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EMPLOYMENT & HR

Returning To The Office: A Guide For Employers

Engaging with employees and preparing for a safe return to work

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Contents

Summary

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The Covid-19 pandemic will have a long-lasting impact on the economy, businesses and working lives. The restrictions imposed by the Government fundamentally changing the nature of work and workplace interactions.

People have discovered that work can be done outside of the office, and it is possible to get most things done remotely. Just as businesses and organisational leaders had to set up procedures for employees to work from home, they now must prepare safe return-to-work offers.

Now that the government advice to work from home has ended in England, employers should take an individualised approach to consider the physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing of the workforce, as well as following and monitoring ongoing government guidance.

It is important for employers to consider the diverse needs of their workforce and they must be aware of their duty of care in ensuring that the workplace is sufficiently safe to return to.

1. Before Covid-19

McKinsey and Co highlighted that before Covid-19, the conventional attitude towards offices was that they are critical to productivity and the accumulation of talent [1].

Companies competed for prime office space in major urban centres, and many focused-on solutions that were seen to promote collaboration.

As we look to the future, organisations need to evaluate and redefine their attitude toward the office and to the changing needs of workers.

Although, this may be daunting, it is also an opportunity to create a culture that reflects the future of the business, works better for employees, and potentially provides a competitive advantage in terms of attracting and retaining employees.

2. The Government Perspective

On 19 July 2021, the UK Government lifted most coronavirus related restrictions and legislation in England. The guidance on working from home was also lifted, although the Government encouraged employers to start a "gradual" return to the workplace [2].

On 7 August, the Welsh Government moved Wales into Alert Level 0 and lifted most coronavirus-related legislation. However, the Government says working from home can be a "reasonable measure" employers take to meet their legal obligation of acting to reduce the spread of Covid-19.

On 9 August, the Scottish Government moved Scotland into 'beyond level 0' and lifted most coronavirus-related legislation. The guidance on working from home was also lifted, although Government says working from home is an "important mitigation" that will reduce the risk of the spread of Covid-19.

Targeted measures to protect the public from the Omicron variant were put into play on the 30th of November 2021. They were introduced as a precaution while more information was gathered and assessed on the variant's transmissibility and any possible effect on vaccines.

3. Considerations for Employers

This section outlines the key challenges that employers might face when welcoming their workforce back into the office, either on a full-time basis or part-time through flexible/hybrid structures.

3.1 Refusing to go to work

The House of Commons Return to Work report states that all workers have an obligation to obey lawful and reasonable instructions given by their employer [2].

However, if an employee refuses to attend a workplace because they reasonably believe that there is imminent danger to their wellbeing, they have certain protections under employment rights legislation.

There are now several Employment Tribunal judgements in cases concerning employees who raised concerns about Covid-19.

In many of the cases employees have not had much difficulty establishing a reasonable belief of serious and imminent danger. However, there are indications that a general fear of Covid-19 may not be enough, especially if the employer was following the Government's working safely guidance.

3.2 Health and Safety during the commute

In November 2020, Bonnetts Solicitors published an article on an employer's duty of care regarding commuting during Covid-19 [3]. They highlighted that many workers have expressed a concern for their safety during the commute to the office.

Under ordinary circumstances, an employer's duty of care only extends to the workplace or when employees are travelling due to business requirements. However, the lines have become blurred due to Covid-19. It now expected that employers are responsible for their employee's safety during the commute if they are expecting them to come into the office.

Bonnetts state that although there is no definitive answer to what the duty of care for employers entails, many leaders are currently considering the risks to their commuting workforce.

It is recommended that employers should ensure that they communicate with all employees regarding their commute, doing all they can to ensure they feel safe to return to work.

Employees should feel comfortable to raise any concerns that they may have about the risks associated with commuting and employers should strive to meet them in the middle with a solution that considers their concerns.

3.3   Employees with Caring Responsibilities

Schools in England re-opened to all pupils on 8 March 2021. However, parents may still need time off to care for a child who is self-isolating, either because the child tested positive, or they were a close contact.

Employers also need to note that caring responsibilities disproportionately fall on women and should ensure that their policies are not indirectly discriminating against female employees.

3.4   Vaccinations and Employment Law

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 [4] requires employers to take reasonable steps to reduce any workplace risks.

This duty gives employers justification for encouraging their employees to be vaccinated to protect themselves and everyone else at the workplace.

The Government have urged employers to encourage staff to get both their first and second jabs* to protect them and others from Covid-19. Motivations for doing so include:

- Employees can better protect themselves and those around them

- Lower risk of employees catching and spreading Covid-19 to colleagues, therefore reducing the negative impact on the workforce therefore reducing the negative impact on the workforce

- Bringing staff back safely into the workplace sooner

The CIPD [5] urges employers to remember that the vaccine is just one measure of protection and the extent to which the virus will further mutate is unknown.

Employers still need to question whether bringing employees into the workplace is essential as part of their risk management and assessment obligations.

Employers should keep up to date with the latest information on the vaccine rollout programme on the NHS website.

* Booster vaccines are now offered to all adults in response to the Omicron variant.

4. Paying Employees

During the pandemic, the Government offered furlough payments to provide financial support during Covid-19. This ended on the 30th September 2021. This section states the current financial support that is in place for employees.

4.1 Wages

A worker's entitlement to wages is determined by the terms of their employment contract. As a rule, workers are entitled to get paid if they are 'ready, able and willing' to work.

There is some debate over whether a worker who refuses to attend the workplace for health and safety reasons is entitled to pay.

If a worker is unable to attend the workplace, they may be able to work from home and be paid as normal. Generally, workers do not have the right to work from home, although after 6 months all have the right to request flexible working [2].

4.2 Statutory Sick Pay

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) is available to employees who are 'incapable for work' for four or more consecutive days. Anyone who is self-isolating in line with official guidance and anyone who has been notified to shield is deemed incapable for work and is therefore entitled to SSP [2].

5. Flexible and Hybrid Working

Flexible and hybrid working structures are at the forefront of conversations around work. This section explains the main principals of flexible and hybrid working. It explores the benefits of flexible and hybrid working practises as well as the risks involved It shares effective ways of communicating in teams during the transition to flexible or hybrid work.

5.1 The Principles of Flexible Working

The CIPD states that Flexible Working is increasing in demand, however the number of quality flexible jobs falls short of that demand [6]. There is now an opportunity for employers to do more to provide flexibility for the benefit of all employees and their organisations.

Flexible working describes a type of working arrangement that gives a degree of flexibility on how long, where, when, and at what times employees work.

They have provided a list of type of flexible working practice:

- **Part-time working:** contracted work that is anything less than full-time hours

- **Term-time working**: a worker remains on a permanent contract but can take paid/unpaid leave during school holidays

- **Job-sharing:** a form of part-time working where two (or sometimes more) people share the responsibility of a job

- **Flexitime:** allows employees to choose, within certain set limits, when to begin and end work

- **Remote work:** employees work all or part of their working week at a location remote from the employer's workplace

- **Commissioned outcomes**: there are no fixed hours, but only an output target that an individual is working towards

- **Zero-hour contracts:** an individual has no guarantee of a minimum number of working hours [6]

5.2 The Principles of Hybrid Working

While some employees want to work from home all the time after the pandemic, most would prefer a balance where they are in the office for some of the week and at home for the remainder. This has led to the term hybrid working.

According to the CIPD, two-thirds (63%) of employer's plan to introduce or enable more home and hybrid working over the next 6-12 months [7].

Hybrid working means different things for different organisations. Employers must consider employee demand, and what will need to be in place for new ways of working to be effective.

5.3 Communicating Flexible and Hybrid Working Policies

For flexible and hybrid working to be effective, communication between employers and employees must be clear and two-way. When communication is not well managed it can result in gaps in workforce knowledge, barriers to team working and exclusion of team members who are not in the office.

Asynchronous work means that team members are empowered to complete their tasks in their own time, without dependencies or sequential necessities that constrict them to a set order of operations.

Communication within hybrid teams needs to be more intentional as causal, office-based conversations will be reduced. Employers should consider the following recommendations for effective hybrid communication [8]:

- When co-located, face-to-face meeting should occur. But if some colleagues must attend remotely this can lead to 'presence disparity'. Meetings should be held online by default unless all members of the team are together in the office. This will help to ensure that each attendee has a consistent experience of the meeting.

- Teams should be encouraged and supported to establish their own principles for communication. This may include how often to meet physically, what technology to use for meetings and asynchronous work and how to ensure that communication is inclusive of everyone.

- Making use of asynchronous tools. During the pandemic many employees have reported feeling fatigued by long online meetings. When teams are working in a hybrid way, communication can be enhanced by asynchronous tools such as Slack or chat functions in platforms such as Microsoft Teams. This allows people to have more schedule flexibility, as well as location flexibility, and reduces online meeting time.

- Building in regular social and human connection opportunities to support employee engagement and team building.

Additionally, the CIPD has 7 aims for organisations to consider when planning flexible and hybrid working solutions [9]:

- To develop the skills and culture needed for open conversations about wellbeing

- To encourage boundary-setting and routines to improve wellbeing and prevent overwork

- To ensure effective co-ordination of tasks and task-related communication

- To pay special attention to creativity and problem-solving tasks

- To build in time, including face-to-face time, for team cohesion and organisational belonging

- To facilitate networking and relationships across teams

- To organise a wider support network to compensate for the loss of informal learning

Organisations will need to make their own short-term decisions about when and how employees return safely to the office. They may wish to plan for interim hybrid working in the short term whilst also considering longer term strategic decisions on more flexible forms of working.

As hybrid working is a form of flexible working, the CIPD advise that employers consider adapting or updating existing flexible working policies to include hybrid working as a specific category.

Any new or adapted policy should be issued with supporting guidance and information to enable effective implementation. The CIPD advises that organisations should consider the following when developing new policies and procedures:

- Setting out who (or which role types) is eligible for hybrid working.

- Explaining how to request hybrid working.

- Clarifying roles and responsibilities for hybrid workers and people managers.

- How hybrid working intersects with other forms of flexible working.

- Reviewing other related policies including, for example, expenses, IT usage, homeworking, and data protection.

5.4 Current legislation on Flexible Working

Since 2014, employees with at least 26 weeks' continuous employment have been able to make a statutory request, in writing for flexible working, for any reason.

A report was published in September 2021 by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) titled 'Making Flexible Working the Default' [10].

The paper argues that flexible working should become the default. However, there can be no "one-size-fits-all" solution to determine flexible working arrangements.

"Many current flexible working practices have been a response to the particular demands of the pandemic and may not be sustainable in the longer term, on personal or business grounds. But they have opened our eyes to what may be possible, and we now have the chance to seize the moment and make flexible working – in all its forms – part of business DNA." –

The Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy

Following this paper, the government announced at the end of September 2021 plans to make the right to request flexible working a day one right, as well as new entitlements for unpaid carers.

Under the plans – delivering on a commitment set out in the government's 2019 manifesto – around 2.2 million more people will be given the right to request flexible working.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

"Empowering workers to have more say over where and when they work makes for more productive businesses and happier employees"

"It was once considered a 'nice to have' but by making requests a day one right, we're making flexible working part of the DNA of businesses across the country"

"A more engaged and productive workforce, a higher calibre of applicants and better retention rates – the business case for flexible working is compelling"

The proposed changes would also mean that all applicants will know they can ask for flexible working before applying for a job. Equally, employers will need to consider whether they can offer flexible before advertising new roles.

The Minister for Women and Equalities Liz Truss said:

"As we move beyond the pandemic, we must seize the opportunity to make flexible working an option for everyone […]No-one should be held back in their career because of where they live, what house they can afford, or their responsibility to family […]I want everyone to have the same opportunities regardless of their background or location. This is the right thing to do for workers, families and our economy"

5.5 An analysis of hybrid and flexible working

5.5.1. Flexible Working

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen businesses adopt flexible working practices like remote working at an unprecedented rate. Flexible working has supported wider measures to stop transmission of the virus.

The CIPD states that remote working can help people avoid lengthy commutes as well as removing office-based distractions. However, it also poses the risk of people over-working and feeling isolated [9].
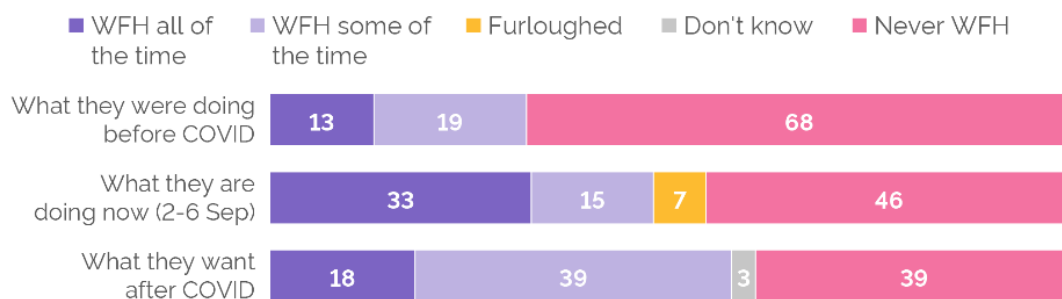
5.5.2 YouGov Survey on Hybrid Working

A 2021 YouGov survey revealed that fewer than four in ten people want to leave their house to go to work. The Covid-19 crisis has given many workers a taste of the work-from home-lifestyle and it seems that many people are reluctant to give this up [11].

According to the survey, prior to the outbreak 68% of British employees had never worked from home, just one in three had, split between 13% who so did so the whole time, and 19% who did so some of the time.

But once the crisis is over, most of those who were working before the pandemic and who intend to stay part of the workforce (57%) say they want to be able to continue working from home.

Most workers want to be able to work from home once coronavirus is over, at least some of the time

% of workers who were working prior to the coronavirus crisis and who also expect to still be in the workforce once the crisis is over

Legend: ■ WFH all of the time ■ WFH some of the time ■ Furloughed ■ Don't know ■ Never WFH

	WFH all	WFH some	Furloughed	Don't know	Never WFH
What they were doing before COVID	13	19			68
What they are doing now (2-6 Sep)	33	15	7		46
What they want after COVID	18	39		3	39

YouGov

2-6 September 2020

This includes 18% who want to be able to work from home the whole time, and 39% who want to be able to work from home some of the time.

Only four in ten (39%) say they don't want to work from home once the pandemic is over. YouGov have concluded that what people want depends on what they were doing before the outbreak, and whether they've been able to work from home during lockdown.

Hybrid working could have an even bigger impact on London. Some have claimed that the onset of Covid-19 has resulted in workers and companies realising they are no longer bound to tolerating the capital's high rents and cost of living.

A separate survey of London workers found that 66% want to be able to work from home once the pandemic is over, almost 10% higher than the national picture, including 19% who would want to do so full-time [11].

5.5.3 Workers Attitudes Towards the Return to Work

A new 2021 study by London Loves Business has found that nearly half of all workers (49%) would look for another job if they are not offered flexible working options post-pandemic [12]. Another indication that this new way of working is here to stay well beyond the end of lockdown.

Further research from Theta Global Advisors supports this view, with many concerned about having to commute and the impact of this on their mental health.

Key statistics include [12]:

– 57% of workers – 11.8 million – do not want to go back to a normal way of working in an office environment with normal office hours

– 65% of working Brits do not feel comfortable commuting to work via public transport anymore and think it will be one of the most stressful parts of their day

– 44% of working Brits are currently working from home and do not expect to return to the office until next year

– 41% of workers in The City of London say the Covid-19 pandemic has encouraged them to look towards consultancy and freelance work or start their own business

– 45% of London city-based workers say the pandemic has made them realise what a poor work-life balance they had pre-lockdown and they will not return to it after Covid-19

– 63% of city-based workers believe the workplace of the future will have to change drastically for the better to avoid losing its best talent to freelancing and consulting

Chris Biggs, Partner at Theta Global Advisors – an accounting and consultancy disruptor commented on these stats:

"These statistics are indicative of the wider trend that we are seeing with workplaces up and down the country. We have long offered our employees flexible working options and I do believe that it is the future of work and boosting productivity." [12]

5.5.4 The Risks

Robin Dunbar, Emeritus Professor of Experimental Psychology at the University of Oxford shared his thoughts on remote working in a BBC Worklife article [13].

Professor Dunbar's overall opinion is that remote working is overhyped. They highlighted that it had been tried and tested 20 years ago, and this was quickly given up on.

This didn't work for several reasons. The workplace is a social environment and business in any form is a social phenomenon. Without face-to-face engagement, and casual meeting around the coffee machine, the 'flow' that makes things work, and work fast will be missing.

Work groups will lose focus, and the sense of belonging and commitment to an organisation and its aim and objectives is very quickly lost.

The loneliness epidemic, particularly among the 20-somethings is a particular problem for new graduates moving to an unfamiliar city for their first job. With no family or friends nearby, work is the only place they can find friends and arrange social events.

The digital world of Zoom and Skype is no substitute for face-to-face meetings. Many people find digital environments awkward and there is a limit in how well the conversations can flow, depending on the number of participants in a meeting.

Although these risks are real, employers must do what is safest for their employees. The risks associated with remote working should always be considered and a balance should be found.

6. Health & Safety

This section sets out some of the key principles of health and safety law and highlights the most relevant pieces of legislation in the context of Covid-19.

The key piece of legislation in the UK is the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 [4]. The act is supplemented by many pieces of secondary legislation.

Additionally, The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) issues Approved Codes of Practice (ACOPs) as well as health and safety guidance [14]. ACOPs have a special legal status. Employers must show evidence that they have worked to comply with health and safety obligations.

6.1 Risk Assessments

Employers are obliged to carry out risk assessments to protect the health and safety of their workers. The HSE has produced basic guidance on risk assessments.

Employers with five or more employees are obliged to prepare and regularly update a written health and safety policy. The policy should cover [14]:

- Statement of intent: an employer's general policy on health and safety in the workplace

- Responsibility: listing the names and positions of persons responsible for health

- Arrangements: listing practical steps that are being taken to

An employer must bring the health and safety policy to the attention of all employees.

6.2 Safe Systems of Work

Employers have a duty to consult safety representatives in their company on health and safety issues. HSE guidance outlines how employers should consult representatives [14]:

- Consultation involves giving information to employees but also listening to them and taking account of what they say before making any health and safety decisions.

- Enough time must be allowed for employees to consider the safety matters being raised and the employer must provide them with informed responses.

- The employer can still make the final decision but talking to employees is an important part of successfully managing health and safety.

6.2.1 Personal Protective Equipment

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy defines a face covering as something that safely covers your mouth and nose [15].

Face coverings are no longer required by law; however, it is advised that people wear them in crowded and enclosed settings where they may meet people they do not usually meet.

Wearing a face mask correctly may reduce the risk of transmission of Covid-19.

Employers should be aware that some people may choose to wear a face covering at all times in the workplace.

However, HSE guidance on PPE and Covid-19 says that PPE is not generally required to protect workers from Covid-19, except in certain settings such as healthcare [14].

Employers must ensure that they do not discriminate in the provision of PPE, by taking account of different body types [2].

6.2.2 Good Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene is one of the best ways to prevent employees from getting sick and spreading germs to others in the workplace.

Employees who make hand hygiene part of their routine also prevent spreading illness to their families at home. Employees with healthy family members spend less time away from work taking care of their sick loved ones.

The HSE recommend:

- Consider using signs and posters to help workers practise good handwashing techniques and to remind them to catch coughs and sneezes in a tissues or the crook of their arm

- Provide handwashing facilities with running water, soap and paper towels or hand dryers

- Provide hand sanitiser in areas where people are unable to wash their hands

During risk assessments employers should think about:

- Providing handwashing facilities at entry/exit points so people can wash their hands when they and leave work

- Making sure handwashing facilities are always topped up

- Identifying where extra hand sanitiser points are needed in addition to washing facilities.

6.2.3 Social Distancing

As of 19 July 2021, BEIS guidance no longer advises businesses to ensure social distancing in the workplace.

However, the guidance says Covid-19 can be spread through social contact and that employers should consider reducing the number of people that workers contact, using fixed teams or barriers to separate groups.

6.2.4 Ventilation

The new BEIS guidance places a greater emphasis on ventilation than the previous guidance.

 It says businesses should maximise fresh airflow, either by opening windows and doors or through mechanical ventilation.

It also says employers should identify areas with poor ventilation using carbon dioxide (CO_2) detectors.

Additionally, the HSE recommend that you should speak to the people who manage the day-to-day operations of young workplace's mechanical ventilation systems to:

- Understand how they operate

- Make sure they're supplying fresh sir into an area and how much

- Make sure they're maintained in line with manufacturers' instruction

- You should base ventilation rates on the maximum 'normal' occupancy of an area.

6.2.5 Workplace Testing

The UK Government no longer provides free workplace testing for employers in England. Businesses can still arrange testing through private providers or ask staff to use free rapid tests at home or at a testing site.

6.3 Vulnerable Workers

In England, people who are clinically extremely vulnerable are no longer required to shield. However, there is guidance that says that people who are classified as extremely vulnerable may wish to be cautious and limit the number of people they meet.

Employers still have a legal responsibility to protect the health and safety of their workers, however the HSE states that employers do not need to implement specific controls for vulnerable workers. They should however ensure that measures identified in risk assessments are applied strictly.

HSE guidance notes that employers have specific legal obligations towards new and expectant mothers who must be suspended on full pay if their work cannot be carried out safely.

7. Case Studies

7.1 Case Study: The British Heart Foundation (BHF)

The British Heart Foundation's Headquarters are in London and the charity also has 7 Regional Offices across the UK. There are 726 paid colleagues (in offices and Field Teams within fundraising).

The BHF works to prioritise:

- Mental wellbeing of the workforce

- Financial wellbeing of the workforce

- Physical wellbeing of the workforce

- Social wellbeing of the workforce

This is known as the Live well, Work well incentive. The aim of the programme is to provide information, resources, and support to colleagues, empowering them to manage their mental, social, physical and financial wellbeing.

7.1 The Mental Health Framework

A mental health framework has been developed by the BHF to demonstrate the charity's commitment to continually work towards understanding mental health in the workplace.

This vision is particularly important at a time where employees are returning to the office and may feel stressed about doing so.

The components of the framework involve:

Support

Supporting people is only ever one click, call or discussion away from the help they need if experiencing issues with their health or wellbeing

Commitment

Physical and mental health is given equal priority

Raising Awareness

Mental Health is actively discussed to help break down barriers

Building Resilience

The importance of personal resilience is recognised and understood by everyone

Leadership

Managers understand mental health and recognise it as a core element of their people management

6.3   Covid-19 Response

The BHF responded rapidly to the pandemic by creating a series of priorities to protect the workforce:

1. Provide support and resources for those adapting to remote working and social isolation

2. Develop guidelines and support for staff loss, bereavement, domestic abuse, suicide, and self-harm

3. Provide clear resources and support for all staff

4. Support groups affected by changes in work environment

5. Use campaigns and comms to promote positive social, mental, physical, and financial wellbeing, with leaders and managers leading by example

They have emphasised that as an organisation they are aware of the anxiety and fear around the virus, and the return to the workplace will be a challenge.

They believe that it is important to measure and mitigate the impact of months of social isolation by maintaining caution in their approach to a return to the workplace.

Stating to employees that vaccination is a personal choice is key to minimising the risks of furthering inequalities.

Developing flexible working arrangements that cater to the diverse needs of the workforce will be an ongoing and everchanging project for the charity.

7.2 Case Study: GlobalGiving UK

Alex Ritchie and Rachel Smith, Co-CEOs of GlobalGiving UK noticed that their employees were coping very differently with remote working when the pandemic hit [18].

The UK operation of GlobalGiving – a US based company which connects donors with charities around the world – employs just 15-16 people. This meant that Alex and Rachel had good visibility of how homeworking was affecting them.

They found that, while employees with children were really enjoying more flexibility, younger staff were finding it more difficult.

Alex explained that over time, the initial appeal of working from home wore off. Some colleagues, particularly those earlier in their career, felt they were missing the social life, learning opportunities and a good space to work in.

Looking at the individual needs of employees was a key driver in working out what to do next at the organisation.

They had to tread carefully and understand that working from home can be quite detrimental for some people's mental health.

To tackle the problem, the company sent out an employee survey:

"We had an open, transparent conversation [about hybrid working] and asked how we could continue to inspire some of the values our team have, like collaboration, creativity and innovation, at time when we are working from home"

The survey revealed that there was clear appetite to return to the office in some capacity – preferably to workspaces within 20 minutes of home.

They planned to invite staff to use a variety of shared office spaces across the UK, allowing staff to meet face-to-face, while enjoying a shorter commute. The only requirement is for everyone to come into a central hub once a month for a whole-team meeting.

These pay-as-you-go spaces allowed the company which previously rented a central London head office – to save money, while giving staff the flexibility to book into a physical office whenever they felt the need.

"You can often just turn up – you might not have a dedicated desk, but you can work on your laptop in the lounge area or sit in booths to have smaller meetings – there are some really nice spaces out there"

"It's a benefit to getting staff networking in person again – if we go into a space with companies, there's a good opportunity to talk to them about charity donations."

Rachel expects the evolution of GlobalGiving's workplace to continue to be shaped by staff, especially the younger members:

"Generation Z are coming into the workforce and, even pre-pandemic, have demanded that companies should be more values-driven, and to offer more technology and digital…organisations will have to keep adapting based on their expectations."

8. Looking to The Future

Employers have already been considering whether to retain any social distancing and other measures once these become voluntary.

However, planning will need to be agile and flexible enough to meet requirements of any significant, future outbreaks. The pandemic is not over, and the government have not ruled out future restrictions. The CIPD is also calling on employers to take this opportunity to build upon the period of remote working, to adapt and learn, and make hybrid working a success [19].

In a BBC Worklife article Cary Cooper, Professor of Organisation Psychology & Health at Manchester University discussed their forecast for the future of the world of work [20].

Professor Cooper believes that the world of work will dramatically change over the next few years, not only because of Covid-19, but also because of the deep recession we will be facing.

"There will, of course, be more flexible working – that is, people working substantially from home if they can and using a central office environment from time to time – but the 9-to-5 in an office environment is dead. Even employers will want this given the recession because it will enable them to substantially downsize their estate costs."

They also forecasted that business travel will virtually cease both within the country and between counties because people are reluctant to use trains and planes. Zooming and Skype will therefore be the venue for long-distance meetings.

Professor Cooper also states that due to the changing face of work, people in management roles will have to undergo a major transformation. They have called for more managers with emotional intelligence and social skills if people are to be managed effectively remotely.

This is so managers can better identify when people are not coping with their work, or suffering from mental ill health. Good social skills in management are essential for building staff morale and for team building in a virtual world.

9. Conclusions

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a dramatic shift in the way that people work. Conventional and familiar expectations of workers to attend the office 5 days a week, are a distant memory.

Employers now must consider a new set of provisions to promote the health and wellbeing of their workforces as they welcome them back to the office. They need to take steps to review their workers' rights regarding vaccines, commuting, pay, and caring responsibilities.

Since the government have allowed offices to welcome back their employees, many debates have been sparked around the right way to do this. Hybrid and flexible working structures have become standard and there are differing opinions on the value of this kind of working style. Some state the lifestyle benefits and some maintain that a lack of office-based work can aggravate social isolation

Despite the opposing views, employers and employees alike must now adapt to a changing face of work, whilst ensuring that optimal communication between virtual teams is maintained

Employers are responsible for maintaining sufficient levels of health and safety in the office environment for when workers to return. This involves setting a good example in terms of hand hygiene, social distancing, ventilation and the use of PPE.

An ongoing consideration of employee mental health is also necessary at this transitional time. The British Heart Foundation and GlobalGiving UK are companies that have showed that they acknowledge the impact of this transitional period of working styles on their workforces.

When looking to the future of work, there should be a fresh outlook on the role and the profile of the manager. Teams need to be managed in an inclusive and considered way by those with both technical and emotional intelligence.

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