



Exploring the post-COVID-19 Workplace

LEVERAGING DATA
FROM OVER 5,000
RESPONDENTS



Launched March 2020



5,000+ respondents



Global 25 Countries



18 Sectors

WRITTEN BY



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Introduction

Globally, the COVID-19 crisis has dramatically impacted the way we work, and at Colliers International, we believe this shift will affect not only how we work in the short-term but will have far-reaching effects on work and the workplace. In this report, based on data from over 5,000 respondents, we will explore where and how we will work in the future and discuss the role of the office.

For the first time in history, knowledge workers were forced into working from home and asked to adapt quickly. For some organisations who had established flexible work practices in place, it was an evolution. However, for many organisations, it caught them by surprise and required an intense and rigorous focus to ensure their organisations could continue to function. The greatest surprise for many leaders has been the realisation that their organisation can work remotely, be productive, and stay connected. This awakening has started a new and essential conversation for many organisations as they explore work, their work processes, work practices and the workplace. If people can be effective working from home, then what is the purpose of the office? How can we leverage our real estate and workplace to best support our organisational and cultural goals?

In early March, our global Workplace Advisory team launched the first global 'Work from Home' experience survey, engaging over 5,000 respondents in 25 countries across 18 sectors. The survey measured the respondents' experience of working from home plus the levels of desire to work from home after COVID-19. The core aim of the survey was to collect data in order to improve the 'work from home experience' and identify potential medium and long-term impacts.

This report aims to look further ahead towards a medium and long-term horizon (1-3 years), whereby the assumption is that COVID-19 measures will be further loosened and there will be limited or no new infections measured. How and where will we work and what will be the impact on office space requirements for organisations?

The report consists of the following two sections:

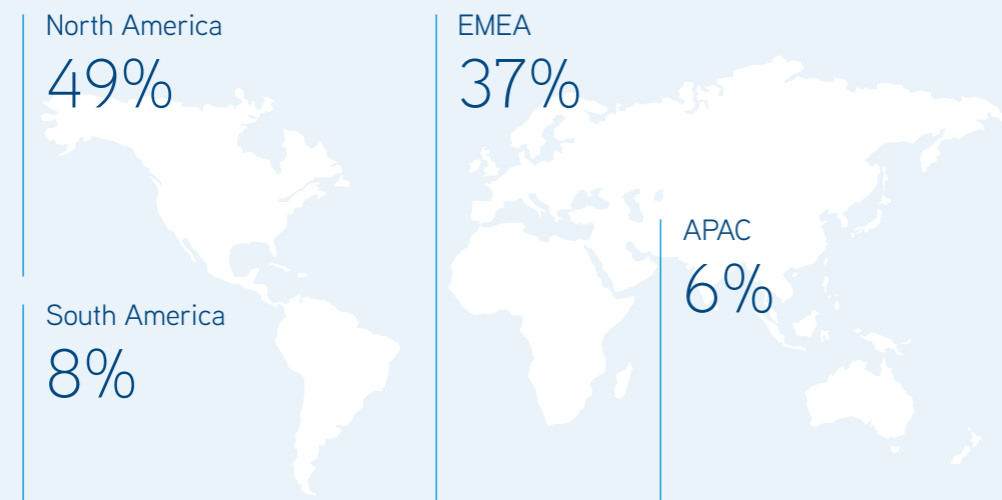
1. Research results on productivity, desire to work from home after COVID-19, connection, work-life balance and management style
2. The expected impacts for the post COVID-19 office and it's functionality

It is recognised that our current views on the work from home situation will not necessarily be fully representative of our views in the future. These will adapt and change according to a myriad of health, economic and societal forces. At Colliers, we will continue to measure the pulse of working from home, how these experiences change over time and influence trends, as well as the impact on real estate requirements.

Key Results of the Colliers 'Working from Home' Survey

Respondents are spread across different regions globally:

(%) RESPONSES BY REGION



Respondents have different levels of experience with working from home before COVID-19:

(%) RESPONSES SECTORS EXPERIENCE OF WORKING FROM HOME (WFH)



This section of the report presents findings related to 5 key topics: productivity, desire to work from home after COVID-19, connection, work-life balance, and management style.

Productivity

Productivity did not change for the majority of the respondents due to working from home

1. Half of the respondents said their productivity did not change working from home. 27% believed their productivity increased since working from home and 23% felt their productivity decreased.

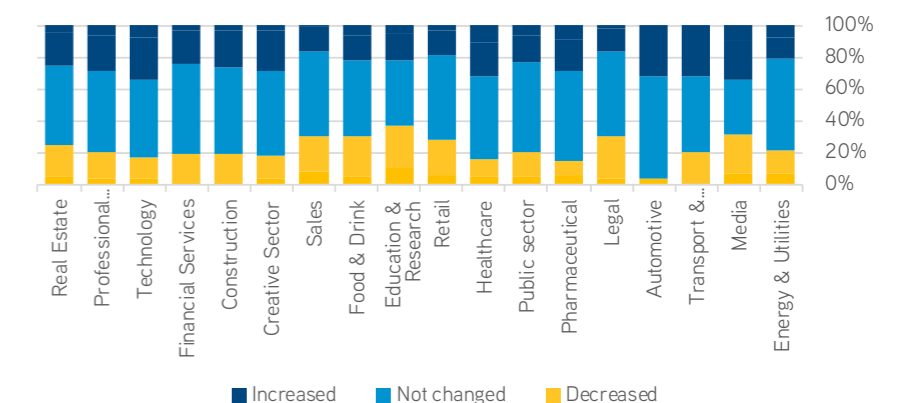
It is recognised that no definitive conclusions regarding productivity can be defined on team level. The numbers in this document are based on an individual's perception of productivity.

PRODUCTIVITY SINCE COVID-19

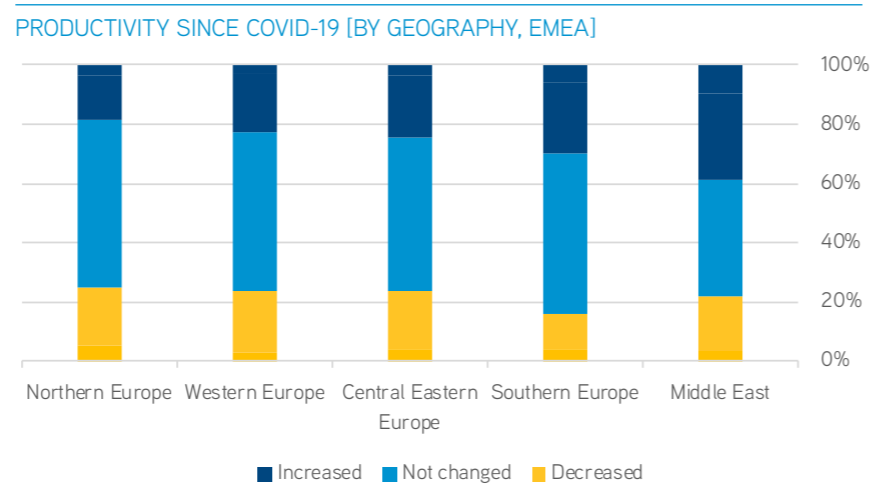


2. The largest productivity increase is identified in the Technology and Media sectors. The highest productivity decrease is identified in the Education and Research sectors.

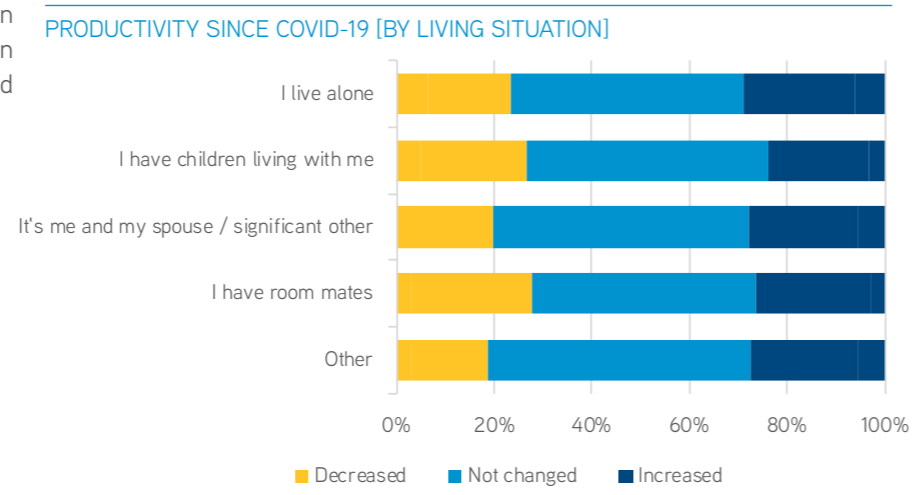
PRODUCTIVITY SINCE COVID-19 [BY BUSINESS SECTOR]



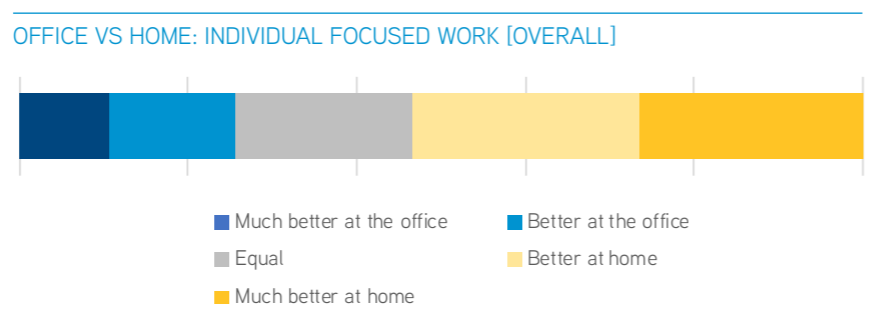
3. Surprisingly, limited differences were identified between EMEA regions. Productivity increased significantly more in the Middle East compared to the subregions in EMEA.



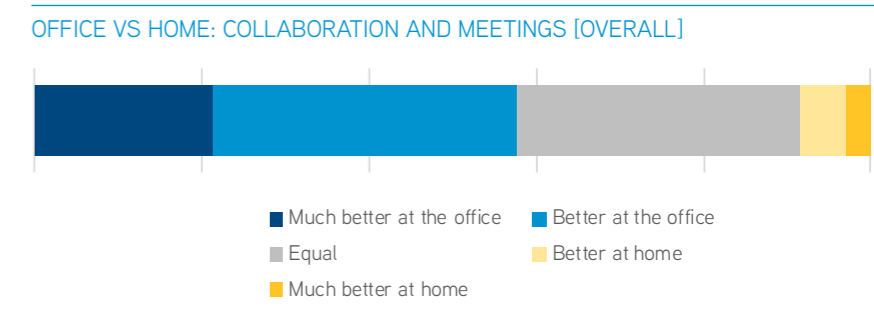
4. Living arrangements have an impact on productivity. Respondents with children and room mates show a more pronounced productivity decrease and lower increase.



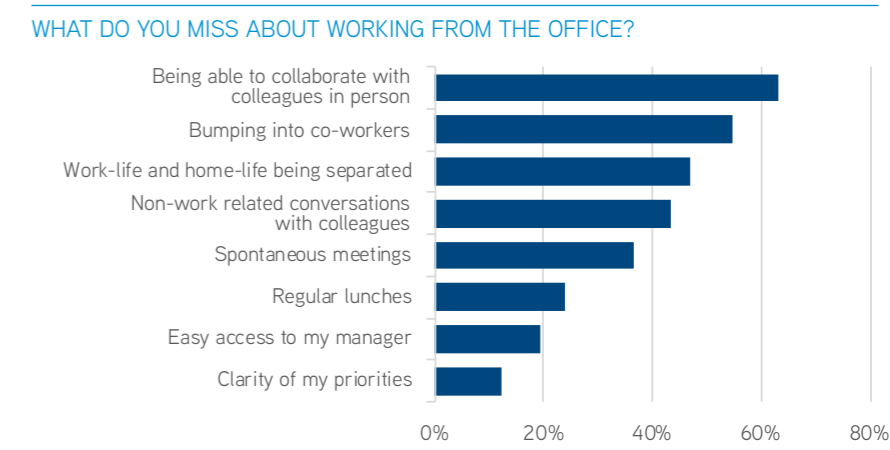
5. When analysing activities most respondents state that they can perform individual work equally or better from home than from the office.



6. Most respondents state that they can collaborate and meet better in the office than from the home.



7. Respondents miss the office as a place to collaborate and bump into co-workers. But also separation between work-life and home-life is important.

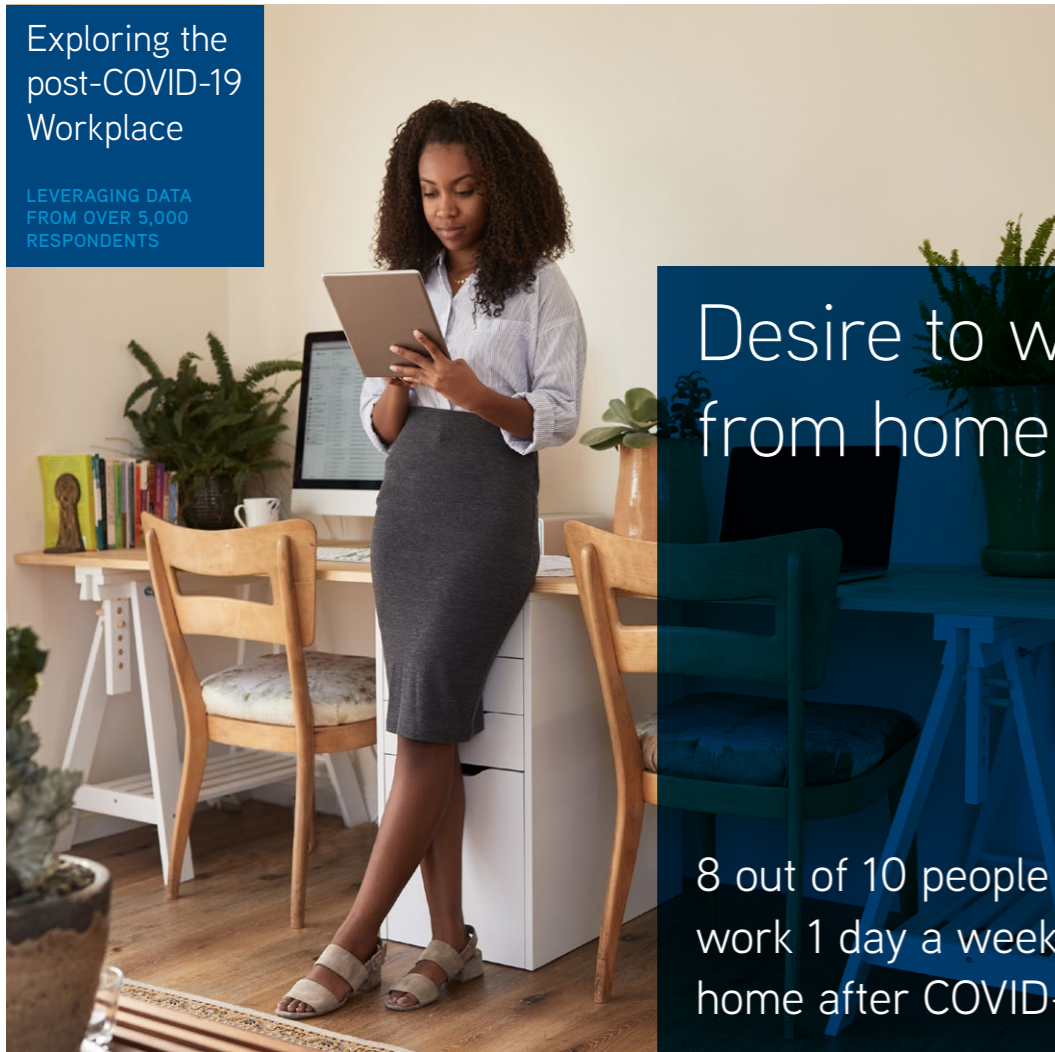


What can we learn from this?

There is a correlation between productivity and the extent to which people meet virtually with colleagues at fixed moments during the day. People meeting virtually with colleagues at fixed moments during the day show a 16% higher productivity increase.

The impact of work locations at home are limited. People working from enclosed rooms dedicated to work show a 5% lower decrease in productivity compared to respondents working from other locations in their house.

Respondents starting and finishing the working day everyday at the same time and take breaks at fixed times show higher productivity increases.

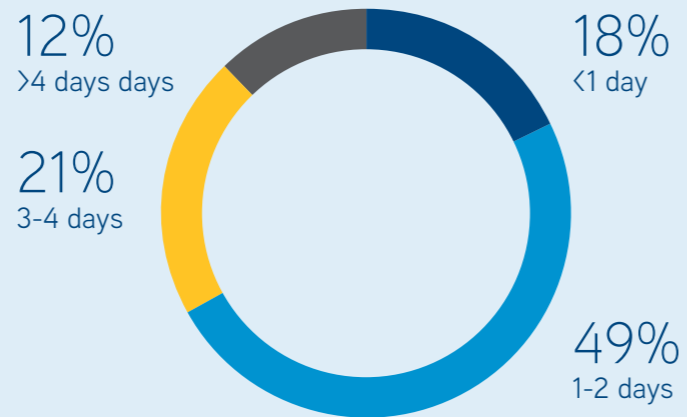


Desire to work from home

8 out of 10 people would like to work 1 day a week or more from home after COVID-19

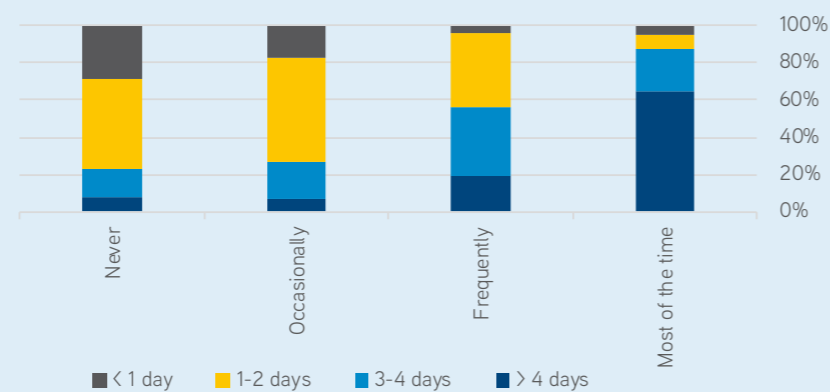
1. 82% would like to work 1 day a week or more from home after COVID-19.

WORKING FROM HOME AFTER COVID-19 [OVERALL]



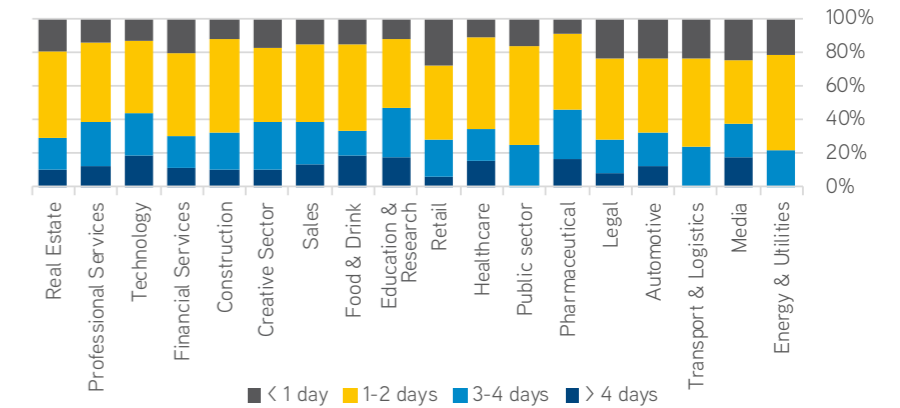
2. Out of the respondents who never worked from home before COVID-19, 73% would like to work from home at least one day a week after COVID-19.

WORKING FROM HOME AFTER COVID-19 [BY EXPERIENCE OF WFH BEFORE]



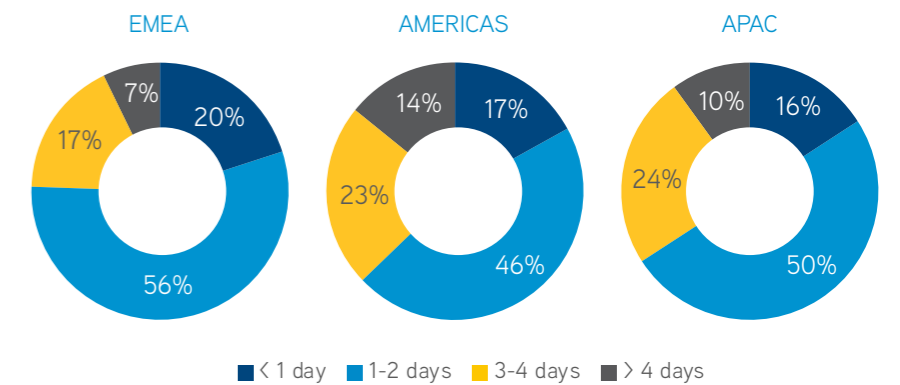
3. The strongest desire to work from home after COVID-19 is in the Pharmaceutical, Technology, and Education and Research sectors. With the lowest desire is in the Retail, Legal, and Transport and Logistics sectors. But even in these sectors more than 70% of the respondents would like to work 1 day a week or more from home.

WORKING FROM HOME AFTER COVID-19 [BY BUSINESS SECTOR]



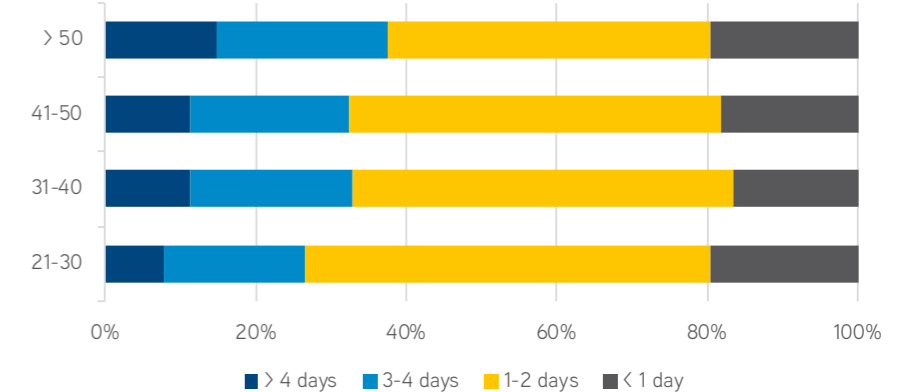
4. Respondents in the Americas and APAC show a stronger desire to work 3 days or more from home compared to respondents in EMEA.

WORKING FROM HOME AFTER COVID-19 [BY GEOGRAPHY]



5. Younger respondents would like to work slightly more from the office compared to older generations.

WORKING FROM HOME AFTER COVID-19 [BY AGE]



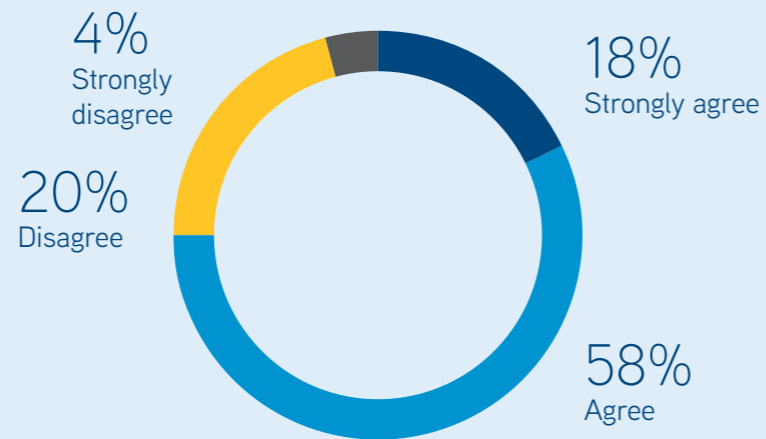


Connection

More than 75% of respondents still feel connected to their team even though they are not physically together.

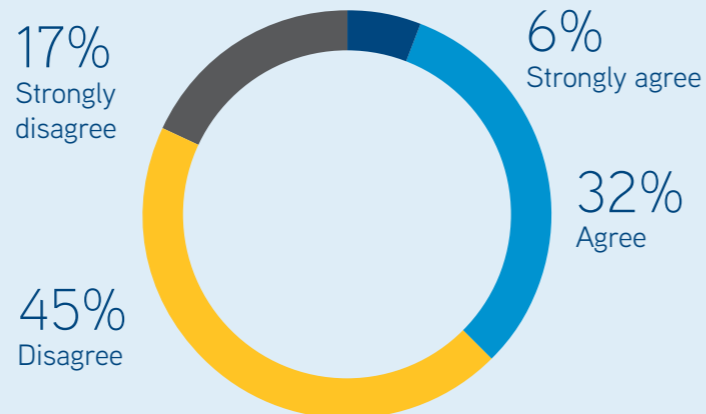
1. Although not being physically together, 76% of the respondents still feel connected to their team.

I FEEL CONNECTED TO MY TEAM [OVERALL]



2. In a separate question 38% of respondents feel isolated from their team.

I FEEL ISOLATED FROM MY TEAM [OVERALL]



What can we learn from this?

Respondents who kick off and finish everyday with virtual team meetings feel 10% more connected to their team.

No correlation is found between the feeling of being connected to a team and using a camera during virtual meetings.

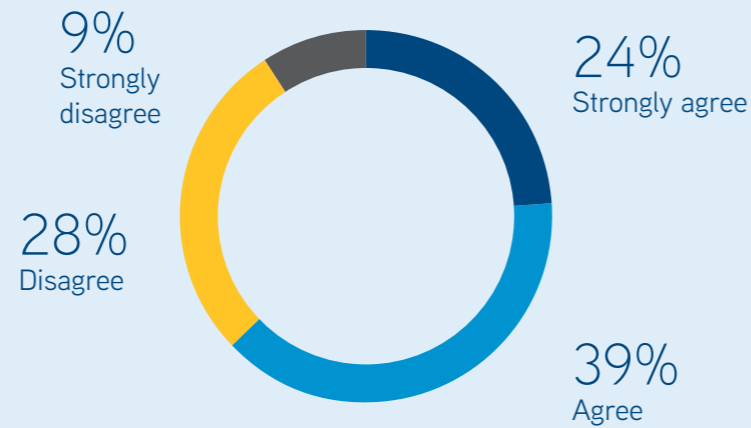




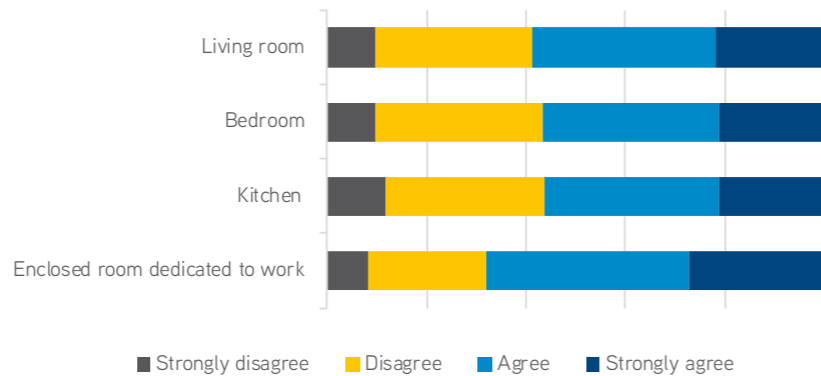
Work-life balance

63% of respondents state their work-life balance has improved since working from home due to COVID-19

MY WORK-LIFE BALANCE HAS IMPROVED [OVERALL]



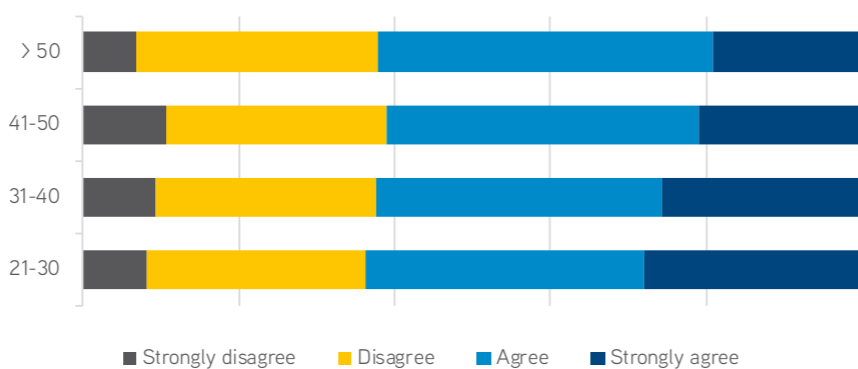
MY WORK-LIFE BALANCE HAS IMPROVED [BY WFH LOCATION]



1. Respondents working from a closed room dedicated to work show a significantly higher improvement in work-life balance compared to respondents working from other places in their home.

2. Younger respondents show a higher improvement in work-life balance compared to older respondents.

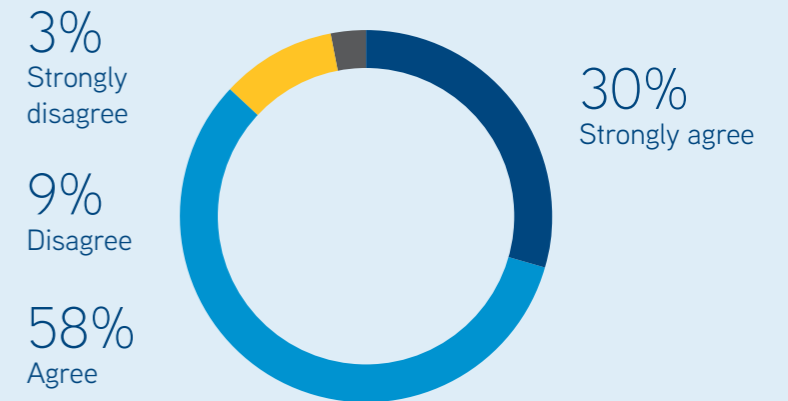
MY WORK-LIFE BALANCE HAS IMPROVED [BY AGE]



Management style

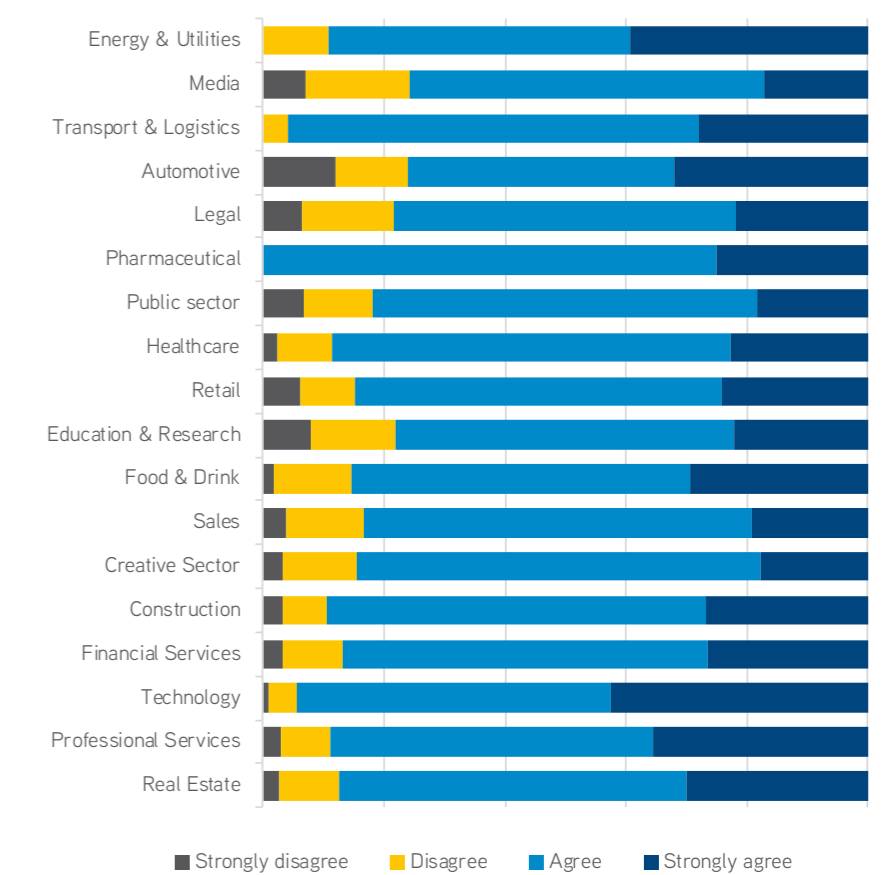
Most respondents (88%) indicate that their manager is able to manage virtually

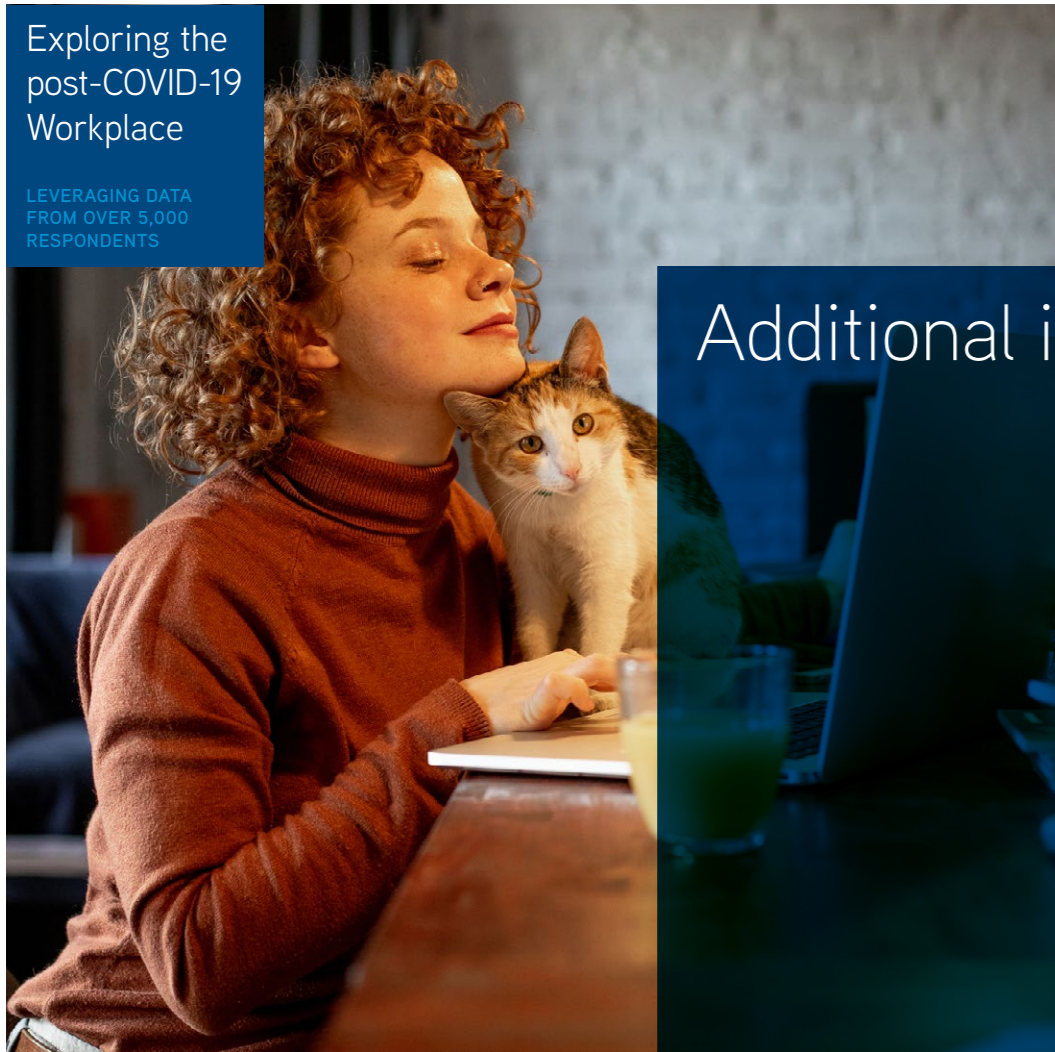
MANAGER IS ABLE TO MANAGE VIRTUALLY [OVERALL]



1. Respondents in the Media, Automotive, Legal, and Education and Research sectors are slightly less positive regarding the ability of their managers to manage virtually compared to other sectors.

MANAGER IS ABLE TO MANAGE VIRTUALLY [BY BUSINESS SECTOR]



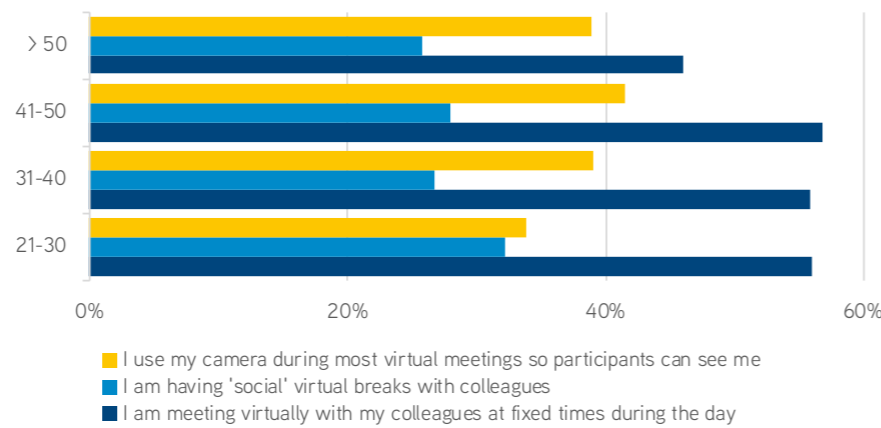


Additional insights

Use of cameras during meetings

1. Respondents between the ages of 21-30 turn their camera on less during virtual collaboration compared to older generations.

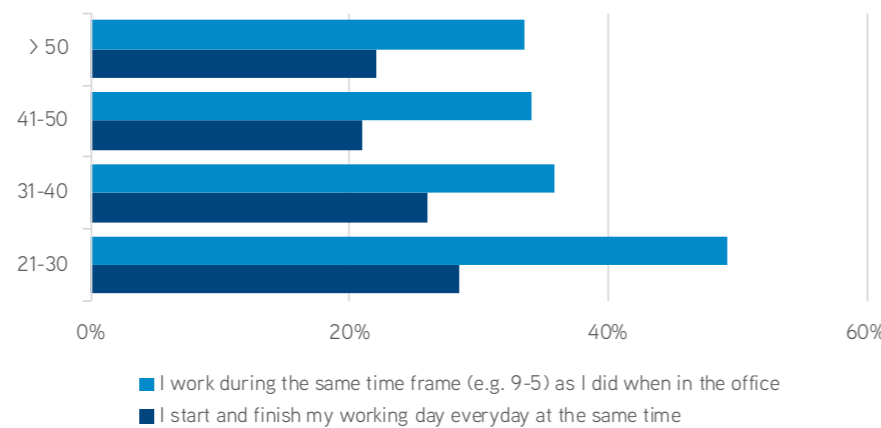
COLLABORATION PATTERNS [BY AGE]



Working times

2. Respondents between the age of 21-30 work significantly more during the typical 'office' timeframe (9-5) compared to older generations.

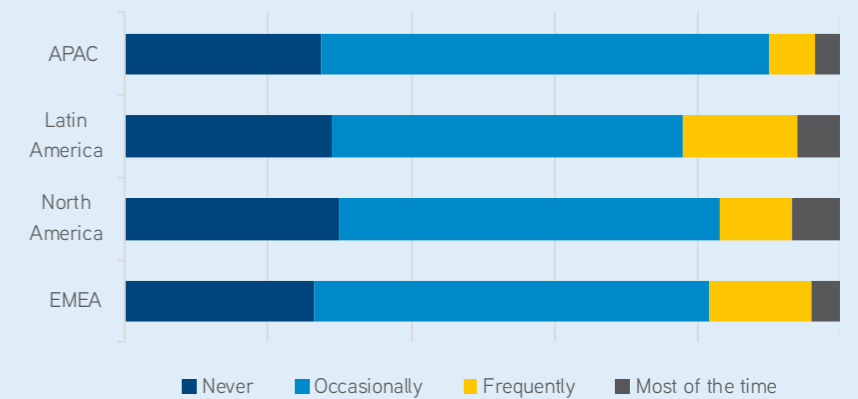
WORKING PATTERNS [BY AGE]



Experience with working from home before COVID-19

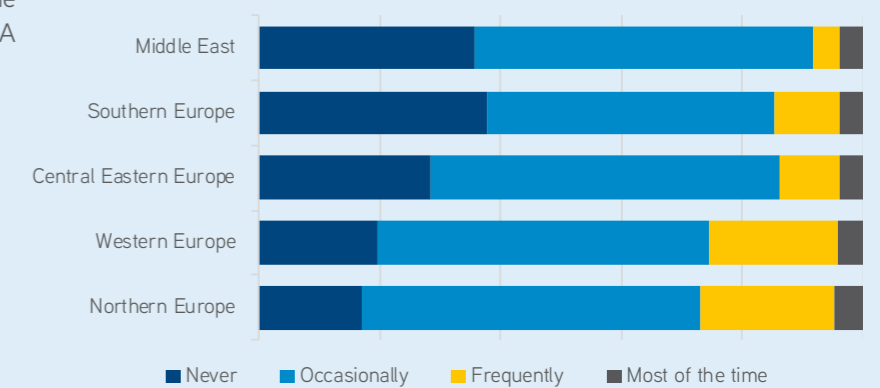
3. Respondents in APAC, the Americas and EMEA have similar levels of experience with working from home before COVID-19.

EXPERIENCE WORKING FROM HOME BEFORE COVID-19 [BY GEOGRAPHY]



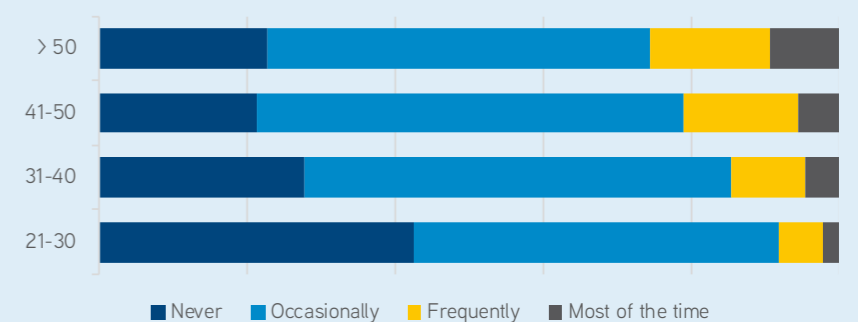
4. Respondents in Northern Europe and Western Europe worked significantly more from home before COVID-19 compared to the other EMEA subregions.

EXPERIENCE WORKING FROM HOME BEFORE COVID-19 [BY GEOGRAPHY, EMEA]



5. Younger respondents worked less from home before COVID-19 compared to older respondents.

EXPERIENCE WORKING FROM HOME BEFORE COVID-19 [BY AGE]

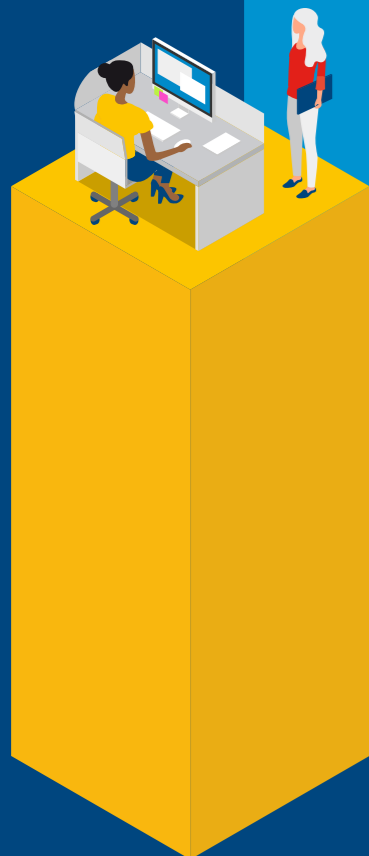


The Post-COVID-19 Workplace

Introduction

What are the impacts of COVID-19 on offices in the future? This section will explore key changes related to working from home and the role of the office after COVID-19.

The extent to which these changes will occur is unclear and will depend on multiple factors such as the economic situation and level of virus control.



1. Working From Home

Working from home is here to stay... it's productive and opens up more opportunities for employees, employers and society,

The Colliers 'Work from Home' survey data shows that respondents miss the office as a place to connect and to collaborate with their teams. However, 82% of the respondents want to keep working from home after COVID-19 a day a week or more. On average, respondents would like to work two days a week from home.

There are differences identified between sectors e.g. in the legal sector it is 1.7 days a week and in the technology sector 2.4 days a week from home. Productivity and work-life balance are the main drivers behind the desire to work from home. This is evidenced by the fact that most respondents indicated their productivity did not change, and even increased, whilst the majority of the respondents indicated an improvement in work-life balance.

It is recognised that the above is based on the individual employee's desire to work from home. From a team and business perspective the preferred number of days working from home may differ. Also, the growth stage of an organisation may impact on the number of days employees work from home.

THE ENVIRONMENT ALSO BENEFITS FROM OUR REDUCTION IN COMMUTING

There are more benefits related to working from home than just employee productivity and work-life balance. During COVID-19 a dramatic decline in air pollution/ carbon emissions has been measured due to less vehicle and air traffic. In London, for example, dangerous emissions have fallen by almost 50% during COVID-19. Additionally, people working from home, close to their kitchen to make a coffee and prepare lunch, has led to a reduction of the amount of single-use plastic food containers, bags, cutlery, etc. However, there are counterarguments as well. Research by the University of Sussex questions the assumption that working from home is better for the environment. According to the university, lockdown has clearly reduced energy consumption, but only some of those savings will be achieved when working from home is combined with working from the office.

LARGER POOL OF TALENT

Having a distributed workforce and labour pool allows organisations to access a larger pool of employees and potential job applicants. Additionally, job searchers have access to a larger selection and wider variety of job opportunities. A larger region and therefore a larger talent pool can be targeted if employees do not have to commute to an office everyday. Employees may accept longer commutes if it is only for a limited number of days during the week.





Further improving the work from home experience

A substantial number of employees were suddenly forced to work from home and many organisations have proved surprisingly resilient and effective in quickly supporting this. However there are opportunities to further improve the work from home experience.

Improving the home office set-up

Moving beyond COVID-19, it is likely that many organisations will further professionalise working from home. Although 78% of respondents are satisfied about the extent to which their workplace settings at home enables productivity, the home office set-up is expected to be further developed and enhanced.

THE HOME OFFICE SET-UP

Expect future home workplace setup to go far beyond a second screen. It is expected that employees will upgrade their home workplace significantly. If organisations are pushing working from home, there will be an important role for the employer to ensure that employees have the right ergonomic set-up. The need for appropriate spaces in homes and/or gardens to facilitate work is already changing rapidly. The sales of 'garden offices/cabins' has tripled since COVID-19.

Technology to optimise virtual interaction

The research shows 90% of respondents are satisfied about the extent to which technology allows them to work productively from home. Although this is a remarkably positive finding, technology is expected to evolve further. It is not likely that technology will replace the experience of face-to-face interaction, but it will get closer in the future.

WILL TECHNOLOGY EVENTUALLY BE ABLE TO REPLICATE THE RICHNESS OF IN PERSON INTERACTION?

Mastering remote work is finding the right tools to stay productive and connected. With the advent of Zoom and Microsoft Teams most organisations have found the transition quite seamless, and a transition that is here to stay in some form post COVID-19.

Currently, digital communication can't replicate the richness of face-to-face interactions and a handshake. The inability to effectively show qualities and emotions associated with face-to-face interaction in existing telepresence tools is a significant downside. Emerging virtual communication technologies are aiming to capture an increasingly distributed workforce, not through existing 2D video conferencing screens, but with virtual and augmented reality, 3D holographic images and even work avatars. New virtual communication tools can use virtual reality and augmented reality headsets to allow employees who work in different locations to collaborate. Employees can visualise and interact with 3D images of their work as a group. They can drag and share information in real time straight from their devices and into a shared holographic space.

Managing distributed teams

88% of respondents indicate their manager is able to manage virtually which is a positive, if arguably a surprising, finding. However, the data is collected over a relatively short period of time (two months). The long-term impact of managing distributed teams is not clear yet and many organisations are strongly focussing on further improving management capabilities. Organisations are aiming to put management methodologies in place to keep individuals and teams engaged, as well as measure and optimise individual and team performance when not physically together.

Managing distributed teams can not be seen as a one size fits all approach. Different people require different management styles. Some people work most productively when they have autonomy and freedom, other people require more control in order to be productive. For these people working from home can be a substantial challenge and lead to a decrease in productivity.

Enabling separation between work-life and home-life

Over 50% of respondents miss the office as a way to separate work life and home life. Moving between places typically makes it easier to separate work and personal life, which is important from a wellbeing perspective.

When people live and work in the same environment it can be challenging to switch off from work. This can lead to significant stress levels. Many organisations are offering guidance and training for employees to deal with any psychological elements associated with working from home.

MANAGING THE COMPLEXITIES OF DISTRIBUTED TEAMS

Managing a distributed team has always been, and will continue to be a challenge for many managers as they transition from an attendance based management style to an outcome based management style.

It involves developing a culture of trust that work is completed regardless of place or time. This necessitates providing a working infrastructure to employees so they have the right connections and tools, and an appropriate place to work at home. Managing a distributed team calls for greater emphasis on clear roles, expectations and responsibilities that are supported by clear communication channels.



Increased working from home will change the size and functionality of offices

Much of what we are experiencing today cannot be taken as a representative example of working from home. However it is apparent that many organisations who did not believe in working from home before COVID-19 are now more open to the idea in the future.

It is expected that a balance between working from home and working from an office will be necessary to meet the needs of both the employee and employer. There is a large difference between the extent to which respondents worked from home before COVID-19 and the desire to work from home after. Before COVID-19 only 5.2% of the employed people aged 15-67 worked from home in the European Union (source: Eurostat), after COVID-19 82% want to work 1 day a week or more from home. (source: Colliers WFH Survey)

The data shows that respondents need offices to collaborate and connect, which means the office is not dead, but with the increase of working from home the functionality and size is expected to change.



2. Re-imagining the Office

The office is not dead, in fact the opposite is expected. Offices will become more vibrant and more collaborative than ever.



The office as we know it today was designed in the dawn of the industrial revolution to manage and optimise administrative tasks. Work was, where possible, standardised with employees performing single individual tasks at rows of individual desks. The main goals were control and efficiency. Today, the vast majority of organisations have moved away from pure control and efficiency to focus more on collaboration, knowledge sharing, innovation and trust. There are great examples of organisations that have transformed their offices to be more collaborative and innovative. However the majority of offices around the world, although they have evolved, are still designed based on 18th century principles.

The office as a place to supercharge collaboration and innovation

The experiences from COVID-19 are expected to accelerate the transformation of offices to become places that supercharge collaboration and innovation.

Many successful innovations and collaborations arise unexpectedly, from unplanned interaction between different people (also known as serendipity). This unexpected connection and intense collaboration is difficult to achieve via Teams, Zoom or Skype. The research data shows that everything that people miss about the office is related to interaction and connection. Taking this into account together with the desire that people have to work from home, the office of the future will have a primary focus on enabling connection and collaboration. There still will be opportunities to do individual focussed work at the office, to offer people choice, but it is not expected to be the primary focus of an office going forward.

FLATTENING THE WORKPLACE OCCUPANCY CURVE TO OPTIMISE REAL ESTATE

Increased working from home does not automatically lead to space efficiency or reduction. When working from home is not managed properly, it is likely that varying peak occupancies will occur on certain days of the week. To spread consistent occupancy over the week, it is important that employees work in schedules and shifts and follow certain rules of engagement which guide people on how, when and where to work remotely.

This involves a behavioural and cultural change as well. Organisations, teams and individuals have to structure and schedule their week more. For example, identify focus working from home days and collaboration office days for the team be together. Workstations can be allocated to teams or individuals and booked on daily or shift basis. There is no one size fits all solution and it is highly dependent on the type of work and role within the organisation.

This involves setting up team-based office occupancy planning, active scheduling of workplace demand and capacity, as well as which team works in what capacity in the office on which day.

However, structuring office visits does sound contradictory to creating serendipity. Organisations should find a balance between creating enough buffer space to allow people and teams to be creative and work from the office when they need to, but also managing space efficiency and sustainability. It is important not to have an oversupply of space when people are working a significant amount of time from home.

Higher quality core offices and more alternative workplaces

If working from home is managed and structured effectively, a reduction of core office space is a possibility due to less work settings being needed. However it is expected that organisations will invest more in the quality of offices, create less dense environments with more collaboration and community spaces and facilities. The actual impact on sq m / sq ft differs greatly per organisation and country.

This is expected to be the end of the anonymous and homogenous office as there will be a rejuvenated focus on quality space with branding and identity. If employees spend time at the office they want to experience the brand and identity of the company they work for.

We have seen that not everyone is able to work productively from home. 23% of respondents stated that their productivity decreased since working from home. It has also shown that people with children and or room-mates show a higher decrease in productivity. However, this does not mean that they do not want to work close to their home. Organisations are starting to think more about offering alternative workplaces to employees nearby their home. This could be a membership at a co-working space, collaboration with public libraries or partner and client offices. This approach allows employees who live further away from the core office and cannot work productively from home to work close to home on certain moments.



There are a number of potential health and economic forces, along with an organisation's strategic response, that will impact on the future way of working and workplace.

There are a number of medium to long-term potential scenarios (e.g. 1-3 years ahead) that precipitate a necessary conversation on the functionality and size of offices organisations may need in the future. It is challenging to predict how the future will look like, particularly in light of the pandemic occurring at different speeds and impacts, and with varying responses and successes country to country. The level to which the virus is controlled and the economic situation after the COVID-19 lockdown will largely influence the choices that organisations will make. It is never recommended to build a medium to long-term strategy based on a short-term impact. However, it is critical to be proactive and not reactive by understanding now what the wide range of potential future real estate impacts could be.

If organisations see a growth in working from home and capacity is properly managed (occupancy spread over the week), it is possible that there is a reduced need for individual workstations in the office. This potential reduced need for workstations can free up space that is likely to be used in one of two key ways:

- To add quality to the work environment (e.g. creating less dense environments and adding more collaboration and community settings)
- To reduce the size of core office space

If organisations do not see growth in working from home and improve office density an increase of office size is a possibility.

The workstation may not necessarily be seen as a traditional desk with a chair and a screen. Employees may prefer to come to the office to predominantly to collaborate and connect so the workstation, or place/setting to do individual work, will evolve accordingly.

Potential health and economic forces influencing how and when workplaces will transform.

HEALTH

- COVID-19 disappears or is suppressed (e.g. through a vaccine).
- COVID-19 is controlled due to distancing measures. When social distancing measures are relaxed new cases appear.
- COVID-19 is not controlled, there is no vaccine and new cases keep appearing.

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

- Prolonged economic downturn
- Economic downturn followed by recovery

A stronger momentum for working from home is possible during a prolonged economic downturn to enable cost savings. During economic downturn followed by economic recovery it is more likely that organisations will enable people to work the preferred number of days from home, and/or the number of days that contributes most to individual and team productivity (this will be different for each organisation). Workplace density will highly depend on the level to which the virus is controlled. If the virus does not disappear (e.g. through a vaccine) and distancing measures stay in place for a long period of time, workplace density is likely to go up significantly. When the economy recovers, and organisations focus on growth, it is more likely that organisations will invest in the quality of offices (including less dense environments) and potentially in third workspaces closer to employees' homes.



An organisation's strategic response is dependent on:

- Growth strategy
- Cash position
- Competitive position
- Industry sector (e.g. e-commerce versus tourism)
- Innovation agenda



What to do now

The office is definitely not dead. However, the office is likely to change in its functionality and size both in the short-term and the medium to long-term. The potential impact will differ from organisation to organisation. As an organisation it is important to safely allow employees to return to the office in the short term with efficient and effective social distancing measures in place. Furthermore, it is imperative as an organisation to be proactive and not reactive by understanding *now* what the wide range of potential *future* real estate impacts could be.

Colliers Rebalance your Workplace Planner

DEFINE THE IMPACTS OF INCREASED WORKING FROM HOME ON OFFICE REQUIREMENTS: SCENARIO MODELLING

The potential increase in working from home is likely to have an impact on the functionality and size of offices. Many organisations are currently asking questions like: What is the desire within my organisation to work from home after COVID-19? How does the desire differ between teams? What will the impact of increased working from home be on the amount of office space we need and the functionality of our office? It is important to test a range of scenarios to be prepared to rebalance and right size the workplace at the right moment. The 'Rebalance your Workplace Planner' enables organisations to be agile and proactive not reactive to an unknown set of economic and health variables.

Colliers Back to Work Navigator

PREPARING THE STEP BY STEP MOVE BACK TO THE OFFICE

Organisations are starting to move back to the office step by step. Interventions in the work environment are required to make the office a safe place allowing for social distancing when distancing measures are still in place. Most organisations start by moving small groups of people back to the office in shifts, therefore clear scheduling and booking is crucial. Colliers International is currently working with many organisations around the world, through the proprietary 'Back to Work Navigator' tool to help organisations preparing for a safe return to the office. The 'Back to Work Navigator' identifies the maximum office capacity allowing for social distancing and defines required interventions related to:

- Design/layout
- Technology
- Behaviour
- Navigation
- Hygiene & cleaning



1 Insight into desire to work from home and role of the office after COVID-19



2 Insight into impact of increased working from home on office space requirements (scenario modeling)



3 Update office concept and working from home set up (technology, policies, capacity planning, layout)



4 Change management and communication strategy

About the authors



JanJaap Boogaard

Head of EMEA Workplace Advisory

JanJaap is leading the Workplace Advisory team at Colliers International across Europe, Middle East & Africa. The team consists of 70 workplace and change advisors that help organisations develop efficient workplaces which enable organisations to work productively. JanJaap has a background in Organisation Studies and worked at Atos Consulting as strategy consultant before joining Colliers in 2012. Since that time he has developed workplace strategies for clients in more than 20 countries globally. He is also a mentor in the Techstars PropTech Accelerator program, mentoring Property Technology start-ups. During the COVID-19 period the Workplace Advisory team is working with many organisations on planning the step by step return back to the office, developing long term real estate and workplace strategies and scenarios taking into account the learnings from COVID-19.



Sven Moller

Associate Director EMEA Workplace Advisory

Sven Moller is an experienced workplace strategist and change manager, based in London, and operates across Europe, Middle East & Africa. Prior to his current role, Sven led Workplace Advisory for Colliers International in Australia. Sven has background in workplace design, architecture and real estate. At 22, whilst still studying, Sven designed his first office HQ for one of Australia's leading fashion companies. This proved to be the beginnings of a strong passion for workplace and how people work. He has developed workplace transformation projects across the EMEA and APAC regions in over 12 countries. Sven is particularly interested in helping organisations develop medium to long-term scenarios on the role and size of the office in a post-COVID-19 world.

About Colliers International

Colliers International is a leading real estate professional services and investment management company. With operations in 68 countries, our more than 18,000 enterprising people work collaboratively to provide expert advice to maximize the value of property for real estate occupiers, owners and investors. For more than 25 years, our experienced leadership team, owning approximately 40% of our equity, has delivered compound annual investment returns of almost 20% for shareholders. In 2019, corporate revenues were more than \$3.0 billion (\$3.5 billion including affiliates), with \$33 billion of assets under management in our investment management segment.

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