

A dimly lit office scene with three people at a counter. A man in a grey hoodie with a Nike logo and 'MSB' is on the left, a woman in a light green hoodie is in the middle, and a woman in a dark hoodie is on the right, seen from behind. They are all holding white mugs. The background features a dark blue wall with a grid pattern, a sink, and some potted plants. The lighting is soft and focused on the people.

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WHITEPAPER

**An Insight into the Future
of the Workplace**



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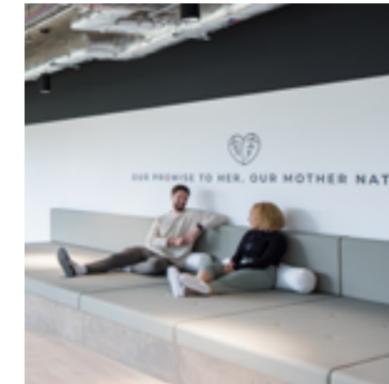
88%

OF PEOPLE TOLD US THAT THEY WANT TO WORK FROM HOME AT LEAST 2 DAYS PER WEEK.

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An Insight into the Future of the Workplace

As the Managing Director of an office interior design and workplace consultancy business, the past year has been a cross between horror and fascinating.

Horror, because our clients are telling us that their offices are drastically going to change but reduce in size; (up to 50% in some cases!) and fascination, because my pet theme when talking at seminars and client leadership's workshops over the past 10 years as to the benefits of freedom working (or is it hybrid/ABW, / flexible/smart/agile/balanced) working, have finally been realised faster than I could have ever imagined possible!

From our surveys we estimate this is going to be between 20% and 50% depending upon the type of organisation, how radically the new way of working is embraced and the geographical location. This is truly a historic shift for the office real estate world to wake up to, and will have a profound consequence to the office sector with a similar consequence as virtual shopping is having on the High Street.

Offices are drastically going to change but reduce in size.

(up to **50%** in some cases.)

The future of the office is being resolved in the favour of the hybrid model that we call freedom working and the pre-covid idea of a desk (or an office) for life has finally been confined to a past era. It seems we have moved incredibly fast in only 14 short months.

We have been working non-stop with our interior workplace consultants over the past year to make sense of the shift of staff expectations and have over 40,000 employee pulse engagements to validate our conclusions. We believe over 90% of all employees now want to make a substantial change to their home/work life balance and almost all, significantly want a more flexible model. We call this freedom working. As a result, most employers are anticipating a large reduction in office real estate.

The interesting thing about this new truth is that there are very few organisations that understand what this is going to mean long term to their property strategy and how it will impact their employees as they get more relaxed about using public transport and integrating back into a busy office as and when the social distancing rules relax. Christi Woolsey, an associate director at Boston Consulting Group says "a lot of people assume that because we know how to work together in the office, we know how to work apart, then we can do hybrid. But hybrid is a third way. It is incredibly difficult to do. This is the problem that everyone will have to solve post covid. It's going to be hard and it's going to be difficult".



90% of all employees now want to make a substantial change to their home/work life balance

This comment is both insightful but realistic and means that organisations will need a form a clear sense of direction by business leaders to impart the new working styles to their employees and will also need a degree of flexibility to adjust to the new norms. It is also likely to be a ever adjusting model as we adapt further as the pandemic risks continue to be mitigated.

What I have noticed, is that generally staff are most productive at home when they are undertaking their concentration work and assuming they do not have young children (or pets) and can find a home zone that is conducive, they produce better work, faster and with less mistakes then when compared to previously working in a busy open plan office. This begs the question as to why we would encourage our valuable staff to come to the office?

My thoughts around this is that we are by very nature as humans, social animals, and that whilst we love our natural habitat (home working), we also crave social interactions and interactive connections for inspiration and personal development. Also, there are activities that just do not seem to work so well over zoom or teams. These activities include training, mentoring (especially important in the legal and accountancy professions), team building, white boarding team events, all hands staff meetings and almost any meetings that boost team moral. That includes a welcome beer with colleagues after a hard days graft!



There are activities that just do not seem to work so well over Zoom or Teams

Then you consider the culture of our organisations that is surely the common glue which holds things together and creates the reason why successful organisations thrive, grow, and develop. It is not easy to inculcate these aspirations over zoom!

I believe the new **freedom working** office will be less about rows of neatly organised banks of desks



Another cultural issue that needs to be addressed is that managers who up to a year ago relied upon 'presenteeism' to gauge the productivity of their teams will now needs to review their expectations based upon staff who will be split between home and office. This will require some clear bench marking, expectations, KPI's or even guidelines and protocols to ensure that tasks are evenly distributed, deadlines are met, and that productivity is uniformly maintained by all.

So, to summarise, I believe the new freedom working office will be less about rows of neatly organised banks of desks and more about what furniture and facilities will be required to support the activities that staff will engage in when they come back into their new office.

I feel strongly that the new office environments that will be successful in the future, will be destinations that are truly magical, flexible, and inspirational and which will provide an environment where social interactions will foster quality cultural bonds. It will be more about recalibrating the office to include collaboration for teams, meeting spaces for training and team building, and quiet spaces for huddles, private calls, and virtual meetings.

Whilst all this might seem like you are on embarking on a journey without a sunset and without a dawn, it is an exciting challenge for those who are intent in pushing the boundaries of office design. It will be incredibly important to keep leadership, management and staff engaged properly to ensure a successful outcome and to keep your organisation nimble to adapt and exploit the new opportunities that freedom working brings in terms of productivity, collaboration, inclusivity, diversity, and Sustainability outcomes. Those that embrace it are likely to find a new era of prosperity. Those who pause, looks back and drift will surely be those who in a time to come, lament at a lost opportunity.

Cyril Parsons

officeprinciples

READING

6 Bennet Road
Reading
Berkshire, RG2 0QX
Tel: 0118 975 9750

LONDON

The Harley Building
77 New Cavendish Street
London W1W 6XB
Tel: 020 3096 0066

MANCHESTER

Peter House,
Oxford Street
Manchester M1 5AN
Tel: 0161 222 4745

BIRMINGHAM

Garden 6
Coleshill Manor Office Campus
Birmingham B46 1DN
Tel: 0121 312 1045

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