A REPORT BY

Cloudbooking

# THE HYBRID WORKPLACE

## A VISION OF THE IMMINENT FUTURE

# THE HYBRID WORKPLACE

## A VISION OF THE IMMINENT FUTURE

A REPORT BY

Cloudbooking


INTRODUCTION

WHY WE NEED TO REIMAGINE THE WORKPLACE

THE HYBRID WORKPLACE PROVIDES THE ANSWER

- What exactly is the hybrid workplace?
- How it can:
    - Meet different needs within a workforce
    - Promote wellbeing
    - Facilitate equality

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THE HYBRID WORKPLACE

- Using different spaces to serve different purposes for better results
- Addressing the blurred line between a digital workspace and physical workplace
- Implications for company culture

SUMMARY

# INTRODUCTION

This paper has not been written as a response to the global pandemic. COVID 19 might have led to the most extensive work from home experiment ever witnessed – forcing society to rethink its work habits, but it has simply accelerated an existing trend. The shifts towards a more fluid workplace were set in motion many years before.

Neither has this paper been written to persuade readers about the virtues of a different working model. The fact that working from home can go hand in hand with productivity is already well-documented.

Instead, this paper has been written to challenge our old notions of what the "workplace" is. It attempts to answer the one crucial question on the minds of businesses and workforces alike: *how might the new workplace function in practice?*

We feel that we are uniquely positioned to do this because, first and foremost, we have worked exclusively as a remote working business for around 20 years. So we understand and have given much thought to the challenges and the opportunities a different type of workplace brings.

## COVID-19 HAS LED TO THE LARGEST WORK FROM HOME EXPERIMENT EVER WITNESSED

# WHY WE NEED TO REIMAGINE THE WORKPLACE

## Old ideas of the workplace are no longer fit for purpose

We all have some sort of preconceived idea of what a workplace is, shaped by decades of working habits, which have remained largely unchanged. But it would be remiss to enter any discussion about what the future workplace might look like without defining what "workplace" actually means. After all, we are not returning to old working habits, so we cannot apply pre-pandemic thinking.

Before, most of us might have thought of the workplace as a physical space such as the office. In fact, the office has become etched in our minds as the prominent model – from the bull-pen offices of the fifties to the siloed cubicles of the nineties. The noughties shifted towards the Silicon Valley experience, meaning creative spaces with free coffee, evening pizza and table tennis to boot all designed to keep people at work for longer. Throughout the decades, these trends were all just subtle variations of the same theme: the physical office. Today though, this narrow description is no longer fit-for-purpose.

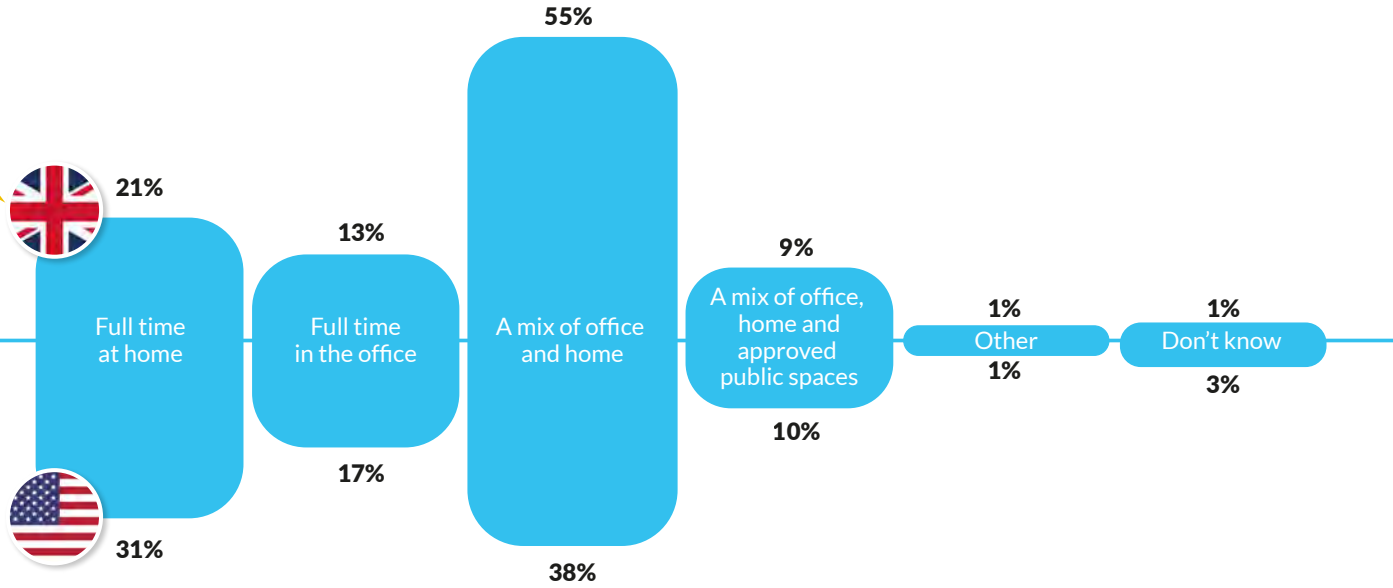
## Reimagining the workplace

The modern notion of the workplace has to go beyond the incremental shifts towards flexible or remote working that we saw pre-pandemic. It requires us to reimagine the workplace to fit the changing needs of modern society – of the employee as well as the employer.

A CEO, board member or shareholder might think of the workplace as a space in which maximum productivity is reached. Given the evidence, this is no longer going to be limited to an office environment seeing as productivity has risen with increased home

**EMPLOYEES DON'T ENVISAGE EITHER A FULL-TIME RETURN TO THE OFFICE OR FULL-TIME WORKING FROM HOME AS THE BEST MODEL**

# WHAT WORKING ENVIRONMENT DO OFFICE WORKERS WANT NOW?




working. A CBI survey suggested that twice as many companies thought working from home will increase productivity than detract from productivity over the two or three years beyond 2021[1].

An employee might have an entirely different vision of what the workplace will look like. Workplace might possess a less tangible meaning that could range from a social community through to a sense of identity or cultural belonging is likely to change for different age groups, roles and social structures.

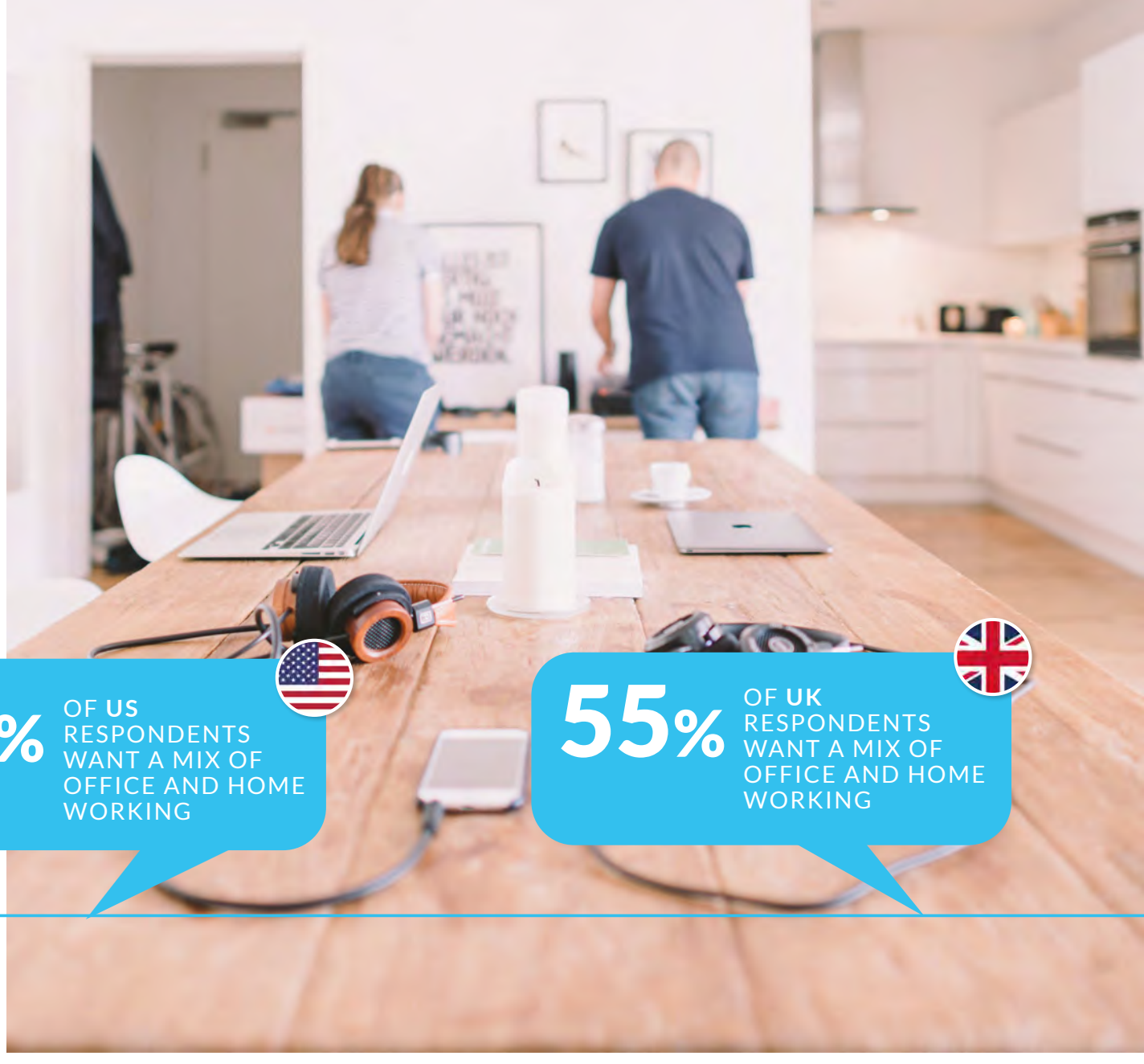
As we found in our own YouGov survey, employees certainly don't envisage either a full-time return to the office or full-time working from home as the best model. Thus, we can no longer view the workplace as a single, physical space. It is not a place run by facilities or IT teams and must be seen more as a collection of physical and digital facilities, which promotes maximum productivity and wellbeing, delivers opportunity, and is more aligned to today's values.

1 - https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2020-11/cbi-conference-survey-october-2020.pdf, p.5

The attraction of cost-reduction will undoubtedly drive companies in terms of the amount of physical space they need.

However, this could be a mistake. While cost savings are likely, starting here could damage other factors and actually result in a reduction in productivity. So adapting to this new vision of the workplace as something that has changed forever requires some thought in order to create competitive advantage.

The big question is: how do we redefine this new workspace?



# WHY THE HYBRID WORKPLACE IS THE ANSWER

## What exactly is the hybrid workplace?

The hybrid workplace is not about hot-desking or working from home on Fridays. It's more of an ethos, like a culture that recognises that people within a workforce are different, and have different needs and motivations, and thus will be productive and excel in different environments.

**THE HYBRID WORKPLACE IS THE PERFECT BLEND OF STRUCTURE, SOCIABILITY, INDEPENDENCE AND FLEXIBILITY**

The hybrid workspace is the perfect blend of structure, sociability, independence and flexibility. It empowers people to be productive anywhere, be it at home, in an office space, a co-working space or a public space such as a cafe.

A hybrid workplace depends on trust. It means allowing employees to decide where it is best for them to work at any given time – not just splitting the working week down the middle between office and home. And it means putting in place the right technology and tools to ensure that as well as being able to carry out their job effectively, colleagues always feel connected and part of company culture – and that they can move between different spaces seamlessly. Enabling sustainable productivity will require thinking about what spaces are best suited to which activities.

Of course, like its people, each company is nuanced. To understand what this hybrid workspace might look like we must start by considering, first and foremost, the needs of the workforce.

## THE HYBRID WORKPLACE IN A NUTSHELL

ACCESSIBLE YET FLUID SPACES, DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL GIVES WORKS THE ABILITY TO BE BOTH PRODUCTIVE AND HAPPY IN THEIR CHOSEN ENVIRONMENT

## Meets the different needs within a workforce

The pandemic shifted the question around home working from can it be done, to should it be done, but to simply ask what percentage of time should be split between office and remote working in the future is to neglect the fact that a workforce is a collection of individuals with disparate needs. Naturally, a workforce brings with it a range of nuanced personal circumstances, as well as needs and motivations.

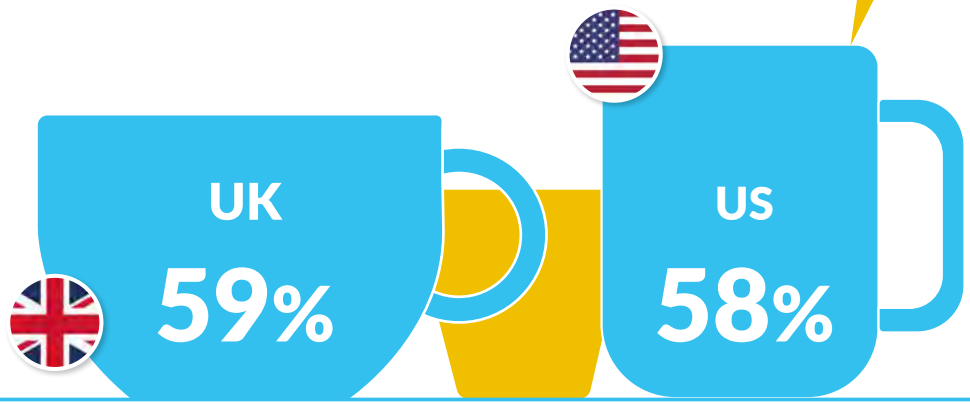
There are many competing interests in terms of age, personality, family status and past habits – as well as factors such as geographical location – that will impact what people want from tomorrow's workplace. In addition, different business functions will also have different needs. All of these factors must be an inherent part of thinking about how to facilitate a new hybrid workplace model.

And unlike the more rigid working model of the past, the hybrid workplace has the potential to satisfy a whole workforce and promote maximum contribution from a spectrum of different employees, so getting it right will reap rewards that stretch much further than simple costs savings on office space.

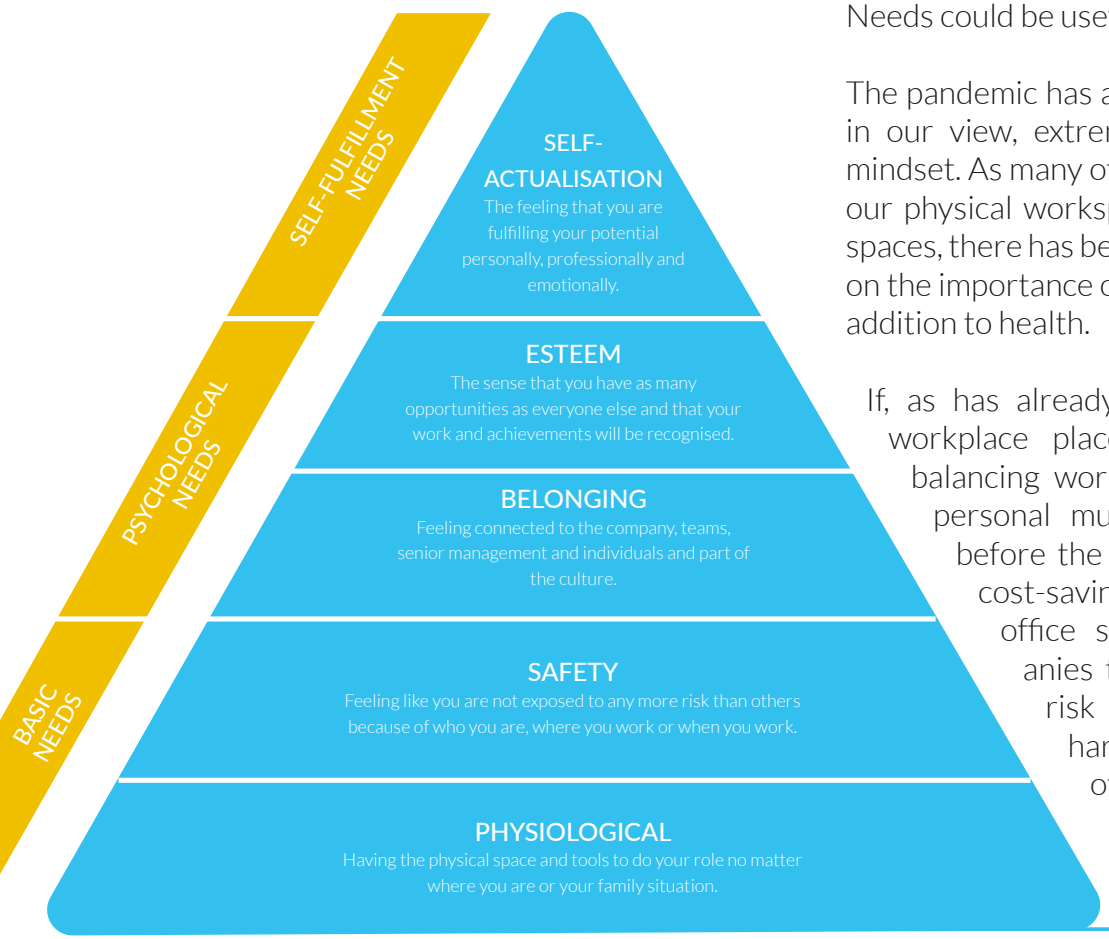
We must also recognise that home and office working are only part of the answer when delivering an effective hybrid workplace model. Many younger workers, for example, told us that using public workplaces, such as cafes would be a good option for them in the future.

So, applying a generalised hybrid workplace model in the hope that it will satisfy an entire workforce is unlikely to reap the true benefits of a hybrid workplace model. It's no longer enough to stop at the needs of a team.

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG PEOPLE (18-24) WOULD USE LOCAL PUBLIC SPACES SUCH AS CAFES?



# PROMOTES WELLBEING




We must be aware of the personal and emotional needs of individual employees, and an adapted Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs could be useful in understanding this.

The pandemic has accelerated a huge – and in our view, extremely positive – shift in mindset. As many of us have had to combine our physical workspaces with our personal spaces, there has been a necessary emphasis on the importance of family and social life, in addition to health.

If, as has already happened, the hybrid workplace places more emphasis on balancing work and personal life, the personal must now start to come before the work. While the lure of cost-savings from cutting back on office space is enticing, comp anies that focus on this alone risk getting it wrong by harming the sustainability of increased productivity and losing talent.

Is wellbeing a one-size-fits-all? In a sense, yes. As personal life begins to take prec-edence over work life, then we believe it is, in a way, quite simple – wellbeing calls for companies to gain genuine insight into what motivates their workforce. But again second-guessing or using generalisations based on the ubiquitous research on the topic will not go far enough.

We think a big part of wellbeing will be maintaining a consistency of experience. Humans are, after all, creatures of habit; whether somebody is working from home, the office or some other public space, how can we ensure we give them the things they need and want to enable them to contribute effectively? This means a sense of belonging to a community, as well the more physical and technical requirements like suitable spaces and access to data.

A blurring between work and home life will require a fundamental policy reassessment. Working from home should not simply mean

2 - https://www.capgemini.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Report-The-Future-of-Work.pdf

replicating office hours for instance. At Cloudbooking we have always operated a core hours policy where we suggest staff should be available between certain, shorter hours. However, we recognise that home life comes with other demands.

According to a CapGemini's Future of Work report[2], remote employee burnout is on the rise. It suggests that over half of employees feel burned out due to working remotely – a figure which rises to 61% for younger employees aged 31–40. The right flexible working policy can eliminate unnecessary stress and the potential for employee burnout while providing employees with the time, space and flexibility to excel.

There are of course many questions which will only get answered over time. For example, how does a company deal with some of those boxes that were once ticked by the given of a fixed physical space (office), where things like community were taken for granted?

And how do we ensure that isolation does not have a negative impact on mental health, given the human need for social interaction?

Or how do we encourage informal interaction and collaboration as opportunities for conversations around the printer decrease?

## Facilitates equality

Another crucial question is, how can we uphold equality in terms of access to opportunity if employees are not given as much opportunity to 'be seen'? Companies have a big opportunity to rethink culture in order to make the workplace the best it can be. The rapid and seismic shift to hybrid working provides an opportunity to reassess old assumptions and rewrite some of the fundamental rules that have dominated office culture for decades.

The idea that staying in the office later paid dividends was far from dead before the pandemic. For many, the shift from an attendance culture towards a contribution culture will be welcomed. In itself, this can engender a more level playing field if those with personal commitments such as family life prohibit them from being always "available".

It becomes less about how long people are at

work and more about their output. While productivity can be difficult to measure, we might start to frame this more as the contribution individuals make.

By enabling employees to work when they work best – shifting the focus from attendance to contribution – it stands to reason that they are more likely to flourish.

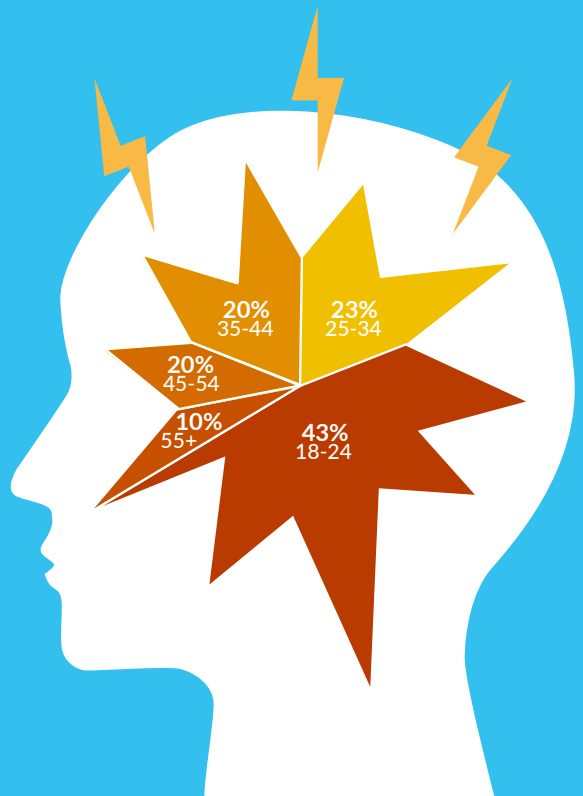
And this will be noticeable. But workplace models should not make the assumption that people can work from home. Companies will have to conduct research to understand their workforce. We know that younger people are far more likely to feel stress or be even more likely to feel less productive than, say, working parents or guardians.

How office space is used will also play a role in equality. If office space is reduced, we must think about how it is best used. Simply giving priority to executives and more senior employees will likely hurt a company in the long run, as it could exclude the people that need it most, as well as stifle creativity by limiting social interaction at more junior levels. And there are of course other questions around how we think about training and development, when it becomes much harder to learn through day-to-day peer observation.

## Using different spaces to serve different purposes for better results

The hybrid office is not just a simple equation of how to split a workforce's time between home and the office. Rethinking the workplace, given the nuanced needs of a whole workforce, means providing the right space for the right activities in the right moment. For example, a café may prove a far better location for a one-to-one get together than a meeting room but is unlikely to work for an eight-person brainstorming session. Now we have a plurality of spaces, we will need a rethink about how different spaces

AGE RANGES WHO INDICATED THAT THEY ALWAYS OR OFTEN FEEL STRESSED WHEN WORKING FROM HOME



# 43% OF PARENTS/GUARDIANS AGREED THE TASKS AND PRESSURES OF HOME LIFE, WHEN WORKING FROM HOME, MAKE IT HARDER TO BE PRODUCTIVE

IN BOTH THE UK & US 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS ARE CONSIDERABLY MORE LIKELY TO FEEL STRESS OR ANXIETY WORKING FROM HOME

# HOW TO THINK ABOUT THE HYBRID WORKPLACE

might be used effectively, which in turn has the potential to increase both productivity and wellbeing.

In the past we simply worked in the office, and home working became a place where we tried to emulate the office so that we didn't have to travel. But in a hybrid workplace, this thinking becomes outdated as we start to understand the merits of each space and the activities it best serves.

## Reimagining the office

We must remember that the office is not dead. It will just require some imagination around how we best use office space. One idea is that we start to think in terms of destination offices; a space where people go for a specific purpose. Claremont suggest that reimagining the workplace as a destination will involve the use of more dynamic and interactive zones that support knowledge sharing, socialisation, collabo -ration and staff engagement[3]. In this context, the office becomes a place to facilitate the things that a workforce might otherwise lack, such as face-to-face contact and spontaneous creativity.

Human interaction plays a big part in creativity and innovation, so working out how to bring people together will be crucial. The office may no longer be a place where people sit staring at a screen all day, but rather a place where interaction is brought to the fore and spaces are designed in such a way as to promote collaboration. The emphasis of the office might also lean towards learning and observation a space where younger people can access mentors and where teams are brought together regularly. To a degree, the role of the office manager will also change. Perhaps they will become more focused on risk management and avoiding a level of litigation – putting testing facilities in place for example.

3 - https://www.claremontgi.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/FutureFlexible-Destination-Office-Whitepaper.pdf

**WE MUST REMEMBER THAT THE OFFICE IS NOT DEAD. HUMAN INTERACTION PLAYS A BIG PART IN CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION**

## Integrating and balancing working from home

For those fortunate enough to have the space and set-up, we might start to see home as a place to get things done. A space in which to get our heads down away from constant distraction and back-to-back meetings. In her Tedx talk[4] , Lisa Bodell refers to the fact that most people spend their days in meetings and answering email and how this inhibits the ability to do the things we want do, such as create change and innovate. Home working offers an opportunity to create the space for these things to happen.

And given that creativity and innovation depend as much on personal output as they do on collaboration, home working offers the time and physical and mental space to allow people to work in ways that best suit them. Good ideas are not born staring at a computer screen. If, as they say, the best ideas come when we least expect them, then who is to say that taking a break to tend to the garden mid-afternoon won't be productive?

4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qm172DbaSbc&list=PLZ8yZO4y8_wkxrT-ipAFNC7acB8yEkTBB&index=14

**IT SEEMS INEVITABLE THAT WORKPLACE PROVISIONS WILL ALSO PLAY A KEY PART IN ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TALENT**

WORKPLACES EXTOL THE IDENTITY OF A COMPANY AND THE SENSE OF BELONGING

## Considering other public spaces

The use of public spaces stretches way beyond bars and cafés. Business centres offer a professional environment while collaborative/co-working spaces have become increasingly popular in recent years, often used by freelancers who seek out creative peerage and a social hub. For those employees that live too far away from the office, such an environment offers a solution for those who need social stimulation. We already know that younger age groups are likely to utilise such spaces in the future. Employees are likely to use public spaces of their own accord anyway. So, there must be thought around ensuring such spaces not only fulfil the needs of a workforce but promote wellbeing and culture and meet security and efficiency requirements. And facilitating fluidity means people can use specific spaces as their needs change.

It seems inevitable that workplace provi sions will also play a key part in attracting and retaining talent. Today, people are braver to the extent that we expect an entrepreneurial boom once we are through the worst of the pandemic. Consider an employee who is offered a position and is willing to take a pay decrease if they are able to work from home for the majority of their time. This might incentivise companies to look for alternate spaces for their employees, away from the office and closer to home. This all makes location far less important and provides a wider pool of talent.

## Addressing the blurred line between digital and physical workspace

We cannot talk about the hybrid workplace without discussing its biggest facilitator: digitisation. Each company, depending on its product or service, will of course have different digital requirements. But on a basic level, we might see digitisation as the shift from the use of local files and data to something centralised and widely accessible across different media. This means connecting people in the best possible way – by listening to what people need and want and providing it across different spaces.

This is not simply about providing the hardware and physical tools such as an office chair to people's homes, as few people are likely to be working from home indefinitely – the idea of "desktop" services or "data terminals" are no longer fit for purpose. Digitisation has to be done properly and the crux of any company's digitisation has to be mobile access to data, to facilitate this more fluid idea of workplace. Thankfully, the tools to get this right and provide knowledge and information are already out there.

## Implications for company culture

There is also a question around managing company culture and making a workforce feel connected when they are not all in the same space. What can we do to avoid camps of people in a workforce, for example?

Encouraging collaboration will mean trying out different things. This might mean a "camera on" policy and providing people with the opportunity (but not the obligation) to connect. People have struggled not seeing each other. We are all wiser today and few will be willing to sit through the meetings that nobody ever wants to attend but which are just in the diary, so we need to be creative about how we connect.

Earlier, we also discussed reimaging the use of office space and how this could become a connection hub rather than a place where employees sit in front of screens. So perhaps we need to give thought to how these spaces might be reshaped to facilitate collaboration and to extol the identity of a company and the sense of belonging.

# SUMMARY

The idea of the workplace is not changing. It has already changed. As we adapt to this new scenario, companies must consider what it means for them and their workforce.

Reimaging the workplace must consider the right space for the right activity, putting the emotional and professional needs of each individual at the forefront. To simply view the home as a mirror of the office like before could be erroneous. Accommodating a younger employee without dependants – and who might thrive on human contact – is unlikely to mean just splitting the working week down the middle between office and home. To get this right and encourage sustainable productivity, we have to think what activities are best done at home, in the office and across a range of other public spaces.

When we really start to imagine this new world, the possibilities are huge. Imagine the connectivity between different workspaces being facilitated by real-time transport information for example – say a situation where an app, through API connectivity, might be able to tell an individual any problems they might encounter on their journey to a meeting and direct them to the nearest local space to dial in rather than attend in person. This different view of the workspace has the potential to improve the work experience – and consequently facilitate a sustainable and improved output from any workforce.

THE IDEA OF THE WORKPLACE IS NOT CHANGING. IT HAS ALREADY CHANGED

# THREE TIPS WHEN THINKING ABOUT THE NEW HYBRID WORKPLACE

## 1 DON'T FOLLOW THE MONEY

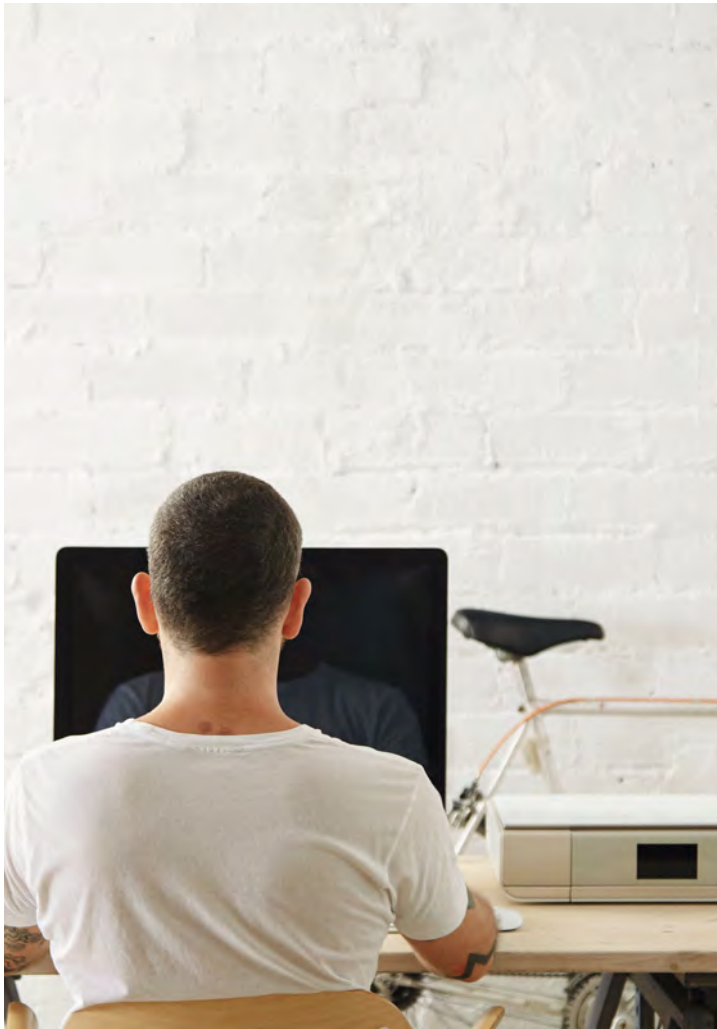
Companies are unlikely to save a fortune by having a reduced need for office space. A workforce has to work somewhere and in our experience companies could end up spending more on third-party business centres unless they have a solid plan in place.

## 2 PUT INDIVIDUAL WELFARE FIRST

Put the wellbeing of individuals and the ability to communicate upfront. If people feel appreciated and they have a consistent space to work from then output will be sustained. This requires thinking about the needs of every staff member – from those living on their own to those with disabilities.

## 3 CONSIDER HOW DIFFERENT SPACES ARE USED

Think about how existing infrastructure can facilitate collaboration and provide a secure space (especially with regards to COVID -19). Put infrastructure in place that allows staff to carry out their day-to-day work in comfort and with consistency.



To ensure your organization is managing its two most important assets: people & space, get in touch with a member of the team today.

UK: +44 (0) 800 033 7841
USA: +1 (833) 574 0688
E: sales@cloudbooking.com

180 Piccadilly, St. James,
London, W1J 9HF
United Kingdom

Conducted by

YouGov®

On behalf of

Cloudbooking

© YouGov plc 2021