

How hybrid working helps to build sustainable cities and communities

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Hybrid working has the potential to revitalise communities, as workers spend more time working at home or close to home. The 'hub-and-spoke' model and an increase in the number of flexible workspaces can also contribute to an increase in wellbeing and community spirit. Bringing local to life.



The 'hub-and-spoke' workspace model is already changing communities. "Big enterprises are moving away from relying on a single, central HQ and increasingly basing employees outside of the major metropolitan hubs in flex spaces in what we're calling 'outer city' locations: smaller cities, towns and suburban locations," says IWG's Mark Dixon. "In the near future, we believe that there will be a professional workspace available everywhere – from the largest city to the smallest village," he adds.

"This transformation will unlock unprecedented value for workers, businesses and local economies, while providing an important contribution to improving the environment. With people working locally, local amenities and retail outlets will receive a boost and new jobs will be created to service a national network of workspaces."

Joanne Bushell, MD IWG, South Africa points out that IWG's workspaces outside of our main Business Hubs have surged in popularity during the pandemic, with suburban towns emerging as working 'hot spots', while demand for space in the main cities has dropped. In the last two years, almost all new IWG centres have been opened in non- city environments and regions away from major urban areas.

Life during lockdown also seems to have given many people a greater appreciation of their local area and a desire to spend more time there. "People want to work close to where they live," says Bushell. "It's going to become the norm"

According to IWG's report on The Flex Economy, the economic and social benefits to local communities of new flexible workspaces are significant in terms of both job creation and value creation.

The makeshift home office setting has changed our working habits and given employees more autonomy over their working day. This has, however, in some cases led to overworking and made it harder for employees to 'switch off'. Now, we must take these learnings and apply them to the new working environment in a post-pandemic world.

The initial shift to working from home could be described as reactive but unsustainable. The early stages have sometimes included back-to-back meetings with a lack of agreed standards and the ever-present issue of the 'mute' button.

Since then, business leaders have developed a better understanding of staff needs, whilst adapting to more efficient ways of working. Employees now know that cramming calendars without space for breaks, lunch or to even have a glance outside is not desirable. Being on mute when not talking and having your video camera on (where appropriate) makes it much easier to engage with other participants. Using the 'hands up' function on calls stops one talking over another and the conversation can flow much better this way. These rules of engagement have brought order and improved interaction when communicating virtually.

Staff wellbeing

The way staff wellbeing is managed also had to be slightly changed and monitored whilst working from home. A survey conducted by the People Collective, targeted at 5,000 HR bosses, queried what employees' biggest reason was for wanting to return to the office. 70% of respondents cited social and mental health issues, including loneliness. While noting an increase in productivity, it also found that half of employees that were home based wanted to return the office, with the leading reason being loneliness.

Being mindful of the environment

With the shift to remote working, employers and employees need to consider the environmental impact of new working behaviours. A common discussion topic has been the reduction in commuting due to the increase in employees working from home. However, the impact goes beyond this and includes our changing use of technology. Adopting a set of engagement rules will not only optimise how employees engage with colleagues but will also lend itself to a responsible use of technology, and ultimately the carbon footprint that involves.

Retaining the benefits of working from home

As South Africa moves into a new hybrid environment, employers are preparing for a greater split between employees working from home and working in the office. This is coupled with an emphasis on creating a greener working environment and begs the question: how do employees set themselves up for a successful and sustainable hybrid environment? In the future, employees could all be using virtual reality headsets to create a "collaborative" feeling, but in the meantime, what practices can they adopt from the fully remote way of working to make hybrid working a success, whilst operating with environmental consciousness?

Key to creating a successful hybrid working model will be enabling co-workers to communicate and, vitally, collaborate and innovate across corporate and home offices simultaneously. The rules of engagement that staff have adopted to improve communication in the virtual environment can be easily transferred into the hybrid environment. This will not only lead to an increase in productivity but will also be a key factor for staff inclusion and wellbeing.

An increasing number of organisations are now asking if remote working should be the new normal and what added value this would bring. Hybrid working; a mixture between office working and being home based, appears to be popular with employers and employees alike going forward.

A recent Atkins survey asked employees what they envisaged the working week to look like in the future, and the results forecast spending 50% of the week in offices. Other high-profile organisations, such as Morgan Stanley and Apple, have explained how they envisage the future workplace, showing the variety of approaches companies are taking to a hybrid model. Apple is encouraging staff to return to the office three days a week, whereas Morgan Stanley has taken a firmer

approach, saying “employees must return to work full time by September”.

An additional consideration is how sustainability, and the UK 2050 Net Zero target will impact corporate plans. Studies have revealed that during lockdown the overall carbon emissions from commuting had fallen from pre-lockdown levels – a strong argument for increased or fully remote working. But has there been a digital carbon footprint cost? And if so, what is its impact?

Cultivate a sustainable working environment by [partnering with IWG](#), and find out more about how the hybrid approach can help your business achieve its environmental goals.

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