
THE FUTURE OF WORK PART II

NOVEMBER 2020

We Are Adam and
My2Be present a
bumper follow up.

Discover what we got
right and what we
didn't forecast.

Read real life stories,
local and global, and
our latest predictions.



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DID WE GET IT RIGHT?

- ✓ A blend of remote & physical offices
- ✓ We are social animals and need time in a physical office
- ✓ Environmental benefits of lockdown have already been undone
- ✓ Increased reports of mental illness
- ✓ Cyber security isn't tight enough
- ✓ Always on culture prevails & working month is 28 hours longer
- ✓ Communication is proving to be the most common challenge
- ✓ Companies making big investments in wellbeing & L&D
- ✗ Focus is still on presenteeism and not output
- ✗ Digital meetings have bred Zoom fatigue
- ✗ Employees haven't had training for new digital methods
- ✗ Culture & creativity are stifled

Are we headed for a global depression???

OUR AUTHORS

It felt like we slept walked into a pandemic.



Richard Gahagan
CEO
We Are Adam

Maybe it was blind hope but when we drafted Part 1, I was convinced Part 2 would have been very much a feeling of “post-Covid” and how the world changed. It transpires this update is very much more “in the moment” but we still intend to provide valuable insight and update. Back in March it felt like we slept walked into a pandemic which in reality had been around for several months and had plenty of air time in the global media, the major clue being the number 19 in the new “C word”. So, in our first whitepaper we researched all the areas we thought would be affected, including travel, office, commuting times, technology adoption and much more. We did this partly because it was a fascinating amount of change in a very short space of time, but also with the objective to provide valuable insight shared across all our respective contacts in industry. Whilst many of our predictions and research have proven valuable, the bigger surprise for myself and my closer network is how invasive the measures have become over a far more sustained period. Most of us predicted that whilst Covid could be a 1-2-year phenomenon, there was always the thought that the “first wave” would be fairly short and we should prepare for the winter’s second wave. Amongst a largely negative backdrop, the reality of all the

ONS data proves that a combination of medical prowess, strong R&D and rapid improvement of treatment practices, the numbers of deaths and of people hospitalised is very much improved from the horrendous numbers in March-May. Still work to be done but there is a definite shift in public opinion for a more balanced view on people’s health and wellbeing with respect to their careers, mental health and other serious illness which has often been forced into the back seat. With all of this in mind, Whitepaper 2 is hopefully going to update, refresh and relaunch our perspective on how the world has changed. We now all know how to use Zoom and Teams, but more importantly we are also evolving our strategies for blended working as we find more and more people have missed the social contact of the office, or the incidental learning for staff members who are missing learning opportunities previously gained by proximity to more experienced colleagues. I’ve also been lucky enough to have been involved in formal and informal social gatherings (within the rules at the time) which have really been an eye opener for everyone around how much we have missed it. We hope you find part 2 of interest, we would love to hear from you if you have particular expertise in any of the areas below or other areas you think we should consider.

OUR AUTHORS

We have to rapidly adjust to ever-changing restrictions.



Adam Mitcheson
Co-Founder
my2be

Back to Normal, and the New Normal were two of the most common phrases over the last 6 months as individuals, companies, industries, and governments have had to adjust to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. When we drafted the initial Whitepaper, this was in order to try to help people, businesses, our clients and communities through the crisis, based on our own experiences and by predicting what we thought would happen in the near and not too distant future. Here we will be taking a look back as well as a look forward to once again offer advice, guidance, and help where possible. The much predicted second wave, seems not only to be medical but economical as industries and sectors such as hospitality and aviation are having to rapidly adjust to the ever-changing restrictions. Office workers have seen the government in the UK push for a return to the office only to see this abolished. At my2be, we have clients in the US and the UK. The major difference we have noticed is that those in Silicon Valley, having

established that they won’t return to an office until August 2021 were able to plan more effectively for their people. Launching programmes, and initiatives impacting Diversity and Inclusion, Developing Talent, Wellbeing, and more. Something we’re proud to have helped deliver. With the UK government having abolished plans for a return to the office for at least the next 6 months, there is an opportunity for organisations to plan with some consistency. We’re here to help and look forward to sharing more thoughts and lessons with you in this updated paper.

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

"The pandemic is going to have a long-lasting effect on how we work, with a step-change in the proportion of people who work from home on a much more regular basis. This will disrupt some existing patterns of economic activity, for example, spending by office workers in town and city centres is likely to drop substantially over the long-term and we will see a further shift to online retail."

Peter Cheese, - Chief Executive of the CIPD

In June, we released our Future of Work 2020 report. When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived on our doorstep many businesses had to find a new way of working ... and fast. We wanted to investigate the effect the pandemic had upon our working lives, and attempt to predict how it would impact us in the future.

As we found in the report, the remote working revolution was already well under way before the pandemic, COVID-19 just sped up the transition. Many workers found themselves setting up at-home offices overnight, and companies scrambled to get equipment to employees and set up systems that kept their staff connected. Many hoped that, within a few weeks, we would find ourselves 'back to normal'.

We are now over 6 months into our new world, and although restrictions have eased, and then tightened again, it is becoming abundantly clear that we will never return to the way things were

before. Even as UK Prime Minister **Boris Johnson pleaded** with UK employers to bring workers back to the office, **up to 62% of UK companies** defied him and kept some - or even all - of their staff working remotely for the foreseeable future. Although city centres are not as deserted as they were at the height of lockdown, they are **still a far cry** from the bustling hives of activity that they once were. Worker footfall in central London in August **sat at just 13%** of its usual numbers, and in Manchester the footfall **raised just 1%** upon Boris' plea.

The Daily Mail called out the "Giants who have let fear keep UK plc locked down", claiming that large companies who refused to bring all of their staff back to the office are behind all of our current economic woes. It is true that many businesses rely on office workers commuting for their clientele - Pret A Manger being one of the more high-profile cases. Pret are **closing down 30 of their UK stores**, as the lack of commuters has affected their sales by 74% even

after they reopened 339 of their 410 stores. CBI boss **Dame Carolyn Fairbairn** believes that a mass return to offices is essential for economic recovery, citing the many auxiliary services that rely on passing office workers.

In August and early September, the government tried to get workers to head back into their offices, even **begging workers** to ask their bosses to allow them to work from the office as more and more big firms declare intentions to extend working from home orders. Some of this began to work. Barclay's boss Jes Staley, who we reported in our original whitepaper as saying "big city offices are a thing of the past", has since **made a large U-turn**, claiming that Barclays 'has a responsibility' to the cities where its offices are based.

LEADERS ARE
DITCHING
THE OFFICE

77 %

FOR GOOD

Research by UK Broadband provider **OneCom** recently showed that up to 77% of business leaders are considering 'ditching' the office for good, instead focusing on 'meet up' spaces.

"Many of the managers that we work with, who were perhaps a bit apprehensive about what it would be like to manage employees remotely, are telling us that they've found working from home remarkably easy and enriching for their teams." - Helen Myers, Operations Director, OneCom ([via Executive Grapevine](#))

So, what exactly is appealing to businesses about remote working? We uncovered a plethora of benefits in our **original whitepaper**, from a better work/life balance to more productive employees, the positive environmental effects and savings on overheads. We discovered that, although not suitable for every industry or even every office, remote work can open doors and hugely benefit a company's bottom line. Remote and flexible working policies have even been **cited as a way to increase diversity** in the workplace, allowing many people who are locked out of traditional office-based roles to enter the workforce.

'This is an important next step for Bonnier Books UK, as we strive to build a workplace culture where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and have their voice heard, whatever their background or circumstances.' - Periminder Mann, CEO Bonnier Books UK, upon the announcement that Bonnier were introducing a flexible working policy.

The current situation is in a constant state of flux. Just as we feel like we have a grip on our 'new normal', something else changes. We wanted to revisit our original report to take a closer look at how the situation has progressed, if our predictions were accurate, and to dive deeper into what the future of work will look like.

RETURNING FROM FURLOUGH

As we write this, the end of the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme looms closer and winding down measures have begun to take effect. Following **calls for the government to extend the scheme**, Chancellor Rishi Sunak **announced further financial support**: "The resurgence of the virus, and the measures we need to take in response, pose a threat to our fragile economic recovery... Our approach to the next phase of support must be different to that which came before ... The primary goal of our economic policy remains unchanged - to support people's jobs - but the way we achieve that must evolve." Whilst the additional support was welcomed by many, some high profile members of the business community have described the update as "**woefully inadequate**".

A **recent survey** by The Bank of England suggests that as little as 7% of the workforce remained on furlough whilst working no hours at the end of September. Despite a further 11% reported to be working part time, there are growing concerns around unemployment. **The Office for Budget Responsibility** has forecast a peak in unemployment rates at 11.9% in Quarter 4 of 2020. In an attempt to counter this, the government incentivised employers to retain staff with a **Job Retention Bonus** of £1000 for any furloughed employee who is not subsequently made redundant. It would appear that the announcement of the scheme has not had the desired impact, with a **recent YouGov survey** revealing that a third of employers plan to make redundancies before Christmas.

Many businesses who reopened and brought their staff back off furlough and into workplace environments found **extra expenses** in re-opening their doors. From risk assessments to new equipment business-as-usual hasn't been as simple as calling staff back in and re-opening your doors to the public. Employers still have a duty of care to ensure their employees' health and safety and this is often costly. **The Financial Times** reported that companies in the UK will have to spend 'millions' in order to make sure offices are COVID-Secure. Measures to remain COVID-Secure have also hit the leisure industry in the pockets, with many restaurants, bars, and pubs barely able to break even after their **layouts changed** to ensure social distancing between customers. Many venues have decided to remain closed for these reasons, with their staff still relying on the furlough scheme that is swiftly coming to a close. The September introduction of a **10pm 'curfew'** has left many leisure industry businesses 'on their knees'.

Many high-profile business owners, such as **Lord Alan Sugar** or Pimlico

Plumber's **Charlie Mullins**, have been loudly blasting staff who are reluctant to return from furlough, labelling them as 'lazy' or 'complacent'. Whilst it may seem that some workers are 'dragging their feet', it is important to establish why that is.

One of the main points that we tried to hammer home in our original report was that the health, safety, and wellbeing of the employee must be at the heart of any decision that a business makes. Offices - especially open plan - are often **hotbeds of germs and bacteria**, something which must be addressed before bringing staff back.

It is always important to remember that every business is different. When it comes to returning to work, there is no 'one size fits all' approach. Your own needs, and those of your employees, will greatly differ from others around you and as a responsible employer you will need to act accordingly.

We believe that these differing needs are the reason that we will see - and in fact, are already beginning to see - a shift towards more flexible and remote working policies. Research from the **Universities of Kent and Birmingham** appear to confirm this, and it seems like each day another large firm **announces** their intention to introduce remote working policies for their staff. We believe that this signals that remote work is here to stay, a thought echoed by **74%** of business owners in the UK.



Reasons Employees May Not Be Ready To Return To Work

- 1 They do not find the office a safe environment. Provide them with a risk assessment completed by a competent person or external provider to demonstrate that you have considered all possibilities.
- 2 They do not feel safe travelling to work. This can also be covered in your risk assessment. You should consider if the employee is able to do their duties from home, or if you can provide parking, or allow the employee to travel off-peak etc.
- 3 A member of their household is in the vulnerable category. As per government guidelines, this employee should also be isolating if co-habiting with someone who is shielding and as such their place of work may need to adapt to accommodate.
- 4 Have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus in the last 14 days. As per government guidelines, they are required to self-isolate. You could offer the employee a private COVID test if they are struggling to get an NHS appointment.
- 5 Concerned about their own health if they catch coronavirus. Have each employee complete a health risk assessment so they can establish for themselves if they are considered high risk.
- 6 Caring for children or other dependents. Employees are entitled to leave for dependents. Refer to your company policy for more details as this varies. You could adjust their working hours to allow for child care arrangements.

Source



OFFICE SPACE

DO WE STILL NEED A PHYSICAL SPACE OR IS IT TIME TO EVOLVE?

When we interviewed Peter Bell, CEO of office space experts [Expedite Group Europe](#), he predicted that in the coming months his business will witness 'churn', as organisations scramble to downsize their office spaces, or have them refurbished for health and safety reasons. Peter also predicted a 25-35% drop in office space requirements over the next 3 – 5 years – something which he believes landlords should be very worried about.

The real debate when it comes to trying to predict the future of work has been about how important a physical office space is to a business's success. The pandemic forced all businesses to adapt quickly, with offices shutting down overnight and employees finding themselves setting up desks wherever they could squeeze them into their homes.

In our first report, we mentioned how our flexible-working policy meant the transition to emergency remote measures was considerably smoother than many other businesses experienced. We already had the technology and equipment, all we needed to do was ensure the health and safety of our employees and adapt to more in-depth remote managing performance.

We knew that giving our employees the option to work flexibly was best for them – for their health and wellbeing, for their families, and for balancing work and life commitments. The situation that we found ourselves in just confirmed this. Going forward, we will be maintaining our office for anybody that requires it or who feels like they would benefit from some time in the office, but the option is completely left up to the employee.

The main argument for a physical office space is the need for socialisation and collaboration. Indeed, [the vast majority of complaints](#) about the current working from home situation centre around feelings of isolation, lack of communication between managers and teams, and the loss of spontaneous collaboration on projects. Humans are social creatures, and being left to work alone for months on end is proving to be [detrimental to many people's mental health](#). There's even [artificial office 'soundtracks'](#) springing up for people who focus better with a bit of hustle and bustle in the background.

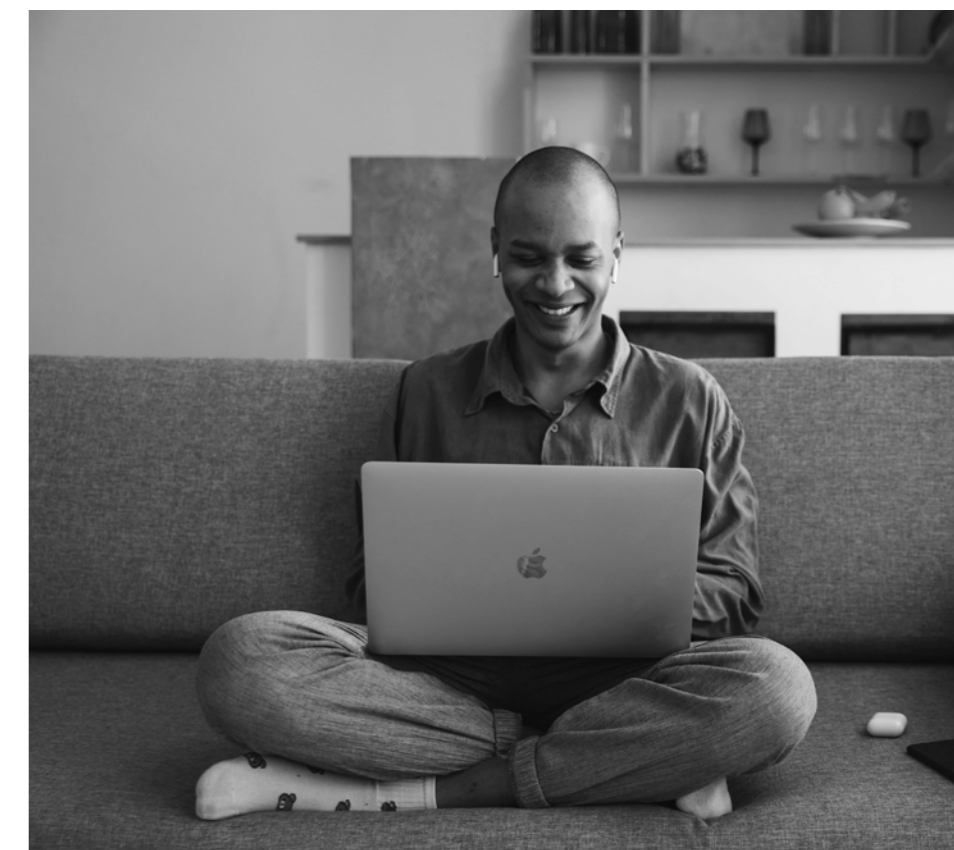
This is not to say that these problems cannot be overcome with smart management. [Training management teams](#) to gauge productivity by output over presenteeism, encouraging [effective](#) and [concise](#) communication, and showing more [acts of kindness](#) are just some of the ways in which teams can be effectively managed remotely. [Micromanagers](#) will not be able to adapt to managing a remote team well, so training will be essential.

In early August 2020, LinkedIn conducted research into what workers wanted when it comes to the future – do they want to return to the office, or do they feel that working from home is best? [Just 24%](#) of those surveyed say they will willingly return to work as soon as they are allowed.

As the pandemic drags on, more and more people are beginning to voice their desire to keep at least some of the working arrangements that they

have adapted to. A staggering [91% of workers](#) in a Eskenzi PR survey stated that they would prefer to work from home at least some of the time, with just 9% saying that they wished to go back into the office full-time. Remote work activist and founder of First Base HQ [Chris Herd](#) predicts that by the end of this decade, the vast majority of workers will be working from home.

We agree. As the pandemic continues, the business world is realising that something needs to change. Workers have had their eyes opened to the benefits of remote work, they have more personal time, and often more money due to not having to pay skyrocketing commuting costs. Even those itching to get back into an office environment will concede that there are indeed benefits to remote work. Now that we have proven that it can be done, and done well, it will be much harder to go back to 'the way things were'.



THE DAILY COMMUTE

We cannot talk about a return to the office without talking about the commute. A business can have the cleanest, most hygienic office in the world, but if a worker has to pack themselves onto a crammed commuter train it can put them at risk. **Just one journey** on a rush-hour Metrolink tram proved that not everybody in Manchester is taking the requirement to wear a mask on public transport seriously, and there seems to be even less enforcement of this law – despite being in one of the worst affected areas of the UK.

The fact that the commute has been getting steadily longer over the past few years can also not be ignored. Between 2007 and 2017, the average amount of time the UK worker spent commuting **rose from 53.6 minutes a day to 58.4 minutes a day**. This doesn't sound like much, until you realise that this equates to 18 extra hours travelling to and from work in a year. 18 hours is a lot of time that a worker could have spent with their family, spent on hobbies they enjoy, or even upskilling

themselves.

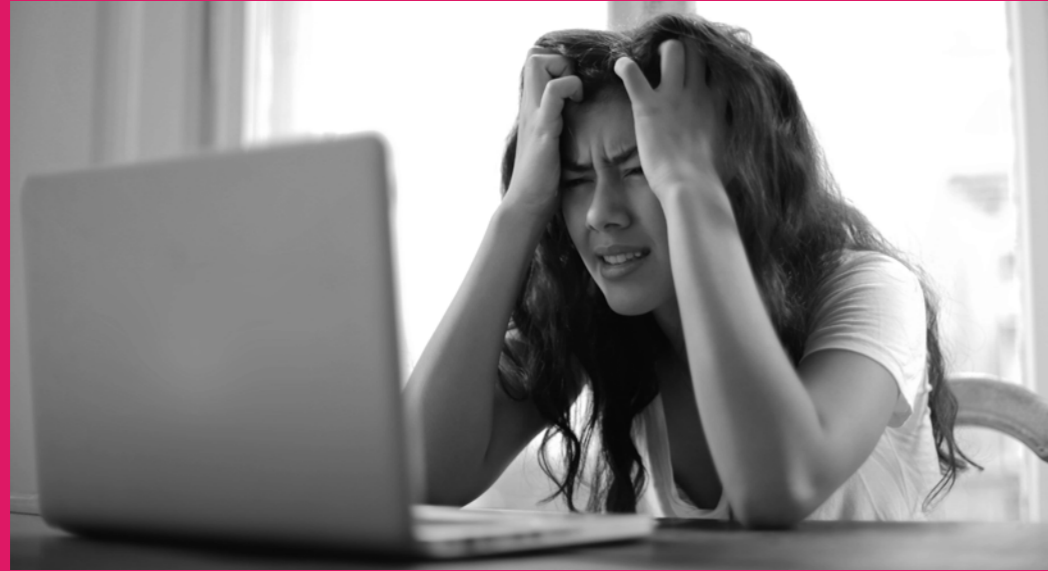
The cost of commuting has always been a sore point with workers too. Each year, as rail fares rise – always at a higher rate than inflation – more and more commuters begin to question what they are paying for. **Over-crowded** and outdated trains, **cancellations** and delays commonplace, and constantly **rising rail fares** mean that the UK's commuters are already disenfranchised. It is no surprise that workers would lean towards eliminating travel as much as possible, and the current shift to remote work could be the death-knell for the daily commute.

The environmental effects of less people travelling daily cannot be denied. Whilst it seems obvious that less cars on the road would mean less emissions, it's also important to note that this is not the only effect the commute can have. The rise of convenience caused a massive increase in waste – disposable coffee cups, sandwich cartons, plastic cutlery, straws... the list goes on. When working from home, this waste is drastically reduced as the worker is likely to make their own food and drink.

Working from home will not cure all our environmental problems, but it can make a significant step towards improvement. Whilst a worker will use more electricity and gas working from home, it is still a substantial reduction in emissions. Switching to working from home a couple of days a week could have a huge impact – **one study found** that 98% of carbon emissions incurred at work was down to a workers' commute.

The changes we are currently experiencing have also caused many big oil companies to begin to pivot on their offerings for the better. **Oil company BP** is currently considering big changes to their offices, expecting to get rid of up to three quarters of their total office space. It is also planning a 're-invention', **switching to providing more renewable forms of energy**. This process, although likely already on the books, has been accelerated by the pandemic. Fellow oil company Royal Dutch Shell is also making similar changes, and both companies have set themselves targets to be net zero emissions firms by 2050.





Employee WELLBEING

In recent years the focus on employee wellbeing has increased, and for good reason. A rise in the amount of people suffering from mental health problems is worrying, and led many to believe that the UK is on **the brink of a mental health crisis** – especially as we attempt to come out of a global pandemic. It is heartening to see, however, that many UK businesses are taking their employee's wellbeing seriously, with a **recent survey by PerkBox** showing that up to 95% of businesses made extra effort to support furloughed staff.

The phrase 'happy staff, happy clients' has been around for a while, and many organisations use it as a foundation to build their company culture. In our original report, we discussed how remote and flexible working policies can be used to ensure a better work/life balance. It also often means the worker has more financial freedom, as costs associated with commuting are also lower.

We explored in the previous whitepaper how workers with existing mental health conditions often find remote and flexible working arrangements beneficial, allowing those who struggle with their mental health to avoid undue stress and have more control over their lives.

95% OF BUSINESSES TOOK MEASURES TO SUPPORT THE WELLBEING OF FURLOUGHED STAFF.

52%
51%

OF SMALL BUSINESSES IMPLEMENTED EMOTIONAL WELLBEING SOLUTIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC.

OF NON-OFFICE-BASED BUSINESSES SAY THEY'LL INVEST MORE IN WELLBEING AFTER CORONAVIRUS.

HR Expert **Gemma Dale** recently outlined the four different types of employees that every company will have as our working lives begin to return to a semblance of normal:

- 1 People that will be fine
- 2 People that will need some support but recover reasonably quickly / well
- 3 People that are ok now but will become not ok in the future (delayed responses)
- 4 People that will not be at all well and will need lots of support.

She goes on to advise; "We need to prepare for what each of these groups need, from some basic wellbeing support for those people in group 2 to those in group 4 who may need long term support. We also need to make sure whatever we put into place is available long term – not just for the next few months."

But what about employee wellbeing when you have remote working policies in place? As we have mentioned, feelings of loneliness and isolation abounded whilst employees were working from home, therefore it is important to ensure that your workers feel connected to their colleagues, their managers, and your organisation. It is important to note that the pandemic has also caused

depression rates to double over the past six months, as worries around finances, health, and family all increase exponentially, and some workers who have never had mental health problems before may now find themselves struggling and in need of support. We believe that a balanced approach of ensuring clear and concise communication is required without becoming overbearing or pushy. Reassurance will also go a long way towards making your employees more comfortable. Studies show that **UK bosses are already leading the way** when it comes to employee wellbeing during the pandemic, providing more support and resources than their counterparts worldwide. Local IT firm San-iT have **created a scheme** which they have called 'SaniTy days' – twice a year, each member of staff gets two 'sanity' days, where they can invest in themselves in whichever way they chose.

If you are one of the many companies looking to introduce a remote working policy within your business, it is important to stress the need for boundaries for your staff. Whilst working from home can give your workers some of their time back, it is becoming increasingly clear that this is not always the case. In fact, **a recent study** of 3.1 million workers across the world found that the pandemic workday is 48 minutes longer than a regular workday, with more meetings (however it's important to note that these meetings are often significantly



Recent research by The Workforce Institute showed that just 20% of staff believe that their employer met their needs during the crisis.

.....
Recognising potential burnout as a risk to workers, jobhunting website [Indeed](#) has given 10,000 of its employees an additional six days of paid annual leave – one day for each month worked until November 2020.

In May, the company hosted [#YOUDay](#) – a shared day off for their employees to spend time with their loved ones – and after receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback, the company has expanded the scheme.

“At Indeed, we felt it was important that our employees could take a moment to focus on their personal lives. While our benefits exist to attract, engage and retain talent, they also play an important role in allowing us to rest and recharge.”

Helen Durkin,
Employer Brand
Programme Manager
at [Indeed](#)

shorter than pre-pandemic meetings).

Whilst your employees working longer hours may seem like a good thing on the surface, it is likely to become detrimental in the long term, leading to cases of burnout and other mental health problems. Presenteeism – where a person’s output is judged on by how much time they spend at work, as opposed to their output – was already causing major problems within the workplace, and this digital form of presenteeism that we are witnessing could be even worse.

In fact, [recent research](#) by the National Bureau of Economic Research has showed that the pandemic has caused the average age in which a person is likely to suffer from career burnout to lower, now standing at age 32, as opposed to around age 50 before the crisis. Almost a third of those surveyed, of all ages, stated that the pandemic has brought them much closer to burning out.

Insurance and Financial Services firm [Canada Life](#) found that despite the current job market, [more than a quarter](#) of UK workers who worked from home during the height of the pandemic are considering changing jobs after the way their employer dealt with the crisis – something which may attribute to a ‘talent gap’ within an organisation. Whilst some employers may believe that a recession will result in ‘cheap labour’, we believe that the opposite will occur – that many businesses will do whatever they can to lure in the best talent, and this talent will be able to demand better salaries and benefits.

Digital presenteeism and the burnout it can cause [has been cited](#) as one of the biggest threats to workplace health after the COVID-19 virus itself. Workers have adjusted to an ‘always on’ mindset, and with each day

bringing more bad news of lay-offs and economic downturns, some workers feel like they need to prove themselves to hold on to their jobs.

It hasn’t just been employees that have been struggling with their mental health during the crisis. The current economic situation and the pressure that it is putting on leaders has caused a [‘devastating’ mental health crisis](#) within management teams, as [72% of leaders](#) surveyed by LinkedIn stated that they have struggled during this time with not having all of the answers, and 52% doubting their ability to lead – which has led to a rise in cases of Imposter Syndrome.

It is important to promote a healthy balance between home and work life with your staff – including managers – to avoid these problems. Removing the pressure to be always contactable and always ‘on’ will go a long way in ensuring that your employees are able to put boundaries into place. It could also be a good idea to provide workers with training and resources to make them aware of potential bad habits and to help them separate work from home.

.....
“Align your team so that they have a collective mission and purpose to work toward. And, of course, keep open all lines of communication. It’s really a case of how we connect, collaborate, and communicate effectively.”
- Martin Murphy

5 WAYS TO SEPARATE WORK AND HOME

1

CREATE A DEDICATED WORKSPACE

Sitting there in the morning at the start of the workday, and leaving at the end of your shift will mentally signal an end to work.



2

RE-ARRANGE YOUR DAY

Some people may find that they are sluggish and slow to start in the mornings, but they feel alert and in work-mode in the evenings. Could starting work ‘late’ accommodate this?



3

DO A FAKE COMMUTE

A 5-minute walk around the block can help create a ‘commute’ mindset, signalling the start and end of each workday.



4

DON'T CHECK EMAILS AFTER HOURS

Checking emails sat on the sofa brings work into your relaxation space. Bad email = high cortisol = stress



5

MAKE THE MOST OF FREE TIME

We’ve all been guilty of falling into a work-sleep-repeat mentality during lockdown. Using free time to do something that you love is guaranteed to boost your mood.



Resilience in the time of Coronavirus

Another wellbeing issue that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore is that of a person's mental resilience. It is our resilience that allows us to cope during a time of crisis, such as the one we currently find ourselves in, as well as bouncing back once the crisis has passed.

As part of a wider, [ongoing study](#) into the nation's mental health during the pandemic, The [Mental Health Foundation](#) looked into the [resilience of individuals](#) during the pandemic, how they are coping, and what coping strategies

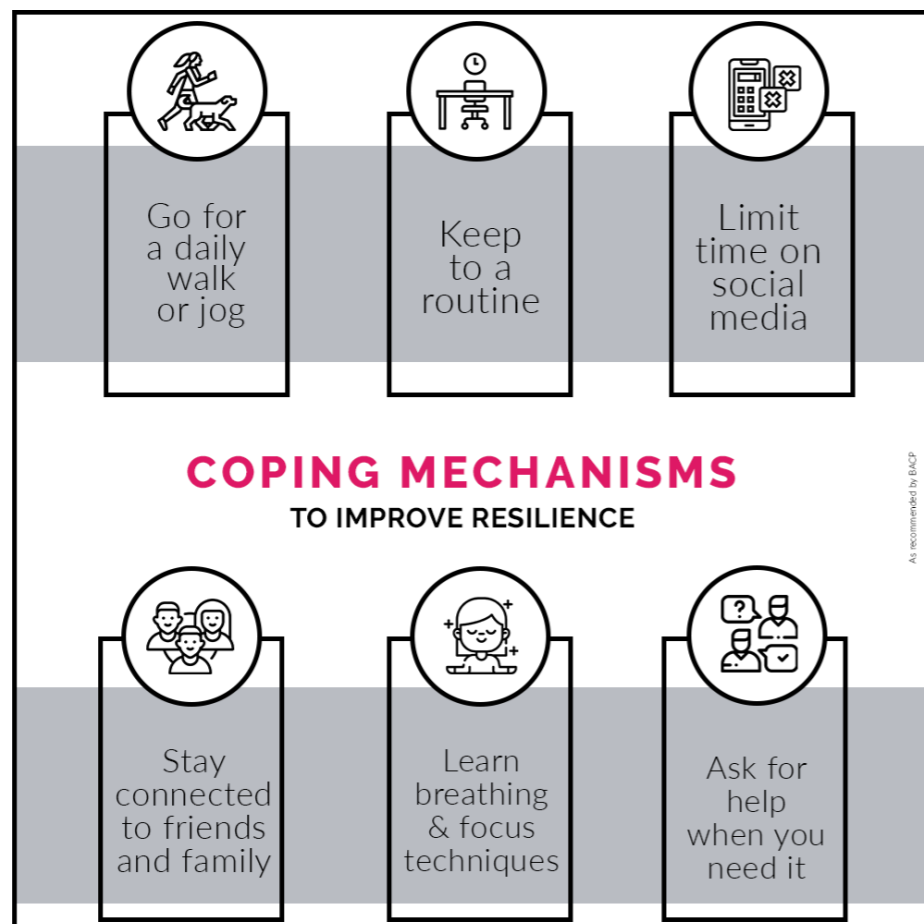
cope is declining and less people are reporting that they are coping well.

Those experiencing stress during the crisis have turned to coping strategies – 87% of those polled. Whilst the majority of these coping strategies were considered healthy, for example going for a walk and putting extra effort into staying connected with loved ones, many people are resorting to ways of coping which are potentially harmful, such as alcohol, substance abuse, or bad eating habits.

The Mental Health Foundation also states that; "It is essential to acknowledge that programmes to promote individuals' resilience are not a substitute for providing the social, economic, and environmental circumstances that sustain

and protect people's mental and overall wellbeing." This highlights the importance that our entire community plays in an individual's wellbeing and resilience.

By providing a supportive working environment for your employees and giving them the tools to look after their mental health and wellbeing during the crisis, you could be helping support their ability to cope during the crisis. This could also have the additional bonus of creating a culture of '[psychological safety](#)', which is not only beneficial to the individual employees, but also for business. This culture often leads to engaged employees, creativity, and innovation – many of the things that will be necessary for businesses to survive the COVID-19 pandemic.



THE BENEFITS OF MENTORING

WITH MY2BE

THE SHIFT TO REMOTE WORKING HAS RESULTED IN TEAMS ONLY COMMUNICATING WITH THEIR IMMEDIATE COLLEAGUES. INFORMAL INTERACTIONS, "WATER-COOLER MOMENTS" AND LEARNING HAS SUFFERED FOR MANY, MEANING LESS CREATIVITY, DEVELOPMENT, AND INNOVATION. CONNECTING AND CARING FOR STAFF ARE SOME OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES COMPANIES ARE FACING BUT IT'S SOMETHING TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP TO OVERCOME.



Online mentoring has been proven to aid personal development, improve employee wellbeing, promote diversity and inclusion, create a healthy company culture, and increase engagement remotely. Put simply, it is a way of showing your staff that you are investing in them as people, their wellbeing, and most importantly, their potential.

It might seem intimidating, but we have some top tips for a successful implementation in your business with help from our client, Simone Shorter, responsible for Talent Success at Box. Box are an incredible example of a forward-thinking company in how they care for their people. Working closely with them, it is evident just how much they value their people, and as a company at the forefront of the Hybrid Future of Work, they are also one of the best examples of a how to successfully transition towards this by taking care of their people now.

01. Awareness. Do your employees know the mentoring program exists and how to access it? As we're settling into a remote lifestyle, clear communication is

essential. You'll need to shout loud above the digital noise and be consistent in your messaging. providing expertise and sharing best practices they've seen work with other companies."

"As a program manager of the internal mentorship pilot, [my2be] has made rolling it out a seamless experience. We're grateful for all the thoughtfulness and all work [they have] provided in getting our program running!"

02. Ease of Use & Training

The best technological systems are intuitive and mentoring programmes should follow the same structure. Are the slow adopters just as likely to use this as those who thrive with change? A lack of training could be what is stopping them from utilising a new system.

03. Manage Expectations

It's important to have a clear idea of what each mentee is looking to get from the program so you can match them with the best mentor for achieving their goals. Once the first session is complete, providing a structure, such as a recurring monthly meeting, is essential for keeping momentum and providing consistent support.

"my2be ... has gone above and beyond in the early stages of program development via consulting,

04. Flexibility is key

We feel like a broken record, but there's no one-size-fits-all solution to any business pain point in the current climate. You will need to adapt your program to suit the needs of all users, which could mean customised set ups for many of your employees.

"I've been impressed with how personalized the experience has been. My2be is great at listening to our unique company challenges and capturing what's most important in the modifications to the my2be platform. They have also made in the moment adjustments to the platform whenever pain points in the user experience came up."

Be sure to request feedback from both your mentors and mentees, keeping it informal and anonymous to get real opinions on what worked and what didn't. A good mentoring programme will improve employee engagement, so make sure you listen to what they have to say. You'll be surprised at what you can learn about your own business and may unearth some valuable gems in the process.

NURTURING CULTURE REMOTELY

“WITHOUT INDIVIDUAL CLARITY, CONFLICT AND ANIMOSITY CAN GROW BETWEEN STAFF, WITH RESENTMENT FROM BOTH FURLOUGHED AND NON-FURLOUGHED STAFF.”

Altum HR, GUIDANCE FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT BETWEEN EMPLOYEES

CULTURE

The majority of business leaders are acutely aware of the importance of culture – **94% of Executives** believe that a company's culture is integral towards its success. The pandemic and the massive shift to remote working proved that culture must be more than just gimmicks and should instead be focused on its people.

Nurturing culture whilst staff have been separated has been a challenge for many leaders. In some cases, workforces have been split not only physically, but with some staff being furloughed whilst others remained working at full pace. [Fenews.co.uk](https://www.fenews.co.uk) predicted in March that resentment may begin to creep in between furloughed and unfurloughed workers, and it wasn't long before stories of this began appearing.

As some offices reopen [The Telegraph](https://www.telegraph.co.uk) reported that there is growing tension between commuters and those still working from home. Some unfurloughed staff resent their colleagues, thinking that they 'have it easy' being at home on paid leave. Meanwhile, the first wave of workers to re-enter the workplace



harbour growing resentment toward their companies for forcing them to commute again, without any of the benefits of being in an office.

We have said it before, but in situations like this it is important to remember that every single one of your employees is an individual, and a 'one size fits all' approach will most-likely end up with conflicts. We are living through unprecedented times, and this calls for unprecedented leadership.

"If you are looking at new propositions, pivoting your business, or introducing a new working model such as remote working - what sort of attributes and behaviours do you need? What impact has this had on customers, suppliers, colleagues, partners? This gives you perspective on what behaviours are making the most difference and what you need to make the most of. This gives you the input to redefine what your culture is going forward. Culture should always be future focused." -

Derek Bishop, Culture Consultancy

So what can you do to keep your culture alive, especially during a time when the majority of us are already '[Zoomed out](#)'? Virtual socials were popular during those first few weeks, but soon the novelty of squinting at all your colleagues squeezed onto a screen wore off.

"You should always look out for your people over everything else, because it will be the people that save the business." - Martin Murphy on [Episode 23](#) of the #AdamAsks podcast.

We believe that the most important step that a company can take towards a healthy culture is to refine their principles and values. Taking the time to communicate these values ensures that the entire team is on the same page, striving towards the same goals. At We Are Adam, we have our [Mission Power Compass](#), developed in conjunction with Leadership Coach [Martin Murphy](#), and this helps all of our

staff strive to be the best that we can be as a team. Other simple changes that businesses can make include:

- Encouraging open communication and feedback - this will help promote transparency and encourage an environment where everybody can contribute, not just the most vocal employees.
- Set expectations over when and where communication happens - This will help your staff members put boundaries in place between work and home lives, as well as ensuring that your official channels don't get flooded with personal chat and vice versa.
- Get to know your employees as individuals - Not only is this make your employees feel valued and lets them know that you care about them as people, but it will also enable you to make better decisions about their working lives.
- Keep track of remote employee engagement - By setting up a monthly or bi-monthly survey, you can easily get a feel for how your employees are feeling and where they need additional support. Don't just make your survey work-related, either!

REMOTE MANAGING PERFORMANCE

Managing remote teams requires a large degree of trust between managers and employees. We discovered in the original report that trust was cited as the main reason many companies felt that they could not offer remote working policies to their staff. This year, however, has proved to employers once and for all that the vast majority of staff can not only be trusted to complete their work, but in many cases they can complete work of equal or higher quality in less time. There are still challenges to overcome, however. **Burnout is increasing** amongst homeworkers, as they often find themselves **clocking in more hours** at their desks despite having reclaimed their commuting time. Presenteeism is a threat to productivity, and therefore managers should take steps to ensure that their staff do not suffer in the long run. The pandemic has meant that many businesses have been proactive, introducing new initiatives and compelling managers to **re-evaluate their techniques** when it comes to measuring productivity. The crisis situation caused by the pandemic has also meant that employees have shown their **'hidden' skills** – something which savvy managers will have picked up on, and it

has enabled them to restructure and deploy their teams in a more effective way. There are, however, concerns that presenteeism is beginning to worm its way into our remote-working lives, and not just by workers putting in extra hours at their desks. **Tales of employee surveillance** are becoming more commonplace, and people are beginning to question both the legalities and the ethics of such spying. Shibu Phillip, founder of beauty product reseller Transcend, told **BBC Business** that he has been using employee surveillance software **Hubstaff** to track his workers, recording their keystrokes, mouse movements, hours worked, and websites visited. He states that it adds a level of accountability to his workers. Not everyone agrees, however. In a **recent report**, the CIPD warned business leaders that surveillance technology seriously harms trust between an employer and an employee, and advises that supportive measures will provide much better results when it comes to staff productivity than surveillance. "Employees generally shouldn't be subject to surveillance when working from home. Any monitoring software could be deemed too intrusive if there are other means to achieve the same result." - **Ksenia Bakina**, legal officer for Privacy International.

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We feel it is important to once again highlight the Harvard Business Review's techniques for putting faith in your employees whilst still allowing managers to have an oversight of performance and productivity:

- 1 Establish daily check-ins
- 2 Utilise technology for effective communication
- 3 Set rules of engagement
- 4 Be human
- 5 Give clear expectations

Job van der Voort, Founder, Remote.com

"If you're in the office and others are remote, everybody has to act as though everybody is remote. If you don't do that, then there is a really big bias and it is very hard for people in the office to see the effect."

(Remote.com is a website set up to aid organisations around the world transition to remote work by helping them navigate local remote working laws on everything from payroll and taxes to HR processes.

Teresa Hassara, MassMutal

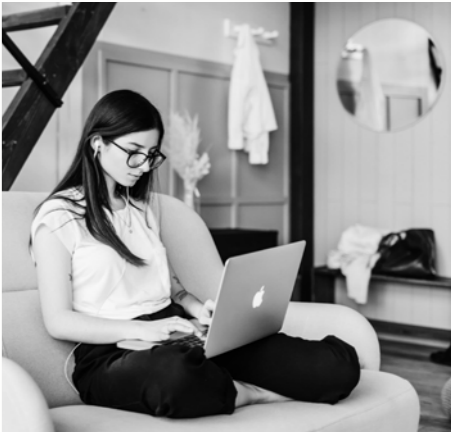
"Keep an eye on time-stamps of emails, and make sure that when people are working at 11pm, it is a choice and not because they're suddenly working 60 or 70 hours a week."

Jennifer O'Lear, Chief Diversity Officer, Merck Group

"We need to take a more planful approach to create space for interactions that happened before: discussions at the coffee machine, collaboration, role modelling of leaders, onboarding of new employees. We need to think: when do we bring people together and what kind of frame do they need in order to make that a meaningful interaction?"

Darren Murph, Head of Remote at GitLab

"One of the most sizable challenges when going remote is keeping everyone in the loop in an efficient way. Put concerted effort around systematically documenting important process changes in a central place to minimize confusion and dysfunction."



Thinking outside the box

Insurance and Financial Services firm **MassMutual** found themselves adapting overnight when the Shelter in Place orders were announced in the US. Overnight, **98%** of their 7,500-strong workforce were forced to adapt to remote working.

This accelerated their usage of **Catalant** – a platform that allows employees to view available roles and projects within the organisation, but also allows managers to get a better understanding of their employee's skills by importing information from their LinkedIn profiles. They also found that moving appraisals and evaluations online meant that it 'levelled the playing field' for their staff.

"We had really positive feedback – when everybody works remotely, it feels like everybody has a fair shot."

- Teresa Hassara, Head of Workplace Solutions, MassMutual.



TECHNOLOGY: ENABLING CHANGE

Multinational food corporation Danone S.A. discovered the just **how adaptable** their staff really are during the height of the pandemic. Their Mexico base of operations was in the midst of a complicated project to reshape and rebrand an entire product when the pandemic hit, meaning that the planned visit of technicians from their Italian machinery provider, Ocme, was unable to go ahead as planned.

Rather than delay or cancel the project, Ocme worked with and trained Danone teams in Mexico via Zoom calls – utilising the technology available to them. The final stage of the project – reprogramming the machinery – was done remotely from Italy. This entire process meant that production was not halted or interrupted, and now the Mexican team has been upskilled with technical skills and the plant set-up for future remote training and projects. Although the process took longer than originally planned – two weeks instead of the original four days – it ended up being more cost-effective than an in-person switch.



Our reliance on technology has never been greater, and whilst much of the technology that we now rely on to do our jobs on a daily basis, for example Microsoft Teams or Zoom, were available pre-pandemic, they were not the household names they have become today.

As the working world begins to find its feet remotely, technology will play a key role. An important consideration when introducing remote working policies is that you get the right technology and software, and that your employees receive adequate training to utilise it. If you don't take the time to train your teams fully, the cracks will soon begin to show no matter how good or expensive the technology is.

Not every piece of tech will be suited to your organisation, so it will be important to make sure that you are investing in what works for you.

Technology will also go a long way in easing the '[Brexit Brain Drain](#)' – where highly-skilled workers are already leaving the country for residence in the EU.

This has been a [major concern](#) for many companies for a few years now – a [2019 survey](#) by Salesforce showed that over half of businesses surveyed were 'concerned' by the phenomena. Highly-skilled Britons are choosing to invest their futures elsewhere, leaving skill shortages in the UK, with [tech skills](#) being a major concern.

By allowing remote working and equipping yourself with the correct technology and onboarding processes, you can mitigate the effects of 'Brain Drain' upon your business and employ the most talented applicant regardless of location. Recognising this shift, social media giant Facebook has created a [Remote Work Director](#) position.

"We're building the future world of work at Facebook as we invest in our teams and explore the possibilities offered by remote work arrangements.

We want to make sure everyone who works remotely has the tools and resources to stay connected to our diverse, vibrant community around the world—as they build for the world." – [From the Facebook careers page.](#)

In order to attempt to combat the tech skill 'Brain Drain' within the UK economy, as well as to help the economy recover after the slew of job losses caused by the pandemic, the UK government has [announced](#) that it will be providing free tech skill training to adult learners.

The Lifetime Skills Guarantee aims to give adults the opportunity to upskill by taking free college courses which will be valued by employers. Adults without an A-Level or equivalent qualification will be offered a fully funded college course, with the opportunity to study at a time and location that suits them. The scheme is slated to begin in April 2021, and a full list of the available courses is expected to be released soon.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Most people across the UK have been working from home for over 6 months at unsuitable and hastily thrown together workstations. Just a quick glance at LinkedIn will show many workers lamenting about their backache or eyestrain, and as an employer it is important to remember that you still have a responsibility for the health and safety of your employees.

If you are considering a long-term switch to remote work, it is important to make sure that you are assessing the risks your employees will face at home. Most of the time, this can be done via a self-assessment by the employee (there are [free templates](#) for this available from HSE) with an accompanying photograph, but there are businesses that will provide this service for you also.

It is also important to remember that you have a duty of care to your employees when it comes to their mental health. We have spoken at length within this report about the importance of looking after your employee's mental health, putting boundaries in place, and ensuring that the risk of burnout is reduced as much as possible.

A return to the office can feel like a Health and Safety minefield. Even if you are only re-opening your office for a small portion of your workforce, it is likely that you will have to make many changes, some of which may be costly. You must make sure to think of everything from social distancing and PPE to office cleaning and inbound/outbound goods.

The UK Government has published its COVID-safe [guidelines](#) online, however it may be worth your while hiring a specialist company to come in to assess your office space and advise on best practice, as well as giving advice on how to implement any changes you need to make.

CYBER SECURITY

"A SOLID CYBERSECURITY STRATEGY IS NO LONGER JUST FOR LARGER BUSINESSES
NOR IS IT A LUXURY – IT IS A NECESSITY."

- SANIT

Many businesses now rely on Zoom or Microsoft Teams to complete their day-to-day tasks, but despite how helpful these programmes have been, it didn't take long for the cracks to begin to show in our reliance upon technology.

By late March 2020, security and privacy concerns regarding Zoom began to arise, leaving some Mac users open to having their **webcams and microphones** hacked, as well as instances of '**Zoombombing**' – when an uninvited guest enters an unsecured video conference, usually with malicious or hurtful intentions. Zoom's Chief Executive Eric Yuan **apologised** for these oversights, and the company has since changed its focus to securing their software.

IT company San-iT has noted that SME businesses are **more vulnerable** to malicious cyber-attacks, which are increasing in both increasing in volume and sophistication. San-iT has found that many SME's do not believe that they are large or attractive enough to be the target of an attack, therefore neglecting to invest in cyber security and leaving themselves vulnerable.

A June **report** from Microsoft found that COVID-19-inspired

cyber attacks spiked to over 1 million incidents per day at the start of March. Malware has been found embedded into interactive 'Coronavirus' maps and spam emails are tricking employees into clicking on malicious links. Cyber-security company **Checkpoint** has found that whilst these COVID-themed attacks appear to be decreasing in volume, threats will still remain more commonplace for some time yet.

Staff training will be absolutely essential in the coming months. Even if your business is not introducing remote working policies, it is likely that new technology or processes have been introduced to your teams. By taking the time early on to ensure that everybody is up-to-date on training – not only on how to use the tech, but also how to use it safely and securely – you can stop any larger problems from rearing their heads further down the line.

KPMG recently discovered the importance of proper staff training when an IT blunder led to the chat data of 145,000 staff members being **deleted for good** from Microsoft Teams, with Microsoft confirming that the data was unrecoverable. All of this happened when a member of staff attempted to delete the ac-

count of just a singular user. It goes without saying that KPMG have since introduced training and processes to prevent this from happening again.

The number of malicious 'phishing' attempts has risen exponentially also, with hackers and criminals looking to exploit the fact that many users will be using technology that they are not comfortable with. Back in June, we found that 60% of all malicious email activity was specifically aimed at exploiting fears and anxieties surrounding the pandemic. Since June, there have been **11,500 reports** of Coronavirus-related fraud, with a total loss of **over £11m**.

If you are unable to provide in-person training to your teams, e-Learning is a great way of ensuring that all of your teams are trained up to the same standard whilst working fully or partially remote.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF REMOTE WORK

FUEL BILLS, GENDER PAY GAP AND AGEISM ARE ALL ON THE RISE IN 2020

As we find ourselves heading towards a second wave of COVID-19, the government has advised workers to work from home where they can. Upon passing the six-month mark of infection control measures, the socio-economic effects of COVID-19 pandemic are beginning to come to the fore. Household costs have begun to rise, as workers use more electricity and gas as they work from home. These costs are only expected to rise over the next few months, as winter sets in and workers need to heat their homes. Energy experts predict that homeworking in the winter could see the nation's energy bills rise up to as much as £1.9 billion. Whilst it has been noted that many workers save money overall on commuting costs, for some this may cause extra financial burden. Martin Lewis of Money Saving

Expert has been trying to get the word out to workers that they can claim up to £6 a week from their employer, and up to £6 pw 'tax relief' if they are self-employed. However, very few workers are aware of this, and even fewer have claimed what they are owed. Accountancy Age has stated that it is the employer's responsibility to inform workers that they are entitled to this relief. They also note, however, that HMRC's complex rules and 'grey areas' are off-putting for most workers as a significant amount of effort is required to claim for such a small reimbursement. Another unfortunate side-effect of the COVID-19 pandemic has been that gender equality has taken a large step backwards, as it has been mostly women who have been the losers in this situation. Women's roles are 1.8x more vulnerable than men's. Before the crisis, women held 39%

of global employment, however they make up 59% of all jobs lost due to the pandemic. Women are also losing out when it comes to hiring too, with only 41.5% of those employed in April 2020 being women, compared to 45.6% at the same period in 2019. It is also unsurprising to learn that women took on the majority of childcare responsibilities during the first lockdown period. This additional burden on women, many of whom were still working full time from home whilst caring for their dependants, has meant that women are now spending more time doing unpaid work than paid work. The effects on mental health have also been noted, with 33% of women reporting that their mental health has suffered as a result of this additional burden. McKinsey & Company's report also noted that women are more vulnerable to economic effects

related to the pandemic than men due to existing gender inequalities. Whilst we have mentioned that long-term flexible working arrangements post-pandemic could help reduce the gender pay gap and other gender inequalities, in the current crisis situation it's women that are the main losers and these advantages are rendered moot. A recent review by Lady Lawrence found that the pandemic has affected BAME people in the UK disproportionately - not only in rates and seriousness of infection, but also economically. The report, which was commissioned by the Labour Party, found that BAME people are over-represented in public-facing jobs meaning they were unable to work from home, are more at risk of workplace non-compliance to COVID guidelines, and are more likely to live in overcrowded housing where the virus spreads more rapidly. A Resolution Foundation study found that twice as many young, non-white workers lost their jobs after being placed on furlough than the average. Of the young workers who lost their jobs, only around a third have been able to find new employment - a startling statistic to be revealed just as the government's furlough scheme comes to a close. Ageism, which has long been a problem within the business world, has also increased during the pandemic. Recent research published by the National Bureau of Economic Research in the US has highlighted that not only are older workers more susceptible physically to the virus, but they may also be economically susceptible - equity holdings took a large hit at the start of the economic downturn, affecting retirement



savings. Employers are also less likely to employ an elderly worker over a younger one, seeing them as having a higher risk factor when it comes to the virus - adding to the proven ageism that typically has been witnessed in previous recessions. The NBER believes that these barriers will increase early retirement, Social Security claims, and poverty among retirees. Younger generations have not been unaffected by adverse effects, however. The current state of affairs has left many younger workers giving up on their career goals. Research conducted by the Princes Trust shows that one in three young people have 'given up hope' of ever landing their dream career, and 44% have actively lowered their aspirations as a result of the pandemic. The Trust believes that action must be taken to prevent a 'lost generation'. In an attempt to counter this issue, the government launched the Kickstarter campaign. A scheme worth £2 billion, it designed to help young people entering by subsidising work placements for the next 6 months. Should a business sign up for the scheme, the government will pay a salary for 16-24-year olds at National Minimum Wage, giving employers access to a wider workforce with minimal financial impact. However, the scheme has been met with some scepticism, with many highlighting the ways in which big businesses are able to manipulate the scheme to fund existing vacancies and support current payroll costs. **We believe that it is the responsibility of all business owners to proactively tackle such inequalities within the workplace, be they a result of gender, race, or age.** **It is only in doing so that flexible working will have a positive socio-economic impact.**

"During lockdown women spent a far greater proportion of their time looking after children compared to men, with the difference amounting to over an hour and a quarter a day."

COMMUNITY & COLLABORATION

"Community and collaboration are the most important things to me from a business perspective. My business was built on supporting a community of independent business owners."

MIKE PYE - BUSINESS OWNER

It is our belief that nurturing relationships with your existing network will be the key for businesses making their way out of the current economic crisis.

Whilst it is true that you must be prepared for your client base to shift, as news of different **company closures** seems to occur daily, by making a short-term sacrifice of your time or services, you can make a long-term investment in your company's future.

One successful, local collaborative initiative was the **Freshwalks** Build Back Better hike. This was an event where those whose livelihoods had been affected by the pandemic could join a hike with several business leaders and mentors to help lift spirits, network, and to help advise those struggling. After the success of the event, Freshwalks has since launched the **PayItForward** initiative, where Freshwalks members have the ability to sponsor a place of a future hike for a person who may benefit from the support of the Freshwalks community.

When it comes to talking about collaboration within the local business community, we turned to our friends at Mike Pye + Co. They have taken the opportunity given to us by the pandemic to reach out to their local community and to cement lasting ties with new and old connections alike, creating a supportive and inclusive community of Manchester businesses.

"We've done a lot of work over the last six months to help support our wider community keep their businesses thriving by providing access to resources, mentoring, and putting in place monthly business strategy sessions to help them with their own individual businesses," Mike told us when we caught up with him in September.

During the lockdown period, Mike and his team wanted to focus purely on adding value to their community. They set up a LinkedIn group, bringing together experienced specialists from many different fields to help support other business owners who had suffered.

The team also developed a series of collaborative workshops which helped businesses Review, Reimagine, and Relaunch their marketing strategies. These workshops help attendees react quickly to challenges, spot opportunities, and how to focus their time and attention on the things that will help their business recover.

Opportunity from collaboration has also presented itself to Mike, one which he has seized. He teamed up with one of his clients, Lee Ali of Expo Stars, to launch an entirely new product, **E5 Interactive**.

After putting their heads together to try to find a solution to the problems their clients are currently facing, they realised that there was a gap in the market for assessment-based marketing and E5 Interactive was born.

"What's been clear in the last 6 months is that the hardship has brought out the best (and unfortunately the worst) in a lot of people. I'm incredibly lucky to be involved in some amazing communities where people have gone out of their way to support each other with their own unique skill sets. Michael Di Paola's Freshwalks community in particular has been incredible, bringing great people together in a variety of ways to help support each other - both digitally and up in the hills. There are too many names to mention but it's been heartening to see Manchester's business community working together so closely to help each other through such a difficult time."

MIKE PYE, FOUNDER MIKE PYE & CO AND E5 INTERACTIVE



OPPORTUNITY

IN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

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"I'M SO EXCITED ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT WE'VE DONE, BUT I AM SO MUCH MORE EXCITED BY HOW MUCH FURTHER WE HAVE TO GO."

Current business news paints a glum picture of the state of the economy. Not a day goes by without another household name firm declaring bankruptcy or announcing a slew of lay-offs. It's easy to think that there can be no good news to come out of all this bad, but Mike Pye's experiences show otherwise – there are opportunities out there, you just need to put in the work to find them.

Hard times doesn't necessarily have to mean bad business, as Ben Francis and his company Gymshark discovered. In the midst of all the bad news, Gymshark hit headlines for raising [£200m in investments](#) – making it one of only 25 UK companies that have ever been valued at [over £1bn](#). The company has also reported some of its [best sales ever](#) during the lockdown months, despite gyms being closed and most people confined to their homes.

"You are going to see Gymshark become more agile than ever [...] It's all about making sure that Gymshark stays on its rocket ship trajectory, continues to build on what we believe the future of fitness brands and communities will look like, and end up becoming a truly global brand." – Ben Francis, Gymshark owner, from his personal [YouTube](#).

So, how did Gymshark beat the odds to come out on top? Their smart marketing decisions and opportunity-spotting have been invaluable. As fears over the livelihoods of personal trainers grew, Gymshark began offering virtual classes, allowing personal trainers to

apply to [give classes through their platform](#) – giving them an income and an audience they would otherwise have not been able to have.

Their reliance on more 'personal' marketing techniques allowed them to thrive in an environment where traditional advertising simply wasn't hitting the mark with consumers. Rather than spending on print or TV advertising, Gymshark rely heavily on [influencers](#) to promote their products. The fitness community on platforms such as Instagram is huge, and by sponsoring key accounts, Gymshark managed to break into overseas markets and retain a loyal following despite economic downturn.

Economic difficulty has long been known for encouraging savvy entrepreneurs to root out opportunity within their markets, and it will be essential for businesses to step back, take a look at their offering and seize what opportunities they can in order to survive... and even thrive. CBI boss Dame Carolyn Fairbairn believes that the pandemic recovery period will be '[Darwinian](#)', and that businesses need to do whatever it takes to ensure their survival. Even Pret A Manger, one of the hardest-hit big names, has spotted opportunity in difficult times, introducing a [coffee subscription service](#).

Opportunity has not just been presented to businesses, but to individuals also. 'Digital Nomads' – professionals who travel the world and work from wherever they find

WiFi – were [already on the rise](#) before the pandemic hit. With the predicted introduction of remote and flexible working policies at firms around the world, the Digital Nomad community is also [expected to grow](#) exponentially. We are beginning to see some countries, such as Barbados, create '[digital nomad](#)' visas in a bid to attract workers to their shores.

Also on an individual level are the opportunities that will be provided to those currently 'locked out' of the workplace, such as those living with disabilities and single parents. With businesses providing flexible working policies and the option to work from home, many of these groups can now consider entering the workforce... and companies can hire from a larger talent pool.

This opening up of the workplace is expected to have socio-economic benefits, such as [reducing the gender pay gap](#), [increasing workforce diversity](#), and meaning less disabled people need to rely on [state benefits](#) in order to live.

It appears that many workers have also taken this opportunity to continue to train themselves for when the job market improves in coming years. Financial Times [reports](#) that many business schools across Europe have recorded higher than usual volumes of applications, mostly due to students 'delaying' their entry into the working world but the rise could also be due to those out-of-work choosing to use the time to further their education and increase their skillset.



COVID-19'S GLOBAL IMPACT

While some nations flailed during lockdown, others thrived. In the Netherlands, remote working is woven into their way of life, and they have led the way for many years now. The **majority of Dutch homes** have high-speed internet access, infrastructure better developed, and there were already **a plethora** of publicly-available remote working locations. Many libraries in the Netherlands **re-invented** themselves as remote working spaces. The Dutch are famously fiercely protective over maintaining a **good work/life balance**.

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"Values such as democracy and participation are deeply rooted in the Dutch working culture, so managers place more trust in their workers than elsewhere in the world."

Aukje Nauta, Organisational psychology professor, University of Leiden

"I'm judged on whether I deliver value, not on the fact that I sit at a desk for nine hours a day,"

Yvo van Doorn, an Amsterdam-based engineer

"Working from home was not an unusual thing in our firm [...] and then, suddenly, brought on by COVID-19, we were all working from home without exceptions and for a longer period. And this turned out to be quite a different situation."

Marc Borggreven, PwC, The Cost and Benefits of Working from Home Report.



Population %
WFH pre-COVID

14.1%

4.7%

At home high
speed broadband

98%

96.9%

Measure
Performance

Outcomes

Presenteeism

Co-Working
Costs

from Free

High

Work/Life
Balance Rating

9.3

6.4

Quality Housing
Availability Score

7.5

5.5



The way we've approached remote work here has been different to what I've seen happen in the UK. Here, my company has offered office equipment to us so that we can work more comfortably, we are receiving an allowance to cover the extra cost of our utilities, and there's no rush for us to come back to the office unless we want to." – Kayleigh Macdonald, British citizen living and working in the Netherlands.

This isn't to say that the Dutch had no problems switching to a mostly remote workforce. They still had many of the same problems that we in the UK and others around the world experienced, the most notable being feelings of isolation and the impacts that could have on an employee's mental health.

So, what can we learn from the way that Dutch employers handled the pandemic? One of the main obstacles that leadership teams in the UK need to overcome is that of trust and measuring performance by presenteeism. Employers in the Netherlands are used to measuring employees by their output, not how many hours they clock at a desk. This attitude was key to keeping the sudden transition into a fully remote workforce smooth as managers were already used to this way of monitoring performance.

The sudden shift to remote work was essentially a large-scale remote working experiment. Where some countries such as the Netherlands succeeded, it stands to reason that many did not.

The [Harvard Business Review](#) conducted research into global preparedness by country. Predictably, countries with better access to high-speed internet and where digital payment systems were more commonplace would transition easier, and therefore it is no surprise that they discovered there is a huge gap in the resilience of rich and poor countries. They discovered that the most prepared countries were Singapore, the Netherlands, and the UK. The most unprepared countries were India, Indonesia, and Thailand, mostly due to their lack of robust digital platforms and access to stable internet.

It is important to note that the United States was not as prepared as many people assumed it was. All seemed fine on paper, with robust digital payment systems and infrastructure commonplace. But what the country was not prepared for was the surge in internet traffic, with many US cities and towns [experiencing internet outages](#) or drops in speeds, some over a 40% reduction. Broadband access is also some of the most expensive in the world, with only 19% of Americans living outside of cities having an alternative to their broadband provider. In order to support a remote workforce, the US must invest significantly into its' internet infrastructure.

The lack of importance placed on a good work/life balance also means that some countries will not be as suited to remote working, finding that their remote workers are putting in a lot more hours and have little to no balance, which is likely to impact their health and wellbeing. The fact that our working days appear to have gotten longer despite a lack

of commute has [been in the news](#) for a while now and is most likely caused by an global over-reliance on 'presenteeism' to measure a worker's performance.

An [analysis of server activity](#) on NordVPN's networks discovered that there are large disparities in just how much more time workers are putting in varies from country to country. Here in the UK, we are working, on average, an extra two hours a day. In the Netherlands, this has only increased by an hour, and interestingly there has been [no rise in cases of burnout](#) amongst workers. In the United States, however, the extra time put in skyrockets to over 3 hours a day of extra work.

This sort of behaviour, although seemingly good news for the companies, is likely to become detrimental in the long run, both to the employee and the employer. Putting in extra work and not taking regular breaks has been [proven](#) to cause burnout, which as we've already mentioned, could end up costing the company more.



FINAL THOUGHTS



Adam Mitcheson
Co-Founder
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New challenges on the horizon

Whilst there have been many changes over the last 6 months, we are now reaching what will be the “New Normal” for the foreseeable future. Zoom, Slack, Teams, Box, and more cloud based technologies may have been alien or rarely used by many 6 months ago but are now a normal part of our daily working lives.

The ongoing changes in restrictions have forced many businesses to learn to adapt in order to survive. Even in those industries most impacted such as hospitality, several restaurants and chefs have managed to pivot their business, adopting technology, and are now providing online products and solutions that they never would have done previously, and even resulting in

hiring extra staff.

However, many new challenges have been presented, largely around employee wellbeing, employee engagement and remote development. Engaging, developing, and caring for your people is more important now than it has ever been.

The evidence presented and the lessons learnt suggests that we will move towards a more hybrid future of work with a digital first approach.

Focussing on people and adopting a digital first mindset will help organisations not only survive over the coming months, but to also thrive in the hybrid, future of work.

It feels disingenuous to call this a conclusion

We are right in the midst of a potential second spike, polarisation of opinion and further uncertainty as to the true impact of 2020 on our economy.

Polarisation isn’t always a bad thing. It can create change and opportunity for many, but the current national mood certainly needs a greater spirit of “coming together” than we have achieved thus far.

Economically, we now know that Tech innovation has enabled far more home working and globalisation opportunity via the global adoption of Teams, Zoom and other tech. The property sector appears to be innovating hugely... but then again stories of cranes now left empty due to the lack of returning European workers has to be a concern, but will likely not hit the news for a while whilst Covid continues to dominate all other health and economic matters.

It was agreed in the Spring that many stats will be subject to debate and counter interpretation but one statistic was held up above all as indisputable – [the Z score](#).

It seems crazy how much damage we have done to many economic sectors and stalling priorities on other health provision,

when bar 3 months we have tracked below the 4 year rolling average.

So my interim conclusion is this: We need to have a clear plan for the next 3-6 months. The human race has innovated and survived far worse global crises - and even thrived afterwards -but the polarisation of this one feels more man-made. Draw from that what you will, but until business can get back to work in a more settled and complete way productivity will be lost, future education opportunities missed, and other health priorities pushed back.

What have we observed and discussed so far in 2020?

- Question things and research your own data. We need to try to remind ourselves to think on a “human race level” -nobody ever told us we were immortal, so we need to make the most of every day in life and business.
- The human race is very strong and resilient as a collective. People thrive when they work together, not alone, so don’t try to do anything big or ambitious solo.
- Business Culture and collective



Richard Gahagan
CEO
We Are Adam

mission will become all the more critical in 2021

- Businesses needs to be flexible, agile and creative
- Planning needs to be “military” in terms of every possible contingency, decision points and timelines for action.

DISCLAIMER: All figures and news stories in this whitepaper are accurate at time of publishing (30th October 2020), however due to the ever-changing nature of the global pandemic details may have changed since publication.

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