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How to fast forward to the office of the future

RESILIENCE TO **RECOVERY**



In common with many areas of life, the office and work culture have undergone significant change during the COVID-19 pandemic. We need to look forward to embracing and evolving our new ways of working write Arcadis Global Director for Workplace Martin Silvester and Senior Vice President and Global Practice Area Leader for the Workplace Practice at CallisonRTKL Kim Heartwell

Welcome to the future of office life, ushered in by the COVID-19 pandemic. So many of the past predictions for the office and work culture have now quickly become a reality. And the old saying that a happy worker is a productive worker has never been more true.



Most employers have discovered that their employees can be trusted to get on with their work whether they choose to work from home or come into the new collaboration and client hub. The transition from expecting people full time in the office, to a more hybrid style of home/office working has taken place. Digital technology has made this impressively seamless and easy.

Employees have welcomed the opportunity to be more flexible about where and when they work. And now that they know they are trusted and that their employers genuinely care about their wellbeing, they have a new sense of responsibility and loyalty to the firm. Many are enjoying this new way of working so much they are taking less time off sick, staying longer with the firm, their productivity has risen and profits are up.

This scenario is all the more amazing when we realize we are talking about today. While substantial change was already underway in the workplace, the pandemic pushed the fast-forward button. Years of anticipated change has happened in just a matter of weeks.

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

While the rate of change has left many of us still catching our breath, there remains a raft of details still to discuss and decide in creating an improved workplace for the long-term post-pandemic world.

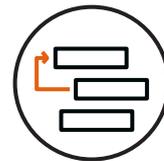
Whether you are a workplace owner, operator, manager and tenant, we have identified six key areas for consideration on your journey to the future and to help guide investment in people and real estate.



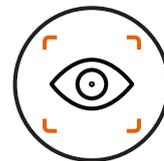
Humanize
Be there for employees and clients



Optimize
Embrace uncertainty



Prioritize
Practice radical sustainability and flexibility



Digitize
Learn from other industries



Hybridize
Rethink working from home



Maximize
Plan for the future



Humanize Be there for employees

Lockdown and working from home soon moved from being a novelty and welcome change to being isolating and strange. Once people had got used to not commuting, many found their accommodation limited for home working if they lived in small apartments or in family homes with children, they missed interaction with colleagues, lacked the levels of sophisticated office tech and became exhausted by endless Zoom and Teams calls.

In the post-pandemic workplace choice will be key. People enjoy being empowered to choose, within sensible constraints, where they can work best. For example, design work is often best accomplished in a collaborative team environment, while writing tasks are often best accomplished alone. They also need to feel they can make the journey to the office safely. Employers are working harder at understanding their employee needs and how best to make the accommodation and tech work for them.



Optimize Embrace uncertainty

Finding innovative solutions has become one of the hallmarks of the pandemic. The fast forward to the office of the future experienced in the past few months has shown that the pivot to home working was achieved faster, with less expense and more successfully than just about anyone could have forecast. In the pre-COVID world that scale of change management would have involved several years of planning and execution.



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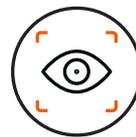
Next is the office itself. Responses have been varied. A very few firms have opted to be fully virtual, while most are considering reducing their real estate and certainly repurposing the space as a more collaborative and client-focused hub. From better work policies to re-thinking square footage and desk ratios, working remotely has presented real opportunities to improve the workplace. Most companies need to provide a mix of enclosed collaborative and individually focused spaces that are strategically placed throughout an open workspace, making it possible to create a healthier and balanced work environment. It's also the case that money saved on real estate can be invested into the environment, technology, ergonomics and wellbeing of people working at home.



Prioritize Practice radical sustainability and flexibility

Certainly, sustainability and flexibility will continue to play a significant role in design – whether it’s at home or in the traditional office. Designing for workplace flexibility is not at odds with designing for sustainability – appropriate and adjustable lighting, air quality, access to natural light and views, the use of healthy and sustainable materials, and the incorporation of biophilic design in the workplace are easily integrated into a flexible work environment.

Designing spaces always incorporates thinking about their climate impact. It is not only about doing less harm, we must be designing buildings that are climate-positive in their operation and construction. Flexible workspaces contribute to this goal with a reduced carbon footprint and a reduced lifecycle impact. It is possible to be very productive while reducing the carbon footprint. This is an opportunity to return with better work practices. When the pandemic is over, we will need to accelerate the economy, but it should be a clean economy. The workplace has to be part of this.



Digitize Learn from other industries

The adoption of technologies from other industries has accelerated. Retail, hospitality and tech are just some of the sources of inspiration for improving safety and the user experience. The early crossover areas include practical tools such as using various apps on smart phones for a range of services from reserving desk space, meetings rooms and booking refreshments to contact tracing. Voice recognition is also being embraced for touch-free elevators and entrance doors.

Brand is also rising in importance when enhancing the user experience. With a dispersed workforce, brand culture and loyalty can provide some of the ‘glue’ that keeps employees engaged with co-workers, management and clients. The presence of branding stretches beyond the physical building and works best when extended into the digital space for example in company communications and virtual meetings.





Hybridize
Rethink working from home

Related to the points above, people in most sectors have demonstrated an interest in mixing home working with time in the office. To support employees in their choices, employers need to help make the home working environment the best it can be. This can involve areas from ensuring digital connectivity and providing ergonomic workstations, to advising on appropriate lighting. Already some firms have invested in renting neighbourhood flex/co-working space to provide a local option to working from home.

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Maximize
Plan for the future

It may be hard to imagine at the moment, but taking a long-term view, the pandemic will pass. Lessons must be learned from the experiences of 2020, and many firms have renewed their focus on business resilience. What happens when the next pandemic comes along, or a crisis is caused by the impacts of climate change. This is certainly the moment to consider all eventualities and the risks they pose to business continuity. No one knows the answers, but this is the time to learn, take stock and prepare to emerge from the pandemic better equipped for the future.



Does happiness drive success?

Happiness by Design™ is a methodology to design for, apply and measure happiness in the built environment. CallisonRTKL worked together with happiness culture coach|sulting company Delivering Happiness and Egyptian community developer Mountain View to create a system that puts people at the forefront of the design process.

Beginning with the spark of an idea based on shared vision of community and caring, founded on extensive research into the science of happiness and the science of design, CallisonRTKL and their partners developed the Happiness Ecosystem, a toolkit and Index founded on the five critical components, or 'truths', of happiness and how each can be supported.

Research by the World Economic Forum shows that \$6 trillion in global costs will be driven by mental health by 2030. This shows the need for increased awareness and tactics to improve mental health, which can start in the workplace. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/05/covid-19-has-changed-working-patterns-for-good-uk-survey-finds>)





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Roger Barker, the IoD's director of policy, said the government should help small firms invest in new technologies to support home working by expanding the scope of R&D tax reliefs. He also said managers should consider employees' mental health when moving towards remote working.

"Working from home doesn't work for everyone, and directors must be alive to the downsides. Managing teams remotely can prove far from straightforward, and directors must make sure they are going out of their way to support employees' mental wellbeing," he said.

Seven out of 10 workers the BCO surveyed said the office was important for learning and developing networks. Two-thirds said their career had been helped by relationships made in the office. Younger employees, who often working from cramped shared houses, are missing out on training and guidance which they would normally receive from more experienced colleagues, Kauntze said.

The IoD also believes offices will remain valuable places for interaction and collaboration, particularly for new colleagues. "For many companies, bringing teams together in person proves more productive and enjoyable. Shared workspace often provides employees the opportunity for informal development and networking that is so crucial, particularly early on in a career," Barker said.

The pandemic has changed working patterns for good, a survey from the British Council for Offices (BCO) has found. In the future white-collar workers will adopt a mixed approach, combining remote working with several days a week in the office.

According to the BCO survey of 2,000 office workers conducted in September, employees at all levels, from executives to trainees, intend or hope to divide their time in the future between their homes and their workplaces.

Sixty-two percent of senior executives and 58% of entry-level workers want to alternate, according to the BCO, which has around 3,500 members including large office occupiers, architects, engineers and big property firms including Land Securities and British Land.

"We are never going to go back how things were before," said the BCO's chief executive, Richard Kauntze. "The idea that people will return to the five-day week in the office has gone, and I think a much more blended approach is likely, two or three days in the office and two-three at home or wherever is going to be a much more typical pattern. Most people will value being able to work on that basis."

The Institute of Directors agrees that more firms are taking a mixed approach to where their employees work. A new IoD survey of almost 1,000 directors found that three-quarters anticipated more home-working after the pandemic, and more than half planned to reduce their long-term use of workplaces.

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Arcadis is the leading global Design & Consultancy firm for natural and built assets. Applying our deep market sector insights and collective design, consultancy, engineering, project and management services we work in partnership with our clients to deliver exceptional and sustainable outcomes throughout the lifecycle of their natural and built assets. We are 27,000 people, active in over 70 countries that generate €3.3 billion in revenues. We support UN-Habitat with knowledge and expertise to improve the quality of life in rapidly growing cities around the world.

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About CallisonRTKL

CallisonRTKL, a global architecture, planning and design practice, began over seven decades ago and has evolved into a cultural agency to advance positive outcomes in our local and global communities. Through a human-centric design approach our team addresses the imperatives of resiliency, wellbeing and technology and their influence in the built environment.

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