

WORKPLACE TRENDS

Top 5 UK trends for 2021





TOP 5 WORKPLACE TRENDS 2021

This year workplace trends have accelerated due to the COVID19 pandemic. This has created a new way of working and many people are hoping this could result in long-lasting positive change. Change Right have identified five key workplace trends that reflect what many organisations and workplace specialists are discussing as top priorities for this year which include hybrid working, feeling empowered as an employee, wellbeing focus, co-working spaces, and smart workspaces.



1. THE HYBRID WORKPLACE

The hybrid workplace is a business model that blends remote work and office work. This way of working offers employees increased freedom and allows them to make decisions around where to work and when, enabling people to fit work around their personal lives.

In 2020 the world experienced the acceptance of working from home due to the pandemic. As we recover and reimagine the workplace post COVID19, organisations are looking to embrace this hybrid workplace strategy. In July 2020 Microsoft published a trend report identifying that 72% of UK employees and managers have a desire to continue working from home at least part-time and, 83% of UK managers surveyed expect to have more flexible work from home policies post COVID19. Whilst working from home may not appeal to everyone, this data shows that there is a positive shift in relation to offering flexibility to employees.

The pandemic has accelerated the hybrid trend, which was slowly being introduced to some organisations prior to COVID19. However, employees have now proven that working from home can be effective and successful with the support of technology such as video conferencing and online collaboration tools.

Ryan Anderson, Vice President of Global Research & Insights at Herman Miller was interviewed as part of this research and commented:

“Hybrid is a term that has been used before but only really taken off recently, it’s implying that employers are now embracing this way of working. The best data suggests that empowering people to work where they think is best increases employee engagement and it’s more inclusive, as everyone’s needs are so different and giving people more choices is a good thing” - Ryan Anderson, 2021.

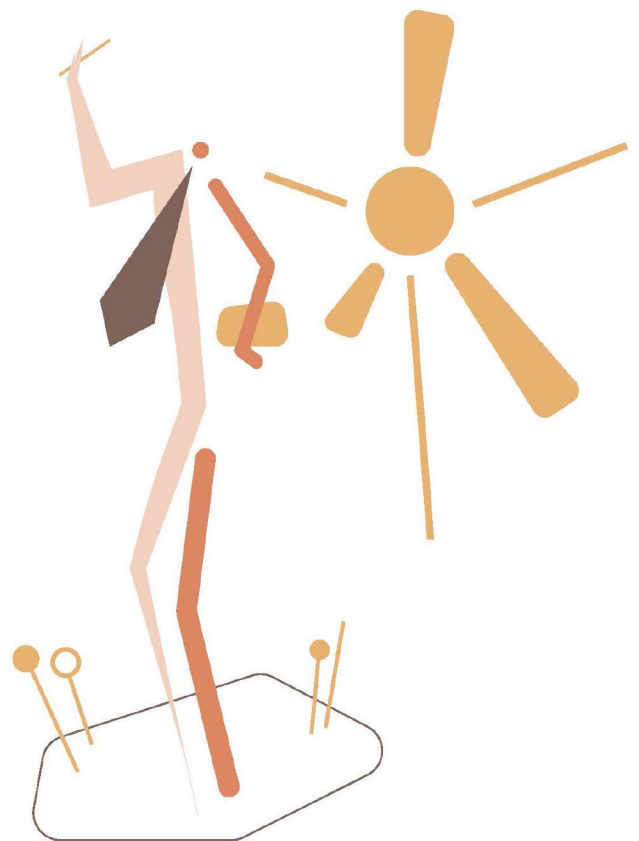
Employees will want to spend better quality time in the right environments; people still want to come into the office, but at the right time with the appropriate space for specific activities. It will be important for organisations to provide good choices for employees.

2. THE EMPOWERED EMPLOYEE

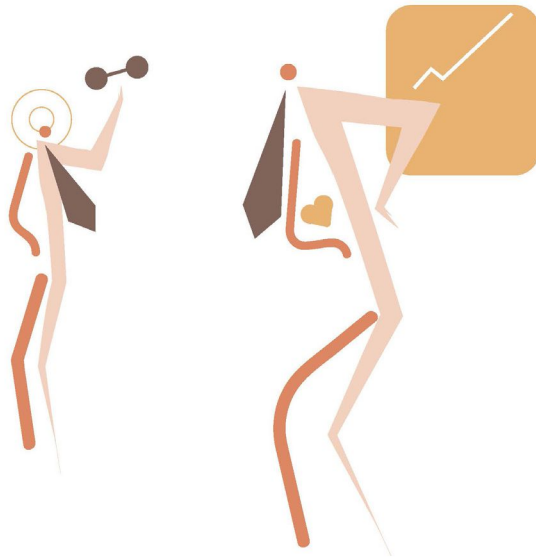
Over the last year there have been incredible shifts in the workplace which has been driven by the pandemic. A key trend for 2021 will see organisations becoming more employee centric with leaders looking at ways to empower their employees. This trend has been growing for some time but has been accelerated with the disruption of COVID19, which is now encouraging organisations to look internally at how they can support employees.

Employee empowerment is when organisations allow their employees to have a certain amount of autonomy and control of their working day. It allows people to make important decisions such as working hours, what days they work from home or attend the office. When deployed well, giving employees a greater choice can result in heightened productivity and increase the quality of work being produced. According to the Harvard Business Review (30,000 employees participated in research across 30 countries in 2018), there is a link between employees feeling empowered and increased job performance, satisfaction, and commitment to an organisation. This helps to retain top talent and builds a better employee experience in the workplace.

To enable people to feel empowered organisations need to offer greater flexibility and options. Flexibility through individual choice, multiple spaces to work from in the office and the use of technology to create greater freedom. In 2020 it became a necessity to work from home. This period showed how different working preferences are, with some thriving with the new way of working from home and others finding it harder and wanting to return to the office.



Looking at the re-opening of the workplace will see employees wanting the opportunity to decide where they work and when. The most attractive organisations will provide a choice and variety of working spaces to suit different tasks, this encourages employees to feel more empowered in their decision making and take control over how they spend their week, in line with their own preferences.



A recent internal survey to employees at the FSCS (Financial Services Compensation Scheme) highlighted that people are wanting engagement with their managers to be based on outcomes rather than how many hours they have worked. This enables employees to experience flexibility in their working week and manage their day around general personal tasks. Being offered flexibility to make your own decisions about your workload could increase motivation and engagement. FSCS have redesigned their organisational model and placed employees and customers at the centre of everything they do.

“In the past, jobs were about muscle, now they are brains, but in the future, they’ll be about the heart”

– Minouche Shafik, 2021.

Employees feel a greater sense of empowerment when there is trust from their leaders, additionally, employee empowerment can foster greater trust in leadership.

Regarding the future of the workplace, Minouche Shafik – Director of the London School of Economics states:



3. THE WELLBEING FOCUSED WORKPLACE

In the UK, the Centre for Mental Health has predicted that potentially up to 10 million people will need mental health support because of COVID19. Over the years wellbeing in the workplace has been a growing focus as mental health becomes a greater concern across the population. Over the last year in particular there has been a significant rise in mental ill-health with the onset of the pandemic; we have all had to change the way we work, how we live and how we socialise since the outbreak. The effects of living through three national lockdowns, the loss of social connections, fear of losing jobs and additional stress the pandemic has created has taken its toll on the population. How does this effect the workplace? The cost of mental health on the economy in the UK is estimated to be as high as £105.2 billion each year. This includes the cost of services, lost productivity at work and reduced quality of life (Mind, 2020).

The workplace has an important part to play in supporting and nurturing positive wellbeing. Throughout 2021 and beyond people will be looking to organisations that appreciate the importance of wellbeing and to those that are invested in supporting employees using a range of different initiatives.

It has become a greater urgency for organisations to have an increased wellbeing focus for their employees as stress and anxiety is at an all-time high; it is great to see that many organisations are starting to make bigger, bolder statements and act.

There are four positive contributors to wellbeing in the workplace, they are:

3.1 Physical is important to ensure employees are provided with the correct equipment to avoid poor posture, neck, or eye strain etc, along with nutrition and exercise opportunities. An example of how an organisation has focused on physical wellbeing for employees is the new office space for Equitas Capital Partners in Manchester. The design encourages staff to follow a path around the workspace which emphasises the views of the outside surrounding area giving the benefits of the outdoors from within the office.

3.2 Environmental creates a focus on air quality, light levels, temperature, and noise. Dr Nigel Oseland – a workplace strategist and environmental psychologist, collaborated with the Remark Group to undertake research into ‘Air Quality and Wellbeing at Work’. They surveyed over 1,000 UK office workers to identify whether air quality impacted on their wellbeing. The results showed that 80% think that the indoor air quality is poor in their workplaces and that it could be having a negative impact on their productivity at work.

Dr Nigel Oseland commented on the results:

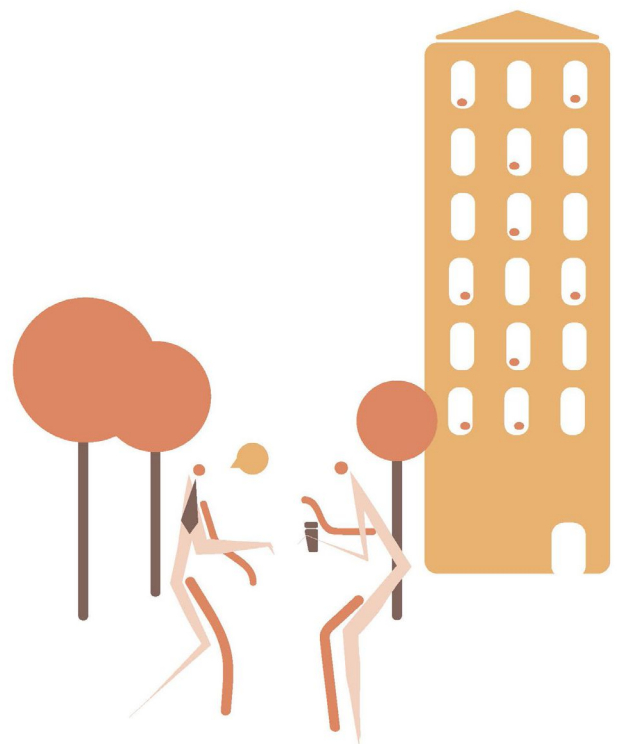
“...we need to pay attention to basic human needs such as good indoor air quality, temperature control and noise reduction. The various disciplines within the workplace industry need a concerted effort for a marked step change from sick buildings to healthy buildings. Everyone has the right to work in a healthy workplace”

An organisation that is passionate about healthy workplaces and supports wellbeing in the workplace is the WELL Building Standard. This is a global movement aiming to transform workspaces into healthy places to be with a people first approach.

Using the latest scientific research, WELL have set out seven key criteria to enable a building to become WELL certified which are: air, water, nourishment, light, fitness, comfort, and mind. Recent buildings to have been certified include a site by the engineering consultant Cundall and The Crown Estate’s Head Office in London.

3.3 Social is an important human need and one that has been lacking due to the pandemic. Sociologists refer to ‘weak ties’ that are our extended networks, our primary networks are those that are family, friends and close people we work with. Over the last year we have been cut off from these weak ties; the workplace can be a hub to foster those kinds of connections which is crucial to organisational culture. Given the long period of time people have been working remotely, coming back into the office and being able to have social connections will be a key focus for building workplace communities and fostering important relationships that we require as social beings.

3.4 Cognitive – About our mental and emotional wellbeing and our ability to be productive. Biophilic design plays a role in promoting positive wellbeing, it can help reduce stress, improve cognitive function, and enhance mood and function.





Biophilia is the last element to this workplace trend. Our mental and emotional wellbeing influences our ability to be productive. In 2014, research by the Journal of Experimental Psychology found that the presence of plants inside a building increases the user's feelings of wellbeing by 40%.

Studies have also shown that the inclusion of biophilic elements in the workplace can increase productivity and decrease absenteeism. Other influences to support cognitive wellbeing can include calming natural colours and materials, soft furnishing, and dedicated spaces for relaxation.

4. THE CO-WORKING, WORKPLACE

Co-working spaces consist of workers from a range of different disciplines, industries, and projects, unlike a traditional office. The trend for 2021 could see co-working spaces more localised with people wanting to create a barrier between home and work without wanting to go back to a long commute and packed trains or motorways. Co-working spaces that are a short journey from people's homes could be a great alternative and compromise to the return-to-work post COVID19. In co-working environments, you can escape the internal politics and you do not have to fit in.

This way of working encourages an extended working community and culture by co-locating individuals in the same workspace with people that are not part of the same organisation. Being more local to home could encourage and create friendships, enhancing the experience of work which is perhaps needed after the last year.

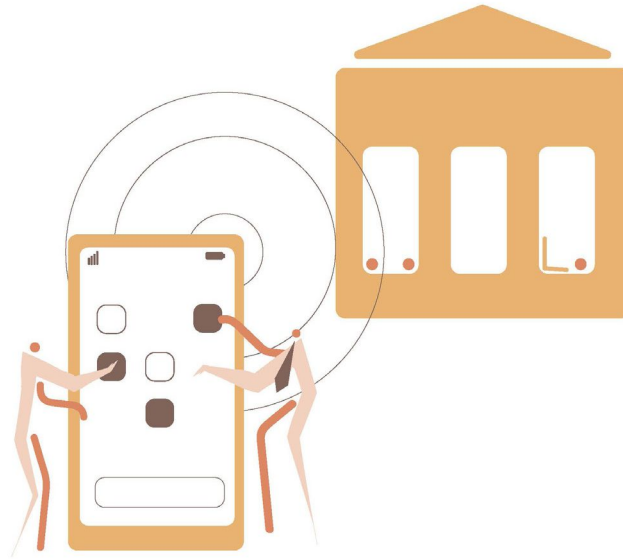
Organisations will manage this through technology, we have become familiar and comfortable with video conferencing more than ever before. There are many online tools that enable team collaboration and ways of working that would allow for employees to be in separate locations, with evidence to support its effectiveness. In these environments you can undertake some focused work that is not possible at home or in the office due to multiple distractions, you can meet with colleagues or use a private space for video conferencing or phone calls.

Bringing diverse groups of people together could inspire and encourage new ways of thinking from a different perspective. An example of a co-working brand is WeWork; there are over 800 WeWork spaces around the world. WeWork have a team of community managers that help individuals connect, learn, and grow through networking events, lunches and wellness activities.



As a service this offers greater opportunities outside of an organisation which enables people to have choice making a co-working space a productive, fun, and social experience.

People that co-work have autonomy and can be themselves at work, organisations need to give people space and support to be their authentic selves. The outcome of this will be employees who feel a greater commitment to their organisation and are more likely to bring their best ideas and enthusiasm to their work each day.



5. THE SMART WORKPLACE

A smart office is a workplace where technology enables people to work better, faster and provides data to provenance these enablers. Using sensors, beacons and mobile apps, the more menial tasks can be done faster which enables people to spend more time on focused work. Smart offices also communicate detailed information such as meeting room availability and what space is free to work in. This information is available, via apps, before people leave their homes and enables better decisions about where and how to spend the working day.

The Smart Office trend has been up and coming since 2017. Organisations now have a better understanding of the concept and new technologies have been developed to integrate automated systems, this makes the workplace efficient, brings down operating costs and creates a well-connected working environment for employees. This trend also has environmental benefits, by saving on energy that is not needed.

Big data and analytics make it possible to extract actionable insights from the information and improve the building performance.

Data analysis is the driving force behind better decision-making in workplace strategy and in turn maximises the efficient use of the estate for organisations.

By monitoring the building, organisations can see how each space is being utilised and how it can improve to be more suitable to the needs of the employees and eliminate dead space. This trend will see smart energy management systems that ensure CO₂ levels are effectively managed, scheduling that can allow someone to book a desk or a parking space along with visitor management systems that can help organisations understand who is in their building. These are ways in which technology can enable workspaces to be more responsive and provide informed choice to the people using it.

A webinar in January with RE: Connect called 'The Future of the Workplace' discussed the importance of utilising smart technology in the workspace. Sherry Nematalla is the client manager at Vodafone Business said:

“The power of data will become more important in providing efficient workspaces in 2021...The upfront investment for an office space that is more smart and digital will in the long term reap lots of benefits and savings by having a space that monitors how the space is being utilised, how trends are taking place, what things are switched on or off and how spaces can be more effectively managed than they can currently”

– Sherry Nematalla, 2021.

In 2020 Vodafone UK announced a reduction in their carbon footprint over the preceding 3 years. The energy they saved since this period, reviewing how their workspaces operate, represents a financial saving of around £10million. This is a great example of the financial and environmental, efficiency and improvements that smarter workspaces can provide, along with increasing employee satisfaction.

SOURCES:

List of people interviewed to validate trends:

Ryan Anderson – VP of Global Research & Insights at Herman Miller (For workplace trends)

Bertie Van Wyk – Workplace specialist at Herman Miller (For workplace trends)

List of webinars attended:

‘THE INNOVATION OFFICE’ Birmingham Architectural Association + Aliermur 03.11.20

‘REIMAGINING THE WORKPLACE – FOR THE NEXT NORMAL’ Dr Anna Tavis (Human Capital Management) 01.12.20

‘FROM THE WORKPLACE TO CHANGE: ITS ELEMENTAL’ Speaker: Neil Usher – Chief workplace and change strategist at Gospace AI and Author of ‘The Elemental Workplace’ 06.01.21

‘RE:CONNECT: THE FUTURE OF THE WORKPLACE’ Speakers: Simon Cohen – Condeco, Workplace Management provider, Sherry Nematalla – Client manager at Vodafone business, Sam Farrant – VPOD 07.01.21

‘THE FUTURE OF THE HYBRID EXPERIENCE’ Speakers: Peggie Rothe – Leesman Index, Thomas Jensen – OTJ Architects, Karen McCallum – CBRE Design 20.08.20

‘IDENTIFY AND THE PHYSICAL WORKPLACE’ Speaker: Sarwat Tasneem, 27.01.21

WESTMINSTER INSIGHTS CONFERENCE: FUTURE OF WORK POST COVID-19 DIGITAL CONFERENCE Speaker: David Blackburn – Chief People Officer FSCS (Financial Services Compensation Scheme) 28.01.28.

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