

What workers want?



The future of the workplace and how employers need to adapt

Where lockdown rules mandated home working for millions of office-based workers, post lockdown freedoms are now putting employers firmly back in control of where their staff sit. But now that we've all discovered we can both meet and get stuff done without going anywhere near the office, how do business leaders decide what working arrangements will be most appropriate going into the future?

To understand the employee perspective, we spoke to over 1000 people across the UK who had moved from office to home working during lockdown. Though there was significant variation in the detail of personal preferences, it was clear from the

responses that there is an overwhelming desire for some degree of face-to-face contact. The future of work will never be fully remote, and, right now, employees need to get together to create, celebrate and collaborate more than ever.

The challenge for employers lies in finding a way forward that works for both the business and for the individuals involved.

In this guide, we share the report findings and look at practical steps business leaders can take to facilitate high quality in-person experiences that will help them attract and retain staff, drive productivity and look after their employees' mental health and wellbeing.



What workers want?

56%

Most people want to mix home and office

56% want to mix home and office working. Only 15% want to be in the office full time, while 28% want to be fully home-based.

34%

Social activities are important

34% of office workers are most looking forward to the return of office banter/chat, while 21% are looking forward to a company get together, followed by socialising with colleagues and simply working together in person.

94%

People want to spend time with colleagues

94% still want to meet up with colleagues but only 31% want to spend 3 days a week or more with them. 2 days a week is the most common preference (23%).

87%

Meeting colleagues in person is good for us

87% reported that meeting colleagues in person was important for their mental health, 82% for their productivity/performance, and 83% for their job satisfaction.

58%

Work is not just about work

58% met a good friend through work and 22% met a partner or spouse. 17% met an exercise/hobby buddy.



There are aspects of home working people will be glad to see the back of

People expecting to go back to working in the office most of the time will be most glad to see the back of ...

- Staring at the same four walls
- Online meetings
- Isolation
- Working without a dedicated work space

38%

The majority of employers are not prepared for hybrid arrangements

Only 38% say their employer has prepared for hybrid/flexible working, while 24% of employers have ensured there will be proper face to face time and 9% have formally changed contracts to reflect home working.

60%

A substantial proportion of people might consider leaving if employers don't provide what they want

60% of workers might consider leaving if they couldn't work from home or were forced to work in the office more than they wanted, while 33% might leave if the office was closed or they were forced to work from home more than they wanted. Over a quarter (26%) of 18-24 year olds would consider leaving if social events were scrapped.



The future of the workplace and how employers need to adapt

Many firms have made a massive investment in technology over the last 18 months or so; now it's time to think how best to bring a physical presence back into the mix.

With face-to-face contact crucial to mental health, performance and job satisfaction, as well as a major source of friends and partners, opportunities to work together in person are essential for a happy and high performing workforce.

- Getting together boosts individual morale and makes it far easier to build team spirit.
- It's also important in helping new recruits learn the ropes quickly and build rapport with colleagues.
- Office camaraderie is far more than superficial chat and banter; it provides the human connection we all need – and so plays a big role in motivating people and driving success.
- Yet it's in danger of fizzling out if get-togethers stay largely virtual.

And, of course, the best ideas often come out of the casual conversations that just don't happen when contact is only via a scheduled Zoom or Teams call.

But – as the research findings show – few people want to be back in the office full time. Some tasks are well-suited to home working, freedom from the commute is welcomed, and family responsibilities such as school pick-up can be far easier to manage. The answer lies in a flexible approach that combines the best of both virtual and face-to-face opportunities.

Heading into the future, this flexibility will be a key factor in recruitment and retention, not to mention productivity and employee happiness.

What employers need to do

Now is the perfect time to take a big picture look at how people work together and communicate across the organisation.

The more you can do to make people feel they belong and are part of both their immediate team and the wider organisation, the greater the dividends you'll see in terms of loyalty and motivation.

1/ Talk to your teams

Ask your people how they think they can work together most effectively now both virtual and in-person working is available. What options work best in different scenarios: an online meeting, a phone call, an email, an instant chat conversation, a face-to-face meeting, or simply working alongside each other and sharing ideas as you go?

Where people are working remotely for most or part of the week, they will want to be selective about how they spend their face-to-face time. In-person get togethers may be preferred for collaborative discussions, brainstorming and "bonding", leaving transactional business to be dealt with online.

Careful planning could well result in fewer but better meetings. Think how to best combine the right people, format, structure, and location to achieve specific objectives.

2/ Stay flexible

If possible, let people choose when they want to come in rather than specifying particular days. Most organisations no longer need anyone physically sitting in the office in order to guarantee cover. The more flexible you can be, the easier it is for individuals to arrange face-to-face time with colleagues, as well as to juggle personal and family responsibilities. And some people will still be cautious about being in a crowded space, and want to judge when to come in on a more ad hoc basis.

3/ Create a team meeting schedule

With flexible in office/remote working, it's even more important to schedule regular dates for team meetings. Particularly creative workshops. Without these, issues will fall under the radar and ideas get missed. Taking people out of the office can turn the meetings into a fun calendar highlight and ensure everyone stays focused. Choose a variety of venues to keep people interested, and follow up the meeting with a social lunch or dinner.

4/

Welcome people back in gently

Think how best to use welcome back social events to help ease people back in and see teams start to bond again. Mental health professionals are talking about 'return to work anxiety': though keen to meet up, many workers are nevertheless worried about coping in wider groups of people. And you may well have new team members nervous about meeting colleagues in person for the first time.

To give structure and prevent stress about having to 'make conversation', arrange team away days or overnight retreats with activities included. From chocolate making to crime scene investigation and nature discovery, there are plenty of options that will give people an unpressured and relaxed way to reconnect. For memorable and meaningful experiences the choice of location is important.

5/

Develop a regular social events calendar

Social events play an even more significant role in boosting team spirit when people aren't together daily. Staff will expect traditional summer and Christmas parties (here at Venuescanner, we're seeing a huge uptick in enquiries for summer work parties), but don't leave it at that. Find other opportunities to bring people together, whether to celebrate, say thank you, or simply have fun and enjoy each other's company.

Informal team nights out will be equally important. Without everyone being in the office, however, activities will need organising in advance. To be sure events will happen, you may want to find a (willing) volunteer to act as social secretary, making bookings and co-ordinating arrangements.

6/

Accept the next 12 months will be an experiment

Be prepared for some ideas not to work. Encourage input and suggestions from staff (you might want to schedule regular meetings for this!), and appoint a working group with a remit to make meetings and communications more effective.



Making the most of the opportunities

Whatever the big return to work looks like, our findings reinforce the importance of investing in getting teams back together. And with the use of both office space and external venues being re-imagined, there are new opportunities to introduce innovative ideas that your people will love.

1/ Rethink the office

A traditional office layout may no longer make sense if time in the office is mainly for meetings and collaboration. But make the office more like a home, and the resulting informal atmosphere will encourage the relaxed conversations that keep the wheels rolling and spark new ideas.

- Think lounge areas with comfortable (but still spine-friendly) seating and kitchens (complete with kitchen table).
- Where possible, put spare chairs close to desk workspaces, so it's easy for people to drop by for a quick chat without having to schedule a specific 'meeting'.
- Remember to plan for privacy, too. Not everything can be discussed in an open plan setting. And who wants to spend their day listening to other people's Teams or Zoom sessions?
- Those in the office are likely to be there with the goal of maximising contact with colleagues. Tasks that need focused concentration can be planned for home working.

2/ Adopt 'space thinking'

Today, there's no need for teams to be in the office for much of their regular work. Increasingly, organisations are seeing the potential of moving even day-to-day working into different spaces. A fresh environment can take people into a different mindset and bring new perspectives.

- A group of desk spaces or a meeting room at a local co-working centre could, for example, provide the perfect occasional team base for times when people simply want to work alongside each other.
- Or how about booking your own private bar and decamping for a brainstorm and beer? With brains in relaxed pub mode rather than rigid boardroom mode, who knows what ideas might emerge!
- Alternatively, you could start a meeting with a structured session in the office, but then move on to refreshments in a local creative space (think boats, museums, and even stylish private homes) to stimulate productive follow-up conversations.

How VenueScanner makes it easy to find and book team meetup venues

VenueScanner gives you access to a huge variety of venues across the UK, from ad hoc workspace to inspiring locations for meetings, parties, offsite activities and more. And the good news is, as more and more businesses rethink what to use their spaces for, there's more choice available to you!

Our quick and easy online search facility makes it simple to find the ideal venue for any occasion and book direct - or you can get in touch with our team of event organisers and let them help. They'll put together a shortlist of best options, help you choose and book, and recommend trusted suppliers to ensure you build your complete event to the right specifications.

The service is free,
with the lowest price
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time

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Or, do you have empty spaces you'd like to turn into venues? Speak to one of our advisers today to see how we can help you. Contact tilly@venuescanner.com

