

5 ways in which 2020 changed the way corporates (and their employees) work

While any reference to the "new normal" should certainly be banned by now, before we move forward into just "normal" it's useful to reflect on some of the most significant ways in which Covid-19 has influenced how and where work happens.



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WFH is not the panacea, flexibility is

There was a time, not terribly long ago, that employees dreamt of being able to work from home, with all the imagined flexibility it provides appearing to offer the ultimate solution to all those workplace woes. Then Covid-19 forced thousands of people around the globe to not just work from home, but basically to do everything at home.

Soon memes joking that we're not so much 'working from home' as 'living at work' started appearing. For many, these were just too close to home, so to speak. The novelty of WFH started wearing thin when we realised just how exhausting video calls are, how much of our communication is non-verbal, and that it's actually rather nice to get away from partners, parenting and pets for a few hours each day.

"Simply going back to the office as we did pre-lockdown is definitely not the answer," says David Seinker, founder and CEO of The Business Exchange. He believes the solution lies in a flexible, hybrid model that allows staff to work from the office on certain days of the week and remotely on others – as is offered by a serviced office solution.

This model also offers significant benefits for companies concerned about being tied down by long, inflexible leases in the current fast-changing reality. If they choose the option of a fully-serviced professional office in which to pursue this hybrid approach, they can save on rental costs through more efficient utilisation of space and associated costs including large fit-outs, furniture and even IT infrastructure.

Productivity has finally been disengaged from desk time

For too long, the accepted way of judging productivity was based on desk time – paying little heed to actual performance. In fact, says Amanda Mitton, managing director at Talent Magnet, WFH has put performance management firmly in the

spotlight. “We may finally be disengaging productivity and performance from desk time, and that’s a wonderful thing. When teams are remote, the onus is on managers to be clear about expectations, and then to ensure they create an environment that allows their teams to work according to their time and energy, and not the clock. Performance should be the only measure of performance, not time online or behind a desk.”

Seinker adds that the flexibility of a serviced office also allows employees the option to work from a space without distractions or interruptions, while allowing for serendipitous encounters with colleagues that may enhance productivity, creativity and problem solving.

Cloud-based technology is everything

As more businesses recognise the value of a hybrid WFH/office model, they are also seeing the need for a set of business tools that make it as easy as possible to keep connecting and collaborating with clients and colleagues, wherever they are working from.

Andrew Bourne, Zoho’s country manager for the African region, points out that cloud-based software solutions enable you to work wherever you are, as long as you have an internet connection and computer. “The trick is in selecting the one that will allow you to continue working for as long as you need to, and not only to fulfil your immediate requirements,” he says. Zoho, for example, offers 45+ apps in nearly every major business category, including sales, marketing, customer support, accounting and back office operations, along with an array of productivity and collaboration tools – making it an ideal all-in-one solution for everyone from SMEs to large-scale enterprises.

Company culture has nothing to do with Friday drinks

Too often when we talk about company culture, we talk about the state-of-the-art coffee machine, relaxation pods and other such gimmicks popularised by Silicon Valley heavyweights.

With the bells and whistles out the way, employers and their staff could well come to realise that culture is instead about the values, practices and beliefs to which employees, management and stakeholders collectively ascribe. Mitton says culture works to unite all parties in a common vision and goal; it’s about alignment, which has a negative impact on performance and productivity if it’s out of sync.

The rise of the WFH ensemble

In late June, *The New York Times* coined Covid season’s hottest new garment – the “Zoom shirt”. Since its launch earlier this year, it has taken video conferences around the world by storm with at home workers kissing their power suits goodbye.

“Work from home has certainly impacted our wardrobe choices and understandably so – very few people feel comfortable dressing to the corporate nines, only to spend the whole day sitting behind a desk at their homes,” says Rob Noble, COO of

RunwaySale.

He adds that they have seen significant growth in the activewear, underwear and sleepwear categories, which could most certainly be attributed to the rise of people working from home. A pair of yoga pants paired with a blouse has become a new staple for many women for example across the country – RunwaySale projects that sales in button down shirts will continually decline for as long as WFH remains the new normal.

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