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The Next Chapter

How much do we need to know about the re-opening of offices?

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Here at MCM we are listening, learning and collaborating with our clients, peers and contacts at every opportunity. But when it comes to preparing for the re-opening of offices, how much is truthfully known about this next chapter? What is it going to take to ensure the implementation of any new workplace strategy is successful in both the short and long term?

In a search to find interesting data and anecdotes that might correlate with what we're hearing from clients that we're currently working with, I came across a number of articles online that sounded like they might be insightful and I settled in to read them with anticipation and a cuppa. However, as I read on I was disappointed to find the contents were repeats on a theme of articles I've been reading on and off for the past few months, despite many people acknowledging the fluctuations in behaviours, feelings and attitudes as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to disrupt our lives. Some of these articles were also flawed by the data they presented. Percentages based on what? Questions asked of who? For me, this lack of fundamental information compromised the validity of the claims these articles were making and so unfortunately, they failed to provide a solid starting point for discussion and debate away from the website on which they sat.

Furthermore, a quick glance of more headlines demonstrated to me that there is a distinct inconsistency regarding the reported direction of travel. For example, I found two article headlines sat next to each other on one particular reference site that said 'Half of workers feel more productive working from home' next to one that said 'Half of employees feel working from home negatively affects mental health'. In truth, these don't mean much as comparable articles as their focus is different, but obviously one is a positive spin on remote working whereas the other is negative and read in isolation the reader could make an uninformed view about remote working and it's role within a long term strategy for their business. Is it any wonder that many clients seem confused and sometimes daunted about this next phase when unhelpful articles such as these are so easily accessible?


More trawling through the internet also revealed that these articles targeting remote working as the reason for a decline in good mental health fail to mention any other factors that could be at play; we are after all living through a pandemic that has rocked the entire world and will continue to do so for what is currently an unknown amount of time. For many, life does not revolve around work, and poor mental health can come from a variety of places and be triggered by a singular or combination of elements. For example, we all know that regular exercise is important for maintaining good mental health but with limited access to gyms or

organised indoor classes during these times, this will undoubtedly be a struggle for those who relied on this method to help them feel positive emotions. In addition, there are many people who don't work in offices but who have been able to return to their place of work, who are also experiencing mental health issues in light of the effects of the pandemic, but for some reason we seem less inclined to discuss this group of workers and how they fit into the workplace puzzle. What if these people live with others who are working remotely from their corporate office? If they are, then I believe there is a strong chance that any stress and anxiety they might be experiencing will be rubbing off on those they share their home with. It is not always easy to recognise your feelings and why you might be feeling a bit more negative than usual and so work is an easy target to blame even if in reality, it isn't the root cause. What about those who haven't seen their friends and family for weeks, months or maybe even a year? Surely, this would also have a negative impact on mental health would it not? Covid-19 has a lot more to answer for than just the impact on the corporate world of work and so I question why there are so many articles singling out remote working as the reason for the decline in good mental health? Isn't it better to acknowledge the scale of difference people are experiencing, the reasons behind them and how we might prepare for the long term effects once we are allowed access to our corporate offices again?



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The work we are doing at MCM with current clients, seeks to uncover these differences and acknowledge the scale of variation without judgement.

We are already seeing that for some, a return to the office 5 days a week is the preference for their own personal or business reasons, whilst for others, they'd like to spend the majority if not all of their time working remotely and then there's those that would prefer to sit somewhere in-between. Some clients are talking about absolute autonomy of choice for all employees, whereas others feel their culture requires a more structural undercurrent than that, and are keen to set some parameters. This appears to vary across industry, locality and within singular businesses and evidence suggests that it is influenced by infrastructure; technology and transport, industry ways of working e.g. it's in their cultural DNA to work together in person, as well as personal preference, which includes but is not limited to, whether people are introverted or extroverted.


Therefore, I feel it's time to draw a line under what we think the future of our workplaces will look like and really start focusing on how the direction of travel is not set in the same way for all organisations, recognising that for some, very little about where they carry out their work will change once offices re-open, but how they interact might pivot completely (or equally how maybe it won't). For businesses that are starting on any journey of change however, it is time to start discussing the how rather than the what, with emphasis on **how** this is going to be successfully implemented and managed to ensure the needs of all employees are met with support, encouragement and empathy whilst balancing that against the needs of the business.

Putting the negative impacts of Covid-19 to one side however, there is no doubt that the workplace industry has recognised that this is an opportune moment to help our clients implement positive change to their workplace. It is a time for businesses to reflect on what is important to them and decide what can be left behind in the pre-pandemic world. It is also a time for people to have their voices heard and their opinions listened to. I for one am proud to work in a role where I get to speak to the people on the ground and help them navigate their journey towards creating a better place for them to work. It is why this industry exists after all right? So let's seize this once in a lifetime opportunity and do something good with it.

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Get in touch if you'd like to know more about MCM's thoughts on this or understand further about how we are working with our clients to help guide them through a process that ultimately enables them to visualise and implement their workplace strategy of the future.

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“It is a time for businesses to reflect on what is important to them and decide what can be left behind in the pre-pandemic world.”

Realising the power of design to inspire and transform; releasing the potential of people wherever they are.

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If you want to know more, please get in touch.



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