for line managers who are weak in these areas and make appropriate interventions, Owen advises.

“Managing people remotely is far harder than it is in an office,” he says. “The office is very forgiving of mediocre management. When your team is remote, managers must be more purposeful and deliberate in what they do. The skills bar has been raised – and only the best managers will survive.”

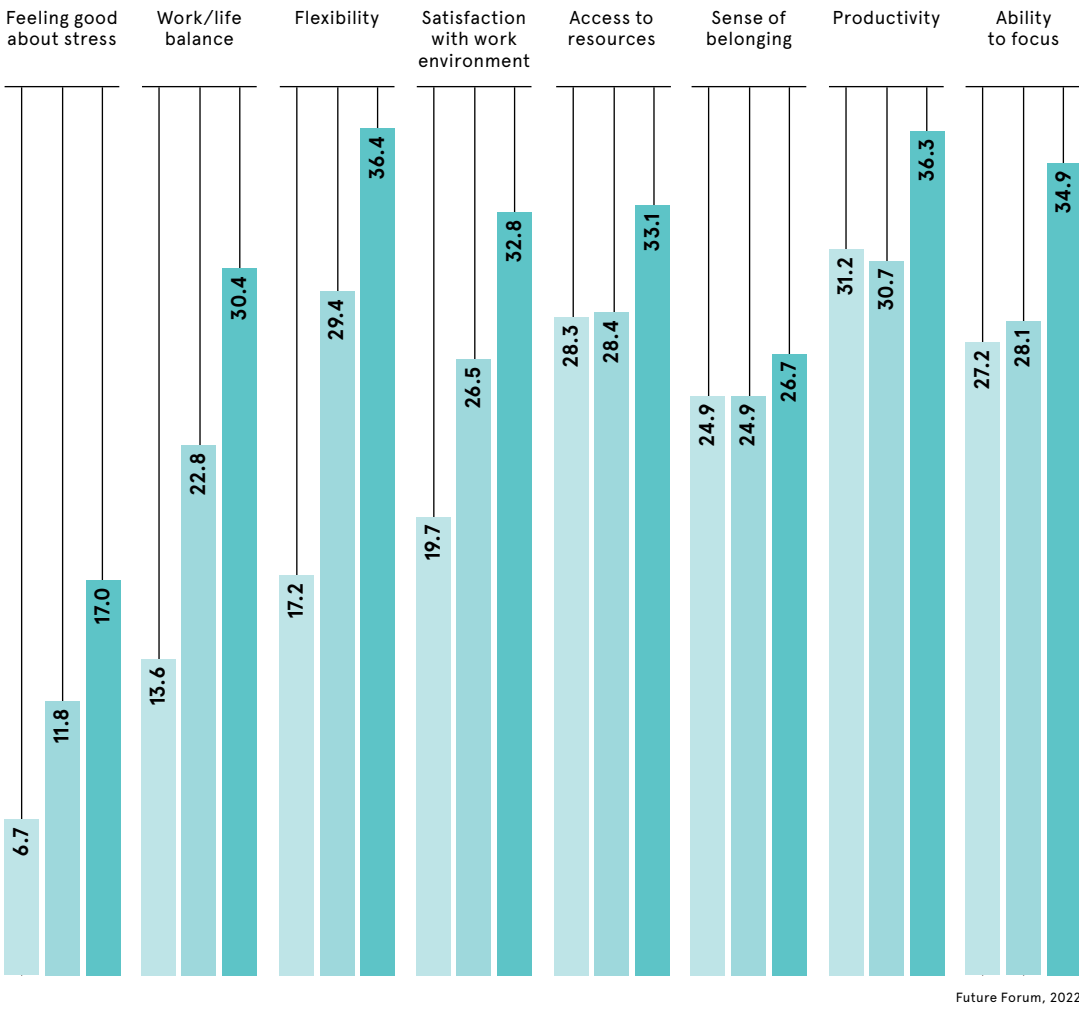
Shiers believes that adopting a hybrid model makes it more important for a company to treat each employee as an individual. Employers should demonstrate their understanding that people will always want and need different things at various stages of their careers, no matter how they prefer to work.

“We are listening constantly to develop a culture that prioritises wellness, flexibility and inclusivity,” she says. “We’re working to ensure that every employee can be the best version of themselves, wherever they’re working. Individualism needs to be celebrated.” ●

HOW HYBRID WORKING AFFECTS THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

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INTERVIEW

‘Workers will demand flexibility – and rightfully so’

Harvard professor **Prithwiraj Choudhury** has been studying hybrid models for several years. He explains what his latest research indicates about the ideal ratio of remote to office working

Mark Walsh

For many people, the past two-plus years have felt like some vast experiment in which they’ve tested new ways of working, socialising and obtaining a satisfactory work/life balance. As organisations adopt varying models while the Covid crisis abates, this experiment is ongoing.

Amid all the upheaval, Prithwiraj Choudhury, who studies the future of work as an associate professor of business administration at Harvard Business School, is certain of one thing: hybrid working is here to stay.

“I don’t think that any CEO should try to turn back time. Workers will demand flexibility – and rightfully so,” he says, warning that firms which have obliged staff to return to headquarters five days a week will find it especially difficult to recruit and retain talent.

Choudhury has been a strong advocate of remote working, particularly the work-from-anywhere (WFA) model, since before the pandemic. His studies have indicated that majority-remote hybrid working can result in greater productivity and offer improvements in work/life balance.

For instance, a 2019 research report he co-wrote about a WFA scheme that had started in 2012 at the US Patent and Trademark Office concluded that the arrangement had boosted productivity, as measured by the number of patent applications examined each month, by 4.4%. Participating employees also said that the flexibility this had granted them to live anywhere in the continental US had afforded them a better quality of life.

The widespread Covid-enforced shift to remote working has brought similar benefits to people around the world, according to Choudhury. He points to findings from a 2020 experiment that he and colleagues from Harvard and Stanford ran on hybrid working with 130 members of admin staff at the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, one of the world’s largest NGOs.

Over a nine-week period, they found that employees who were spending between 23% and 40% of their working time in the office had found the optimum combination. According to the working paper they published in March, this was the sweet spot where staff “enjoy flexibility and yet are not as isolated compared with peers who are predominantly working from home”.

Crucially, people in this “intermediate” group produced the most original work, as measured by the novelty of their email communications. They also received better performance ratings than peers who’d adopted different patterns, including fully office-based working.

“It’s the first real-world experiment I’m aware of that’s been trying to find out how different levels of hybrid work affect work outcomes,” Choudhury says.

Another recent study by academics from Stanford and Columbia has focused on the ability of remote meetings to replicate the type of creative collaboration associated with in-person confabs. Published in the journal *Nature* in April, it indicated that videoconferencing inhibits innovation because it forces the participants to concentrate on their computer monitors too



much. That study found that colleagues connecting virtually generated fewer ideas compared with participants interacting face to face, because their narrowed focus “constrains the associative process underlying idea generation”.

Anyone who’s weary of the sight of Zoom or Teams grids on their screen might well concur. The finding indicates that any brainstorming sessions are best reserved for those occasions when people are gathered in the same space.

But Choudhury believes that asynchronous communication may help to foster creativity when people are working remotely. Through tools such as Google Docs, a Slack channel or a corporate intranet, employees can share ideas and trust their colleagues, perhaps in different time zones, to read and digest these once they’re ready and respond with more considered contributions of their own.

“I wake up, read your ideas, take the dog for a walk, think about what you’ve written, come back and then add my thoughts,” he suggests. “The case for the asynchronous-first brainstorming model is that it leads to more deep work.”

Such factors are partly why Choudhury backs the WFA arrangements that have been gaining in popularity during the pandemic. Airbnb, for instance, joined businesses such as Facebook, Twitter, Deloitte and PwC in April in allowing employees to work permanently from any location of their choice.

This clearly offers employees great flexibility, so a worker with ageing parents, say, could choose to move nearer to them to provide better eldercare. It could also reduce the kind of conflict that can occur between couples when one partner lands a dream job that requires the other to make sacrifices in their own career.

“We have been constrained in our lives by geography for decades. WFA sets us free,” Choudhury says.

While a tech startup may be ideally suited to WFA, his research suggests that large organisations can adopt the approach successfully, too. For instance, Tata Consultancy Services, the Indian IT giant that employs more than 500,000 people, is shifting to a model where its employees will spend a quarter of their working hours at HQ. But schedules must be co-ordinated within its various groups to capitalise on the limited time they do spend in the office together.

“At the start of the financial year, each team has to put when those co-location days will be in everyone’s calendar,” Choudhury notes.

WFA isn’t necessarily limited to so-called knowledge work, either, he adds. A recent case study he has co-written examines a pilot project to digitise manufacturing operations at Unilever. That initiative, started in 2018 at a facility in Brazil, has enabled factory employees to work

“We have been constrained in our lives by geography for decades. The work-from-anywhere model sets us free

remotely, with no change to staffing levels. The company is looking into the feasibility of creating a global virtual control room to oversee operations at its 200 production sites worldwide.

“A control engineer could now live on a beach in Barbados,” he muses.

Some employers are serving notice that having the best of both worlds comes with a catch. London law firm Stephenson Harwood, for instance, recently said it would let staff work remotely, but at 20% less than their current salary. The pay cut reflects the reduced expense of not having to commute into the capital. It also makes the choice of whether to work from home a tougher one.

Such moves reflect how varying policies are likely to emerge around remote work beyond the simple matter of whether to allow it or not, says Choudhury, who notes that Airbnb, in letting staff work from anywhere in the US, will keep them at the same pay.

“Companies with more flexible policies – and pay-equitable policies – will continue to interact with their teams better,” he predicts.

Flexible working arrangements stemming from the pandemic have also prompted debates about their

impact on firms’ choices about whom to promote. Getting face time with the boss has long been seen as a key to moving up the career ladder. So a staffer who spends more time in the office around senior managers might have a better shot at advancement than a colleague who works mostly at home.

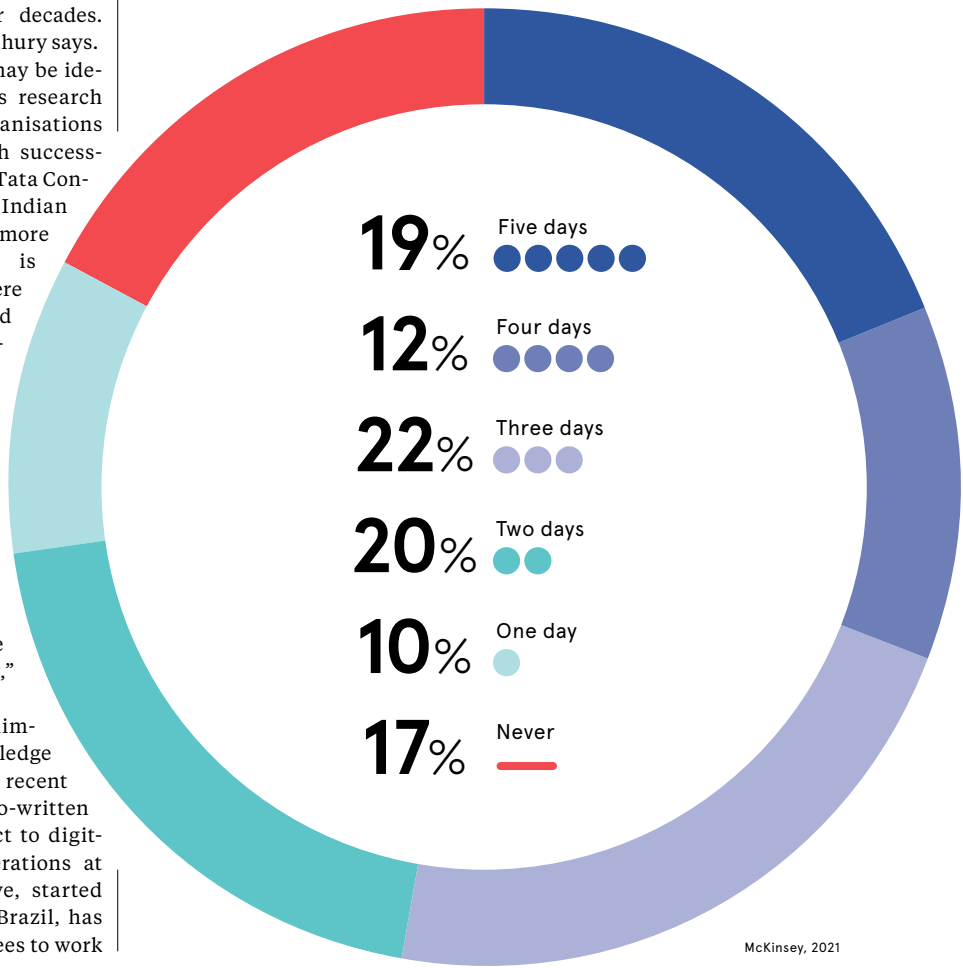
Choudhury accepts that this is “a real concern”. One way to address it is to revamp how performance is measured, so that evaluations are based only on the quality and quantity of output, not how many days someone visits the office, he says.

But that is simply part of the broader restructuring that business leaders must tackle to adapt their organisations to the new working paradigm. Key measures would include enabling asynchronous communication, creating “internal Wikipedias” of company knowledge and aligning people’s schedules to maximise in-person collaboration, mentorship and socialising.

“What you really need as a company to support hybrid working and WFA is to install a new set of management practices,” Choudhury stresses. “This work has to be led from the top – the CEO and the whole C suite must embrace it.” ●

HOW OFTEN DO YOU PREFER TO WORK AT HOME EACH WEEK?

Share of employees stating their preferred frequency



McKinsey, 2021



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