

Creating a dynamic workforce

Empowering employees for
productivity and growth

Research report
March 2021



Contents

Foreward: Adapting to change	03
Reframing productivity	04
Where we are and where we're going	06
Meet the new, dynamic workforce	09
People and productivity	12
Where do people want to work?	13
How do people want to work?	16
When do people want to work?	24
What do people expect from work?	26
Getting it right vs. getting it wrong	28
Dynamic, people-focused and productive	30

Adapting to change

Flexible working has long been part of the working culture at O₂. Yet it had always been something that was optional. Many of my colleagues liked to work from home on a Friday. There were others who relished coming in to a quieter office to finish off the week. To allow the business to offer a flexible working culture meant enabling those people who wanted to work seamlessly across our offices, their homes, or any location of their choice.

In March 2020, all that changed. Being able to work remotely was no longer a choice. It was a necessity.

The pandemic represents the biggest turning point in how we view work. Not just our workplaces but also our workforces.

The findings in this report demonstrate just how dramatically needs and expectations have changed. Understanding the seven new workplace personas revealed here can help us adapt to change. Because people are one of the fundamental drivers of productivity, responding to their needs and expectations could be the difference between growth and stagnation.

The research certainly resonates with the challenges we've been addressing over the last 12 months at O₂. As we plan for reopening – and as we gain better insights into the changing needs of our workforce – it has reinforced the importance of putting people at the centre of all our business decisions.

We're moving into an era defined by 'dynamic working'. I hope you find this research useful as you prepare to adapt for future prosperity.



Jo Bertram
Managing Director, O₂ Business



Fieldwork for the research

Research based on responses from 2099 'workers' – UK adults that had been previously desk-based in part- or full-time work at companies with over 250 employees in a variety of sectors. All respondents were able to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Fieldwork took place between the 7–17 of January 2021 during a third period of national lockdown in the UK.

Reframing productivity

There has never been a greater need to focus on productivity and seize opportunities for each organisation's definition of success.

Within the space of 12 months, our world was turned upside down. The global pandemic, Brexit and the economic fallout of both forced people and organisations to adapt quickly. UK organisations are now operating in an environment in which the economy has suffered a significant decline. According to Office for National Statistics (ONS) data for 2020, the UK economy shrank almost 10% – “more than twice the previous largest annual fall on record.”

However, there are signs of optimism. Reporting on its decision to hold interest rates on 4 February 2021, the Bank of England's Monetary Policy

Committee said the economy was “projected to recover rapidly towards pre-COVID levels over 2021.” This came at the same time that the UK Government announced a timetable for the reopening of the country following the prolonged series of lockdowns.

UK organisations will be critical to the success of this latest transition. Yet shifting out of ‘survival mode’ towards sustainable operations could depend on lessons learned. The ‘new normal’ seems to be defined by adaptability. To rapid new Government policies. To different trading arrangements. And to different ways of working.



Understanding what motivates people is crucial to understanding how to boost productivity.

Since the first lockdown in March 2020, people's expectations of work have changed, with many desk-based office workers finding themselves working remotely for the first time, finding the line between work and life becoming very blurred. Employees discovered they were productive in a myriad of ways and at different times of the day. Some people were quick to adapt to home working. Others took more time. Digital collaboration worked seamlessly for some groups and less so for others.

So what did we learn about people and productivity?

This research builds on our [Flexible Future of Work report](#) published in May of 2020. We wanted to understand in greater depth how people now want to work and how this could impact productivity. It focuses on employee behaviours, needs and expectations. And identifies the working patterns and behaviours that are reframing how to boost productivity.

The research clarifies the differences in employee expectations before and after the pandemic. It provides evidence on how their attitudes to work (and their employers) have changed. It presents seven new workforce personas for UK organisations to consider. And it shows us that unless employers listen to their people – and their individual needs – they risk compromising their own future by passing up opportunities to increase productivity at a time when the economic outlook is still volatile.

The research is based on interviews with 2099 UK adults that were previously desk-based in part- or full-time work in organisations with more than 250 employees across a range of public and private sectors. This report analyses the results and highlights some of the biggest implications for UK organisations as we prepare to reopen the country.



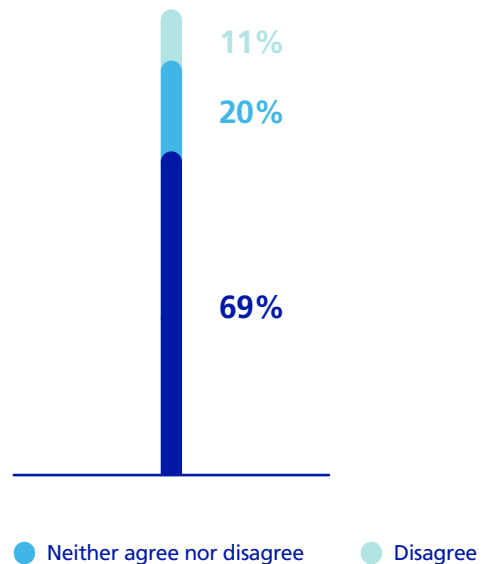
Where we are and where we're going

UK organisations have made huge investments just to 'keep the lights on' throughout the pandemic. They have had to change the way they interact with their customers and suppliers. Professional services organisations have shifted huge numbers of employees online in very little time. And some organisations have been forced to close temporarily and adapt staff roles in accordance.

Despite the constant state of flux since March 2020, two thirds (69%) of employees said their organisation had supported them well.

Many organisations prioritised measures that would allow people to do their jobs. In some cases, that was equipment to work from home or organising weekly Microsoft Teams meetings to stay in touch. In others, it was changing the emphasis on how people were managed.

Agreement that 'My organisation has supported me well during the COVID-19 pandemic'



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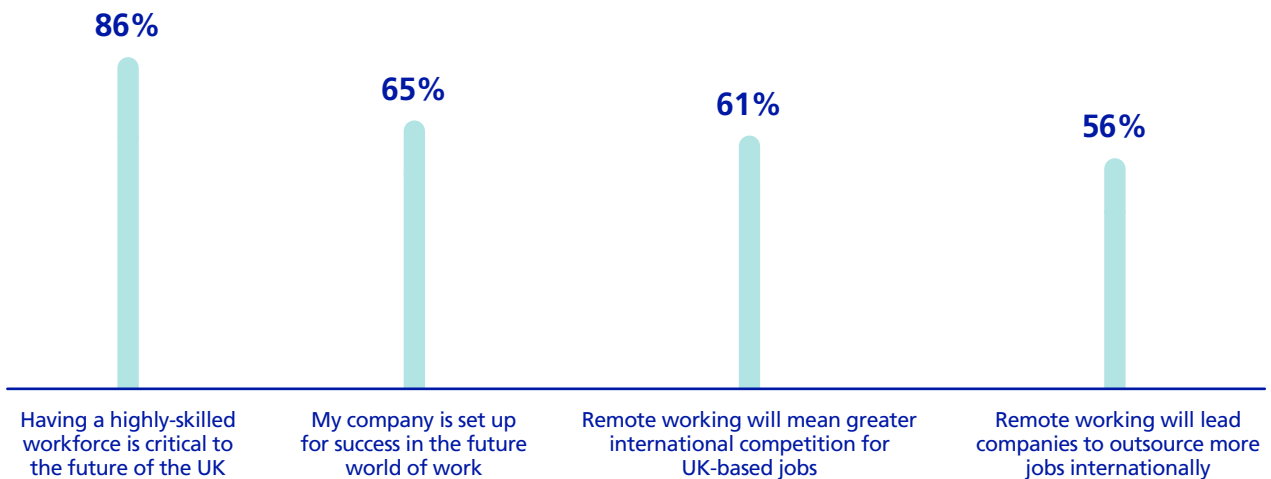
Our priorities as a senior leadership team quickly narrowed to focus on employee safety, looking after customers, and mental health.

Andy Murdoch, Group Director of Operations, Hitachi Capital

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However, the research also indicates that this is a short-term position. Only 65% believe that their organisations are set up for success in the future world of work.

Thinking ahead to 2024, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?



If only two thirds of the workforce believe their organisations are ready for the future, this suggests many may struggle and the hopes of a swift economic recovery could be dashed.

Some organisations have already stated clear positions on where and how their employees should work. At one end of the spectrum, Goldman Sachs¹ have stated they will expect all employees to be back in the office five days a week. Whereas Twitter² are allowing staff to work from home 'forever'. Meanwhile, for a lot of organisations, the wider debate about the best approach continues.

This is important because it is about what we expect of people 'at work' from here on in. If our goal is to promote and encourage productivity, can there be a one-size-fits-all approach to working anymore? For example, the research shows that 32% of people never want to work in an office again. But then 28% would only work for a company that has an office.



When we were told to work from home at the very start of the pandemic it was more of a novelty and we thought it wouldn't last very long. However, since we are now in our third lockdown, working remotely is now the new normal and I don't think it can ever return to the way it was.

Research interviewee

¹ www.bbc.co.uk
² www.bbc.co.uk

In the same way that organisations had to rapidly adapt, so too did employees. They realised they could work in a different way to before. In many cases, people adapted how they worked around what else was important in their lives – their families, their physical health and their mental wellbeing.

This shift has been fundamental.

To boost productivity and in turn, economic success, employers need to understand what has changed. Lifestyle choices, work preferences and stages of life can all have an influence on what employees want from work. Recognising the diverse nature of the workforce and their specific needs will help people do their jobs as effectively as possible.

These new employee expectations will have an impact on where people work, how they work and the hours they work.

And the choice is not just a binary choice of office or home, but allows choice of location related to project and personal needs which is typically referred to as hybrid. At the same time, and more importantly, **a dynamic workforce is emerging.**

One that allows people to be their whole selves by valuing what motivates different types of people. Creating a culture and support structure that enables everyone to perform as effectively as possible. The research identifies seven new workforce personas that make up the dynamic workforce. Each one has their own role to play in boosting productivity at an individual, team and organisational level.



Meet the new, dynamic workforce

A dynamic workforce is exactly what it says it is. Adaptable. Agile. Flexible. In short, it is a collective that is prepared for change. It combines all the attributes of remote and flexible working.

Despite the ruptures of previous months, this form of workforce has the potential to be more productive than before. Being able to respond to change – whether small or significant – is an asset. People who can continue to work effectively while competitors' or customer and citizen needs change around them will be the most successful.

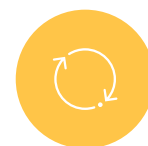
But who are these people and what do they want out of work?

The research points to seven different workforce personas, combined into three distinct groups.

These personas are useful in defining what people will need to be productive over the long term. Identifying what enables these personas to bring their 'whole selves' to work will give employers the basis to meet their expectations and earn their productivity in return. In some cases that might be a huge shift away from 'presenteeism' – always being there – and focusing instead on outputs. In other cases, it is about trusting people to decide when and how they will do their best work – whether that is in the office or not.



Office Cravers



Mixers



Home Dwellers

Introducing the seven employee personas

The responses to research questions about work preferences identified what the workplace means to different people.

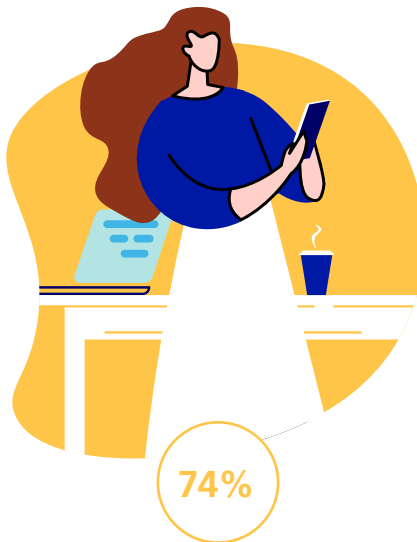
Office Cravers

Want to be back in the office permanently...



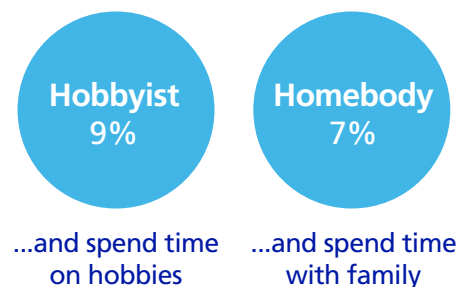
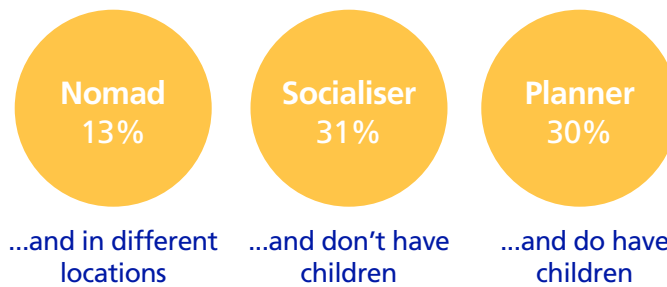
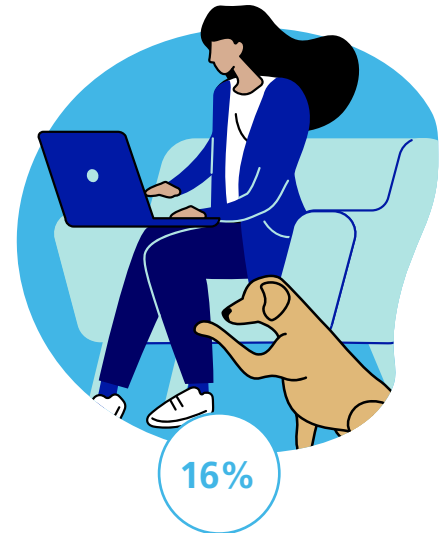
Mixers

Want to work in the office*, from home and elsewhere...



Home Dwellers

Want to work from home permanently...



*32% of all respondents would prefer not to work in the office again. Half of these (16%) make up the Home Dweller groups, and the other half (16%) are found in the Mixer groups.

Office Cravers

At one end of the scale are the Office Cravers. People who enjoy life in the office and look forward to making it their main place of work again.

Within this group are the:

Career Starters: These are typically junior members of staff – only 57% of whom say they are satisfied with their work-life balance now, compared to 77% before the pandemic. As many as two in three say they are missing the social life of the office.

Command and Controllers: These were likely to be older employees and often more senior. Almost half (45%) say they dislike technology and only use it when necessary for work.

Mixers

The majority of employees can be classified as Mixers. These people miss some aspects of office life, like socialising with colleagues, but also appreciate the freedom to work remotely.

However, there are three very different personas within this category:

Nomads: Three in five Nomads prefer an equal mix of office and remote working and are often motivated by working in different locations including customer sites, coffee shops and holiday homes, for example.

Socialisers: They are more likely to want to work remotely (33%) to allow time for socialising with friends and family outside of work, but benefit from the engagement and interactions with colleagues that the traditional office offers.

Planners: Almost three quarters (72%) of Planners want to continue having a choice over whether they go into an office for specific purposes, or work at home to better manage family life.

Home Dwellers

At the opposite end of the spectrum to Office Cravers are Home Dwellers. Having proved it's possible, these employees want to work remotely on a permanent basis. In most cases, this is because they want to keep the control they have gained over balancing work, personal interests/hobbies and family life.

This category divides into two further personas:

Hobbyists: Four in five (80%) are satisfied with their work-life balance right now, compared to just 53% before the pandemic.

Homebodies: An even higher percentage – 84% – are satisfied with their work-life balance right now.

What can these personas and their preferences tell us about how to shape our organisations to improve productivity?

People and productivity

The seven personas identified by the research represent real people. Real people affect productivity. Responding to their (new) needs can transform a tough economic situation into a more favourable one.

It comes down to putting in place the tools, technologies, processes and support to help people work in the best way suited to them, and allow them to be their most effective. Gone are the days when people had to conform to 'the organisation'. Today, an organisation must fit around its people.

Every organisation is different so there is no 'one size fits all' model for how to do this. However, the research shows that UK workforces can identify ways to be more productive through a better understanding of their people by asking some fundamental questions:

Where do people want to work?

How do they want to work?

When do they want to work?

What do they expect from work?



People and productivity

Where do people want to work?

The pandemic forced people to work from home. When this first happened, IT teams were asked to get people set up so they could keep working.

These ‘solutions’ were implemented quickly and often without the luxury of planning. Some were more complex than others. Knowledge workers may have been able to access the usual desktop software via a secure Virtual Private Network (VPN) or remote log-in. Others were already using cloud software. Meanwhile some people faced problems logging in to enterprise applications that weren’t set up to allow for remote access.

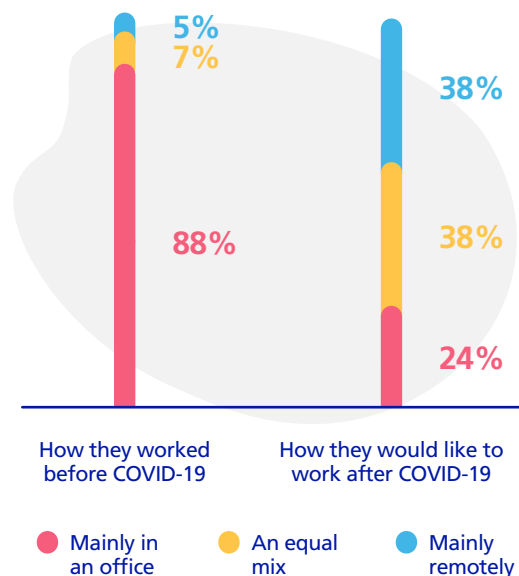
Yet one thing was clear from the evidence of those organisations who adapted relatively well. The technology already existed to connect people at home to the things they needed to be able to work. This step defined work as an activity, rather than a place where people had to go.

So why wasn’t there a greater prevalence of remote working before the pandemic?

We know there was a trend towards flexible working. However, the research shows that a huge 88% of people were mainly working in offices before the pandemic. Yet after COVID-19, people say they would prefer to work at home (38%) or a mix of home and office (38%). Using this information, UK organisations have an opportunity to evaluate how people performed/are performing and take positive lessons forward by building new sustainable models to further boost individual and team productivity.

ell. **76% of people would prefer a level of location flexibility post pandemic**

Typical working location before COVID-19 vs. where they would like to work after the pandemic



There are many nuances in these lessons. For example, some people found that the work devices, solutions and tools that had been provided by their organisation were less effective than their own personal devices or consumer solutions when working away from the office. This increased the amount of ‘shadow IT’ as employees looked to use solutions to fill gaps not currently provided by IT departments. This increased security risks for organisations. In turn, this has led to the need for new remote working policies and procedures, and a review of which tools are needed to support employees working away from the office.

Over the long term, the new requirements for technology, policies and procedures could influence the organisation as a whole. Not just to ensure cyber security and compliance but also as a requisite for the hiring process.



Teams and Zoom used to be products that were just added on to a typical office setup, then they became fundamental to how we all work – and new features and functionality were rolled out. We need to ensure employees are fully trained on these, to drive usage and adoption, and help them do their job properly.

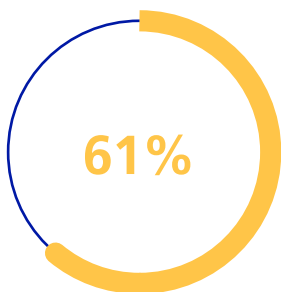
Karl Liriano, Head of Innovation, O₂ Business



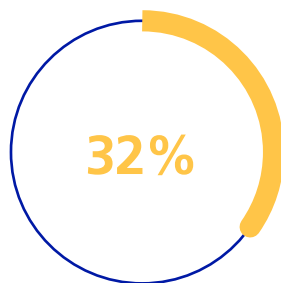
With this in mind, the research shows that now is the moment to evaluate where people want to work. This needs a review of the hardware and software to support this development. Including how choices will affect security, risk and hiring in addition to providing people with what they need to do their jobs to the best of their ability.

Three in five (61%) of people say that remote working should be the new default. And almost a third (32%) say they never want to work in an office again.

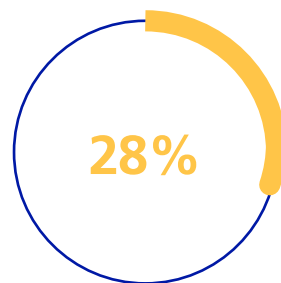
Do you agree with the following statements?



Remote working should be the new default



I never want to work in an office again



I would only work for a company that has an office that I can work in (i.e. I'm not forced to work from home)

In many cases this comes from suddenly finding they don't have to go to an office to do their job. As one employee put it, "Realising, after years of envying people who can do their jobs anywhere, that I can now do mine anywhere too."

These altered expectations have ramifications for the entire organisation. So Operations, HR and IT need to work together before agreeing a company position. The outcome of these agreements should shape a plan that supports all employees while maximising the output of the overall workforce. It's no good Ops setting a new way of working that HR can't get buy in for. Or that IT can't support. Similarly, IT can't just give people one type of technology and expect them to operate effectively or happily in different locations without consideration of those unique needs. Instead of IT, HR or Ops-led propositions, these need to become employee-led propositions.

Running employee surveys is one way to uncover the needs of employees. The personas in the research provide a basis on which to understand the drivers – and blockers – of productivity at the organisational level. In one example, Hitachi Capital discovered only 22 of its 1600 employees required a desk to work at home as their people had their own home set up and were able to take other equipment from the office during lockdown. This led to a rethink of why people were expected to come into the office and how the workplace could be remodelled to meet different needs.

“

We've properly listened to our staff and really had much deeper interactions with them.

David Clarke, Director of Services, RNIB

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32% say they never want to work in an office again



People and productivity

How do people want to work?

The way work happened changed almost instantly after the first lockdown. No more so than in terms of formal and informal engagement between people. The technology they are using. And the physical workspace they find themselves in.

Engagement

The research highlights a clear conundrum for employers. There is no consensus as to how employees want to interact with each other. More than half (53%) say they prefer remote catch-up meetings. Yet, while 41% prefer remote project meetings via video calls, more than a quarter (27%) prefer these to take place face to face.

It's the same for strategy meetings. People are completely split on their preference for interactive sessions such as training or brainstorming. This demonstrates there is still no standard way

to cater to all preferences. Understanding the differences between these engagements – and variety of needs of the people involved – will help employers and managers design around them to support more productive outcomes. For some it might be that their organisation lacks appropriate digital tools, or that employees don't know how to use them effectively – both of which can be easily remedied. But for others it is the energy and enthusiasm they feel when face to face, believing that cannot currently be captured in an online experience.

Preference for engaging remotely or face-to-face for different work activities after COVID-19



Those that have applied for a job in the last three months are much more likely to want to hold whole office parties remotely (24% vs. 6%)

The social connection ‘at work’ clearly remains very important. The majority of people want team socials and office parties to take place in person. But general social interaction is also more important to some personas.

Diving into the research, the findings show that almost four in five (69%) of career starters miss catching up with their colleagues. This could be because being together in an office makes it easier to ask questions or to watch and hear how more experienced colleagues operate. This is just one example of the kind of empathy managers need to have with their people. A younger colleague and an older, more traditional employee may work much better together with regular face-to-face meetings and opportunities to talk. Mothers and fathers of young families may prefer to schedule calls around the day’s school runs or when their children are sleeping.



69% of career starters miss catching up with their colleagues

RNIB employees from all over the country were given access to Microsoft Teams and more meetings scheduled between regional employees. People have said they feel more included in decisions. They also say they have more opportunity to engage and contribute instead of missing out because of the time it would have taken to commute to HQ.



When you’ve got most of your staff in London, your staff outside of London can feel a bit unloved. People feel more equal now, because nobody’s anywhere.

Ros Parker, Director of People and Organisational Transformation, RNIB



Yet the research shows that almost half of people (45%) don't have access to video conferencing facilities. This negatively impacts collaboration. But it also affects specific groups of people more than others. Early career colleagues or new starters may not have had the face-to-face interaction since March 2020 to get to know their colleagues. Understanding other people's ways of working teaches you how to engage with them on a one-to-one level. In turn, this influences how productive people are when working together.



45% of people still don't have access to video conferencing facilities

Understanding the scope of engagement preferences not only helps shape the way individuals work but also the work day or work week for the overall team. By building clear expectations of team members from their own preferences, it becomes easier to establish the trust that everyone is doing their jobs. This is essential to realising the productivity gains of a dynamic workforce.

A dynamic workforce is also more likely to be a diverse workforce. Establishing a way to respond to individual needs makes the organisation more open to employees of all kinds.

With many organisations committing to diversity, equality and inclusion policies, the ability to encourage job applications from people living with a disability and/or less likely to be able to travel can help those organisations make good on their promises. People with different backgrounds and experiences also bring a wider range of skills into the organisation and this can have an impact on productivity.

Being able to work remotely also makes the 'workplace' more inclusive for those who can't easily commute into a central city location. Removing several hours of commuting time could improve talent retention as people gain back those hours they would usually use just getting to work (the Hobbyists, for example).

Creating a level playing field is also about the technology available to people in the office and those in another location.



Technology

The research shows that some organisations have been able to adapt well to the restrictions in place since March 2020. This may be because of the nature of the work. It may also be because those organisations were already set up for home working. Yet even these organisations may be unprepared for the needs of a dynamic workforce.

To do this, organisations need to evaluate whether the hardware, software and supporting infrastructure they have are designed to maximise the work of people both in and out of the office. At the same time.

Giving people the devices, access to apps and connectivity they need to be productive is one thing. They also need to know how to use them. Especially as these will help dictate how people work together. There needs to be consideration in the ways in which collaboration of office and remote colleagues can be performed effectively – gone are the days of forgetting about the people on the phone when the majority of people may have been in an office meeting room.

The new workplace etiquette is often enabled by technology choices. For example, the way that the ‘hand up’ (ask a question vs. raise an objection) or chat function (extra resources vs. way to engage for people in noisy environments) are used on video calls. And new features are being added regularly to collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams.



57% of people have a reliable internet connection

It’s not just the core technologies that play a part in maintaining productivity. The disparity between certain people in terms of peripheral accessories can also make a big difference. On the one hand there is the older member of staff working from a spare room with a desk, video lights, quality headset, ergonomic chair, laptop stand and second screen. On the other is the junior member of staff working from the sofa of a shared apartment, with an old laptop and the earphones they got with their own smartphone. The latter is unlikely to be able to work at their best for long.

NHS England had plenty of discussions about what employees might need above and beyond a laptop.



We very definitely see that it is a corporate responsibility to provide those things and I would say a mouse and a keyboard, and a screen isn’t a ‘peripheral’, that it’s part of the core IT offer. While you could argue people could work on a laptop, from a health and safety view you can’t.

Mark Blakeman, Director of Corporate Operations, NHS England and NHS Improvement



The majority of people say they have the technology they need to meet their immediate needs. However, the research also shows that they may not be set up to be productive over the long term:

Access

Two in five say they still don't have access to all the relevant work systems.

Connectivity

Only 57% have a reliable internet connection, which is crucial to working from home all day.

Devices

Almost a third (31%) say they still don't have a laptop or desktop computer provided by their organisation.

Equipment

The majority don't have a proper desk to work from at home.

Support

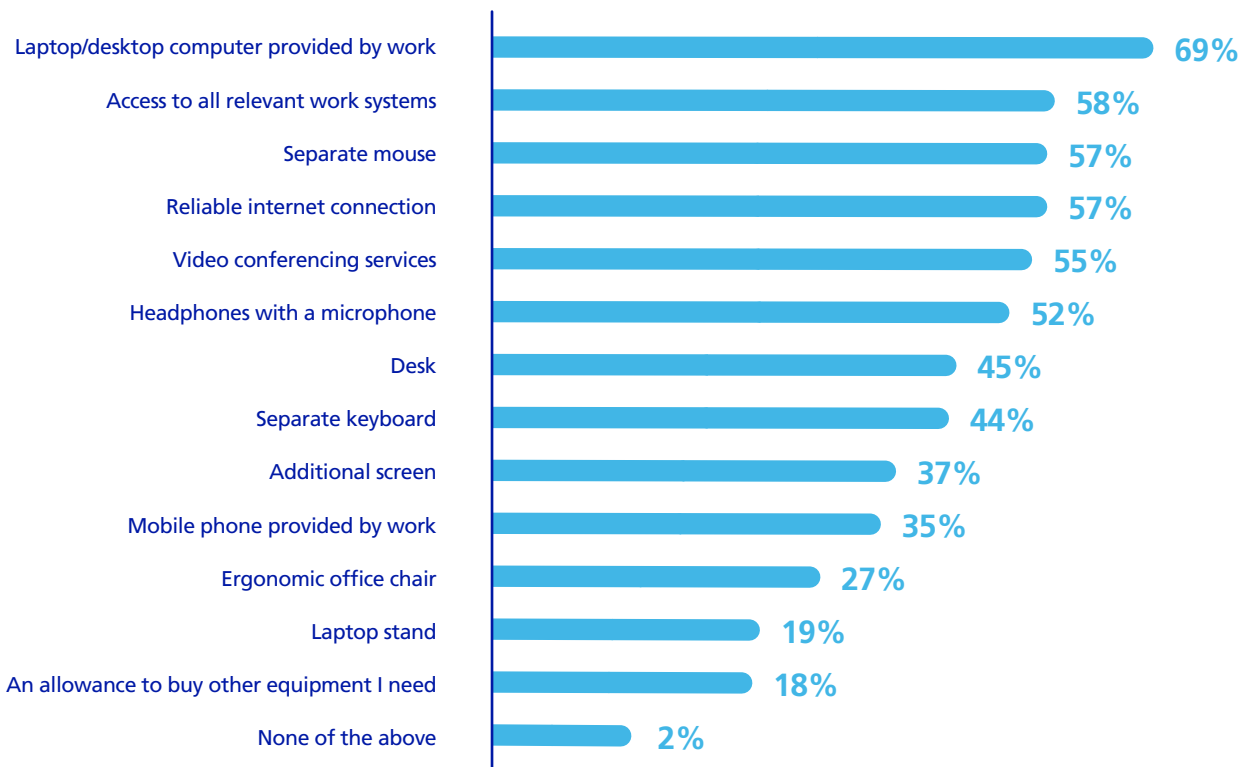
Only a quarter (27%) have an ergonomic chair to prevent back and neck issues while working.

These are all mainstays of your typical office and essential to maintaining (let alone boosting) productivity.

Disparities in occupational health standards have an impact on how effective people are in both the short and long term. People with neck and back pain will find it harder to concentrate and will need to take more breaks. They are also likely to be more frustrated with their employer and could look elsewhere for employment.

The lesson here is that there isn't a level playing field. Employers must continue assessing what people are working with to support individual work choices. Instead of looking at these in isolation, they must be considered from end to end in the same way offices are designed to stimulate productivity. And there is still some debate about who pays for what.

Which of the following do you have access to whilst working from home?

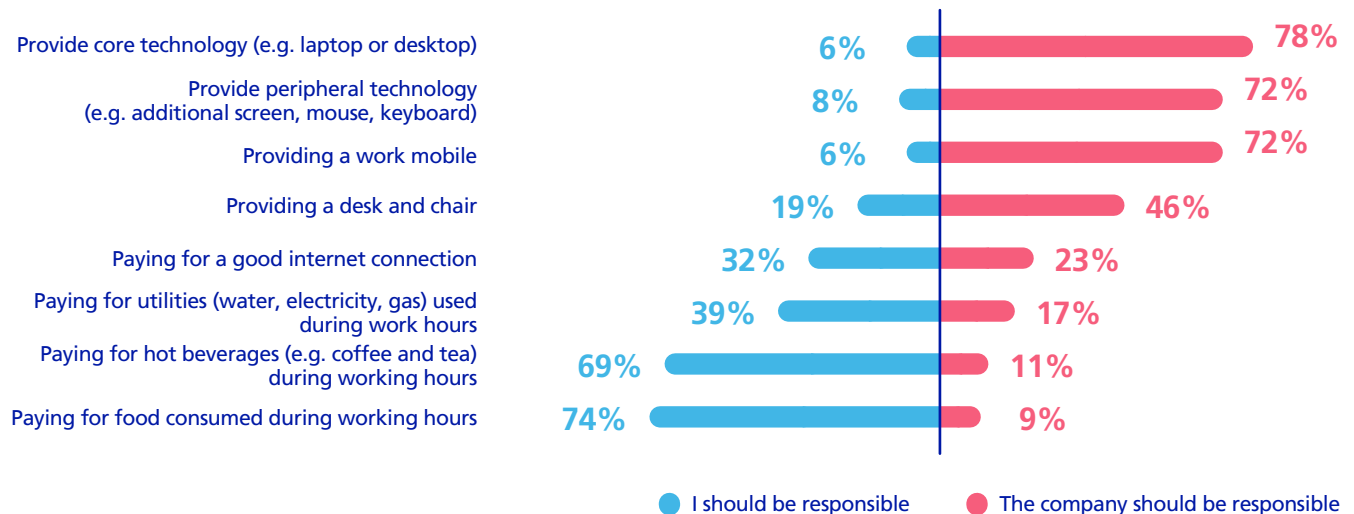


Workplace technology has always been a factor in employees’ productivity. In the past, many people would simply accept what their employers provided. A few individuals might ‘make a scene’ and demand something different. But by and large, the company’s IT policy was sacrosanct. Then people started using their own laptops and tablets, as well as digital tools and solutions that helped them do the work they needed in a more effective manner. The rise of shadow IT came from people being frustrated by what was on offer from the organisation. Some workplaces

have embraced Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policies and guidelines to protect corporate networks from the risks of all these different personal devices. Further review needs to be carried out to ensure the right tools are in place for people to work at whatever time and location they choose.

Workers believe that their employer should provide core and peripheral tech, as well as a work phone – but are split about who is responsible for a good internet connection.

Responsibility for the providing or paying for work-related or adjacent items



£ C-suite are more likely to feel that the company should be responsible for paying for a good internet connection (36%)

The impact of the pandemic encouraged NHS England to allow staff to use their own devices. Supported by secure access to the systems and applications they need to be productive, this has helped give people more control over how they work right now but also into the future.

“Our long-term aim is to support people who want to bring their own device or customise their own device. We see self-service as a key part of this, particularly when we move to the cloud.”

Mark Blakeman, Director of Corporate Operations, NHS England and NHS Improvement



Today's employees expect work technology to function as well as the technology they use at home. Especially since so many people have been using the two side by side. This represents an opportunity for HR and IT departments to support each other on remuneration, benefits and retention. And this could be particularly relevant for bringing certain personas into the workforce.

What is clear is that employees expect their employers to provide baseline capabilities. Around three quarters want employers to provide a laptop (78%), peripheral technology (72%) and mobile phones (72%). Other items that are less distinct from home life – such as chairs or contributions to household bills – could become discretionary items in benefits packages. Even down to smaller things like paying for food and drink consumed during work hours.

Who should pay for internet connectivity is more ambiguous. Paying for 'good' internet connection will mean people can do the work (or make regular video calls) without service interruptions. Especially if other householders are using broadband for work or children are gaming or watching on-demand TV services. Here, there are options for employers to explore mobile options like 4G or 5G to separate the costs of connectivity.

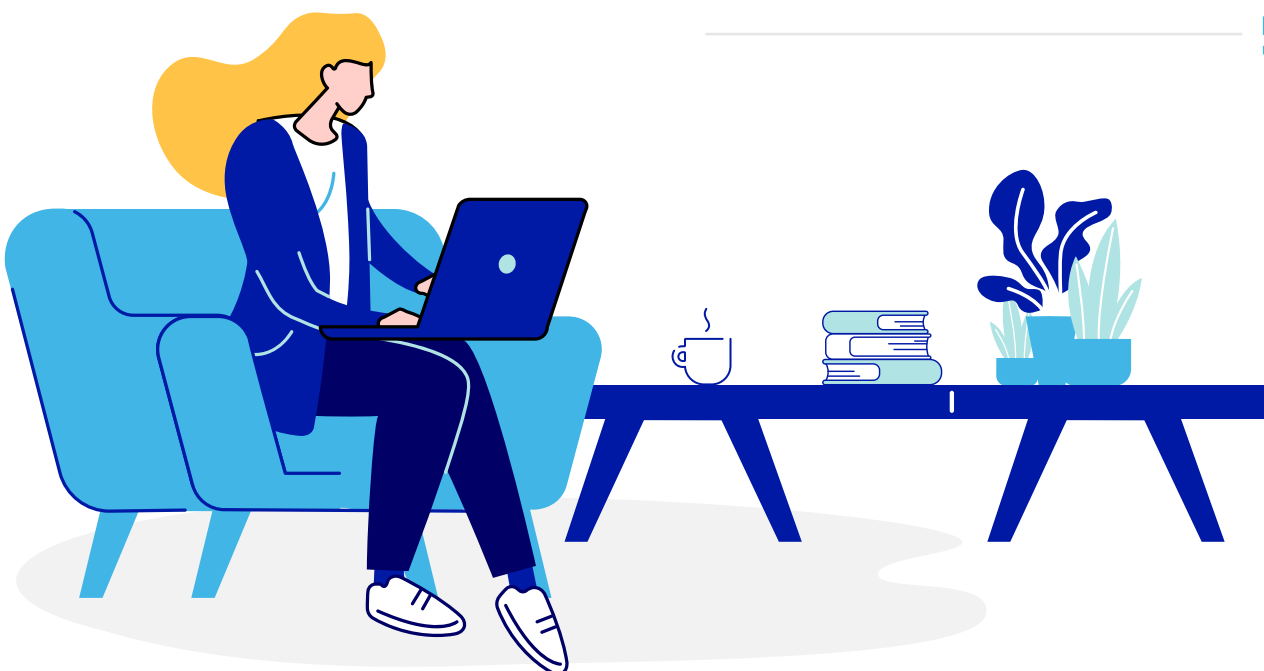
Levelling up these essential elements means that there is no disparity between individuals working at home, on the move or in the office. As a result, physical workspaces can be repurposed to suit the new organisational working styles.

The RNIB faced the dilemma of how to help employees with connectivity costs. As a registered charity, the RNIB needed to stay on top of costs – especially when home broadband would be used for other things. At the same time, the organisation needed to support its workforce and keep people happy. So, they chose to explore options for 4G or 5G connectivity just for work.



We've had many conversations about covering the cost of home broadband, or whether we should provide something a bit more flexible.

Ros Parker, Director of People and Organisational Transformation, RNIB



Physical work spaces

The seven different workforce personas demand different things from offices or HQs.

Career Starters or Command and Controllers much prefer to work in the office. So organisations may still need to provide desk space and meeting rooms for functional, day-to-day activities.

Some people will come into the office once or twice a week. They may need collaboration spaces to explore ideas with the wider team before going back home to work on their respective details. Equipping these spaces to bring in people who live/work much further away or who can't travel will also be important.

Those who rarely come in to the office may only do so for big gatherings or social functions. This may require auditorium-size spaces that can accommodate large groups.

Understanding the makeup of the organisation, the mix of personas and their needs will help determine the optimum physical estate and the technology requirements. Supporting processes will depend on these choices too, such as when the IT Service Desk, building facilities management or even air conditioning is available.

Simply getting rid of buildings could save costs, but what about future needs? Would smaller, more geographically-distributed hubs provide a better option than a single large HQ? How will people collaborate if there is nowhere for them to gather? What about the people who only function well in an office? How can you ensure there is some scalability as your organisation evolves? These and many other questions need answering before any decisions are made.

With seven different personas to take into consideration, this may seem like a daunting task. However, it's possible to keep it simple by addressing the individual needs of all seven personas without adding unnecessary complexity to the overall solution that is required.



People and productivity

When do people want to work?

Despite the increasing trend towards flexible working pre-pandemic, there is now a clear demand for either fully or semi-flexible working hours in the near future. Just 8% of people were able to work completely flexibly before March 2020. Now, more than a quarter (27%) say they want this to be their regular work pattern.

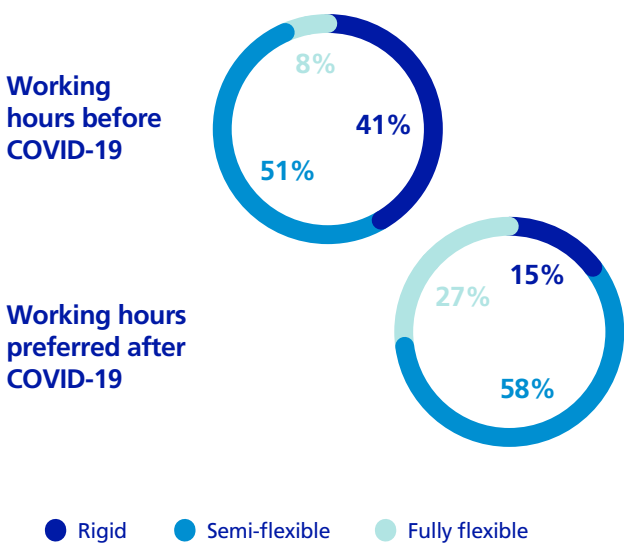
In total, 85% want some form of flexibility over the hours they work.

This has significant implications for those employers who previously demanded a high degree of ‘presenteeism’. It shows a need for cultural change, and can also help in making preparations for how work spaces and technologies will need to adapt for your own workforce.

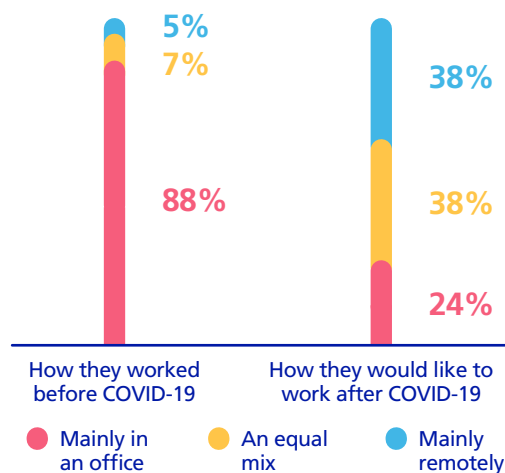
For example, Saint-Gobain Building Distribution UK (SGBD) surveyed its colleagues based in the head office about how they would like to work when the country reopened. It then used these preferences to help prepare a plan and clearly communicated how it was going to support colleagues. This concluded in a reduction of building space with a hybrid working model. This included giving those who needed to return

to the office a dedicated desk and offering hybrid colleagues days when they can come in for operational efficiency and to make best use of space.

This is important. If everyone is allowed to pick and choose when they come in to the office, it can cripple the support systems in place. Whether that is everyone arriving at 9am and having to queue to get past security or a lack of desks for all the extra people. Booking systems – many of which were already in place for meeting rooms – could be extended to ‘free’ desks so there is no negative impact on productivity when people want to come in. Clear policies and expectations will help ensure this can be managed effectively.



Typical working location before COVID-19 vs. where they would like to work after the pandemic





Work is a partnership... it's about looking after people and treating one another as we would like to be treated ourselves, as genuine colleagues on a journey together with clear accountability and responsibility and all underpinned by a clear Business Purpose and set of values.

Peter Briggs, Business Transformation Director, Saint-Gobain Building Distribution



SGBD had already invested in a new Voice over IP telephone system in 2018/19 in order to best serve customer requirements. This really came into its own during the pandemic as it allowed the businesses to respond dynamically to a fast changing landscape and route calls to different locations, including home via softphones, depending on where colleagues were able to work safely and still operate the business effectively. SGBD also sped up its roll out of Microsoft teams by almost 6 months to give colleagues a consistent channel for remote working.

Flexible work hours have clear advantages. If people choose not to go into the office then they save commuting time, especially during rush hour. This might provide that extra half an hour to go for a walk or get some exercise. And these happier, healthier employees are more likely to be productive. Online collaboration tools can help them share and work on content together at different times depending on their preferred working hours.

Yet flexible hours also raise questions for organisations. For instance, should the IT Support Desk opening hours be extended earlier or later? Is it cost-effective to open offices seven days a week? How does keeping office space available 24/7/365 – and the subsequent power use – affect sustainability targets? What technology needs to be invested in to manage people and office resources most effectively?



85% want some form of flexibility over the hours they work

Clearly there must be a balance between employee demands and employer requirements. Still, the research demonstrates how individuals will perform best when their work environment is optimised around their preferences.

People and productivity

What do people expect from work?

The research tells us how employee expectations have changed. Especially in terms of where, how and when people would prefer to work. It also highlights the impact these wider factors have on productivity.

Yet individual factors are just as important to productivity. People who are dissatisfied are less likely to work hard (or harder when required). They are also likely to voice their frustrations, and this can undermine morale.

The survey asked people what – if anything – they felt they had missed out on from their employers due to COVID-19.



33% feel that they have missed out on training or skills development

A third of people (33%) feel they missed out on training or skills development during the pandemic. More than one in five (21%) haven't received the coaching or mentoring that is so often important for embedding skills or helping people 'climb the ladder'. And roughly the same number say they have missed strong leadership from their manager.

Uncertainty has a lot to answer for. And perhaps managers or HR departments have been busy fighting other fires. Perhaps there was an expectation that these issues would be addressed once everyone returned to the office.

However, the research tells a different story. Many people don't want a wholesale return to the office and the future dynamic workforce is likely to be spread between locations. So organisations may need to rethink how they measure and manage elements of the workplace.

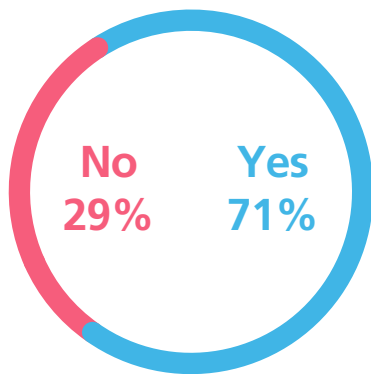
For example:

- How to appraise people without seeing them 'at work' each day?
- How to identify and address skills gaps when people are 'just getting on with the job'?
- Who could benefit from coaching or mentoring compared to others on the team?
- What management style works best now that people are based in multiple locations?

Focusing on training in particular, almost a third of people (29%) say they aren't getting what they need to develop at work. This is particularly prevalent among junior management (34%) and junior team members (34%) who would normally be considered worth investing in as future leaders or long-standing employees.

A lack of skills can be the difference between operating a barely-functioning organisation and one that is built for sustainable growth.

Do you feel that your organisation is providing you with the necessary training and support to develop the skills you need for the future?



29% are not getting what they need to develop at work



Junior management and team members are most likely to feel that they are not provided with the necessary training and support (both 34%)

Presenteeism and onboarding

The RNIB has looked into training programmes that help managers consider outputs rather than presenteeism. Especially when appraising staff and completing reviews. For many managers this will be a new way of thinking, but it has the potential to level things up so all employees – regardless of location – receive the same oversight.

Hitachi Capital designed its new employee onboarding process. By creating dedicated virtual classrooms, new employees reported they had better dialogue with managers. They also said that this approach encouraged the leadership to take more time to listen to their concerns.



Getting it right vs. getting it wrong

As the research clearly shows, where people work, how people work, when people work and what people get from work can positively or negatively affect productivity.

The potential productivity gains

Almost half of employees (48%) say that if their employer supported their preferred way of working they would be even more productive.

This is significant. The ability to positively affect the productivity of nearly half the workforce could become a competitive differentiator. Especially if the organisation can calculate the financial impact of every 1% increase in output.

Increased productivity can lead to delivering better citizen and customer services, innovation, increased profitability and efficiencies, and market growth. And the opposite is just as valid.



The issues with inaction

Good people who work hard aren't always easy to find. The time and money invested in training. Offering the best tools to do the job. Making sure people feel valued at work. They all pay dividends in productivity. Yet the research shows some employers have failed to do that – so it's not surprising that some people are leaving to find jobs elsewhere.

When those who had applied for another job were asked the reasons, remuneration was the number one factor (33%). However, a close second was the want or need for a lifestyle change that the employer couldn't or wouldn't accommodate (26%). Dissatisfaction (with the organisation or with the role) is another big reason to change roles. Given the evidence that many employers haven't provided what people expect from work, this is no surprise. Although one revelation is that 16% of people specifically cited the poor provision of technology as a reason why they had looked to move elsewhere.

Understanding the seven new workforce personas is crucial here. Different people have different needs. If employers fail to grasp this then they risk not only a loss of previously hard-won employee engagement but a loss of good people, full stop.

The impact of low engagement, dissatisfaction and staff attrition is felt on the bottom line. Whether it is a lack of training leading to skills gaps, employees who are less inclined to do their jobs well or frustrated staff who decide to leave. All these scenarios mean that there's a negative impact on productivity.

A dynamic workforce with multiple personas needs flexible working. Not just in terms of hours or location but also in terms of the tools, training and management styles on offer. Especially when the research shows that not only have 22% of people applied for a new job in the previous three months but that a further 21% would also like to move on.



26% of people who had applied for a new job stated their employer being unable to accommodate a needed or wanted lifestyle change was a contributing factor



Dynamic, people-focused and productive

What does all this evidence mean for the productivity of UK organisations and a post-pandemic recovery?

1

Firstly, that a dynamic workforce of seven new personas requires an employee-centric approach to be successful. It is not as simple as office working vs. home working. Or video meetings vs. in-person meetings. It is about supporting people with the technologies, leadership and benefits to help them do their jobs well and retain their talent.

2

Secondly, it's about creating new 'workplaces' that are stimulating and engaging environments. Partly for existing employees and partly for attracting new talent. Expectations are changing – especially as new generations join the workforce – and if one organisation cannot fulfil them then people will switch to a different employer that demonstrates a better understanding of what they need.

3

Thirdly, a people-centred organisation is better placed to adapt to the future needs of individuals. Focusing on a fully motivated, dynamic workforce in which each persona is provided for means higher productivity is not just an outcome at a single point in time but is sustainable for years to come.

To talk to us about how we can enable your workforce, or set up a session with one of our Digital Workplace specialists, **contact us** or call on **0800 955 5590**

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