Mixed messages cause conflict and confusion

The government’s ever-changing guidance around working from the office has caused much concern for businesses. But what does this mean for the long-term viability of remote working?

However, even before the government’s latest guidance, a poll by the RCN (published in only September) showed how three quarters of workers had at least one concern about returning to the workplace, with 76% of respondents thinking they were at greater risk of catching COVID-19.

When speaking to Parliament on September 22, the prime minister appeared to give one indication of opening up on a wide scale. He explained how remote staff would have to now make choices and that COVID-19

response guidelines within small, localised settings. Meanwhile, a separate study showed how three quarters of workers had at least one concern about returning to the workplace, with 76% of respondents thinking they were at greater risk of catching COVID-19.

“Employers should treat concerns about returning to the workplace with sympathy and work together to make the office a safe place for employees who genuinely feel unable to venture into the workplace,” Dr. Vatidis urged.

During the summer, the UK government was under strong pressure to make employees work from home. During this time, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) released data showing that the proportion of OECD countries working from home at any given time was higher than before the pandemic. This is likely because of the surge of COVID-19 cases, many of which were related to work.

The government’s guidance on working from home is based on the premise that remote working is the new normal. However, this guidance has been met with mixed reactions and confusion. Some employees feel more productive working from home, while others are concerned about the lack of social interaction and the need for more meetings.

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Job-sharing trend gains momentum

While many employees remain unconvinced at the practicalities of the concept, job sharing has become a favourable solution for some workers in uncertain times.
**Things we will and won't miss about office life**

*By Peter Cranage*

**Office retention**

Office workers don’t just need ideas and innovation, they need basic feelings of security. For a long time, managers have struggled to ensure that employees feel safe and secure at work. With their office space and colleagues, many employees are finding themselves with fewer work friends and colleagues, and a greater risk of feeling isolated and alone. Not surprisingly, studies show that employees are more likely to feel isolated and alone when they work remotely.

**The commute**

One of the most desired aspects of working from home is the ability to save time and money by not having to commute. With the widespread adoption of remote work, the benefits of saving money and time are becoming more apparent. However, for some employees, the lack of a commute can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Without the daily interaction with colleagues, many employees are finding themselves feeling isolated and alone.

**Chit-chat**

Many employees enjoy the social aspect of working in an office. From casual conversations with colleagues to informal networking opportunities, there are many benefits that can be gained from working in a traditional office setting. With the widespread adoption of remote work, the social aspect of working in an office is becoming less accessible. Many employees are finding themselves feeling isolated and alone without the ability to connect with colleagues in a face-to-face setting.

**The digital divide**

In the era of remote work, the digital divide is becoming more pronounced. With the adoption of remote work, the need for digital literacy and access to technology is becoming more critical. Many employees are finding themselves feeling isolated and alone without the ability to access the necessary technology and resources to work effectively.
Are so-called 15-minute cities, where work, retail, and leisure are within 15 minutes of their home, a reality? The answer to collaborating effectively in a remote-working age?

In a work context, this would see people with very different ideas come together to create something new and different. This means that to innovate, you need people to be in touch with one another, be able to share ideas, and be in the same room or in the same meeting space. Even before the coronavirus pandemic, two-thirds of people who worked together in the same office, or on the same project, were in contact with each other every day. It is clear employees would benefit from high-quality audio solutions to productivity, performance and employee wellbeing in the new normal.

In a remote world, where work and play are not always separate, home has become an office. As the world embraces remote working, the skills and competencies needed to adapt for this new environment are in demand.

Making ‘15-minute cities’ a reality

Cath Everett

The idea of a 15-minute city was resurrected by the mayor of Lisbon, Martinhio da Cunha, and others in the 1970s who wanted to encourage more sustainable urban living. The concept, which was expanded by the influential architect and planner Ernesto Pujol, envisioned a city in which everything was within a 15-minute walk or cycle ride. This idea was later adopted by mayor Benjamin Hidalgo, who has been leading radical urban transformation in cities in the US, and which involves reshaping the city’s infrastructure and services so that people can live, work, and commute within 15 minutes of their home.

This idea has found traction in the UK, with the government’s ‘15-minute city’ policy, which aims to create a more sustainable, equitable, and environmentally friendly future for cities. The policy includes reducing car dependency, increasing access to green spaces, and improving public transport connectivity.

The success of 15-minute cities is closely tied to the concept of efficient urban design and planning. The layout of a city with 15-minute cities in mind includes a mix of residential, commercial, and public spaces, with easy access to parks, playgrounds, and other amenities. The idea is to create a more vibrant, walkable, and liveable city, where people can connect with each other and enjoy a range of activities within a 15-minute radius.

While the concept of 15-minute cities is appealing, it is important to note that the implementation of such cities requires significant investment in infrastructure and public services. This includes the construction of new buildings, roads, and public transport systems, as well as the adaptation of existing infrastructure to meet the needs of a 15-minute city.

In conclusion, 15-minute cities are an exciting vision for urban development, but it will require a significant amount of investment and effort to make them a reality. The concept holds great promise for creating more sustainable, equitable, and environmentally friendly cities, but it will require careful planning and execution to ensure its success.

Bad audio is bad for business

As the world embraces remote working, overcoming poor audio performance is imperative to ensuring high productivity, performance and employee wellbeing in the new normal.

The average audio solution end-user loses 29 minutes a week due to poor sound quality on voice calls. The average audio solution end-user also spends double-checking information via a laptop and phone. Simply providing high-quality audio solutions to employees is expected to include collaboration and learning spaces.

Despite the benefits of high-quality audio solutions, many employees are miscomputing the additional costs that go with providing them. If high-quality audio solutions are optimized, the resulting benefits can be significant. A recent survey by EPOS revealed that an average employee spends over 22 hours per week checking information on voice calls, including email and chats, according to the company. This is a significant amount of time, and it can add up quickly over the course of a year. High-quality audio solutions can make a real difference in the productivity and performance of employees.

In fact, eight in ten of those experiencing poor audio quality on voice calls would prefer to use high-quality audio solutions for their employees. Many people are investing in new equipment to ensure they are able to communicate effectively and that their audio is of high quality.

While high-quality audio solutions can improve productivity and performance, they must also be user-friendly and easy to use. This is particularly important when people are working remotely, as they may not have access to the same resources and support that they would have in a traditional office environment.

In conclusion, high-quality audio solutions are becoming an integral part of the workplace. They are helping to improve productivity and performance, and are likely to become standard in many industries.

It is clear that improving the audio experience is critical to success in the remote working world. High-quality audio solutions can make a real difference in the productivity and performance of employees, and are likely to become standard in many industries in the future.
COLLABORATION CONUNDRUM

Working remotely, away from our colleagues and peers, has had clear ramifications for how well we communicate and collaborate. From rising levels of “Zoom fatigue” to a drastic reduction in ad-hoc workplace interactions, the future of workplace collaboration can look bleak. New technology may well be the answer, but as long it is implemented with care.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT COLLABORATION TECH IS KEY

Although a top form of remote collaboration, a recent study has shown that video meetings - especially those of over 30 minutes - are more likely to cause fatigue, and feelings of overwork and stress.

WHAT COLLABORATIVE WORKERS ARE MISSING

Workers characterised as “collaboratives” (spending over 65 per cent of their work time collaborating with others) have noticed a 12 to 18 per cent drop in performance, due to a lack of workplace interactions.

IS TECHNOLOGY KEY TO COLLABORATION CHALLENGES?

Global talent professionals say collaboration is one of their top remote working challenges, with tech providing the key to overcoming it.

TOP TECH TOOLS BOOSTING REMOTE COLLABORATION

Remote workers in the US on their most-used collaboration tools:

- Zoom: 36%
- Microsoft Teams: 19%
- Skype: 17%
- Google Hangouts: 9%
- Slack: 7%
- Others: 5%

DIFFICULTIES WITH COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

Remote workers from around the world were asked to share their biggest struggle when working from home:

- 20%: Difficulties with collaboration and communication
- 20%: Loneliness
- 18%: Not being able to unplug
- 12%: Being in a different timezone than teammates
- 10%: Being in a different timezone than teammates
- 7%: Staying motivated
- 5%: Taking vacation time
- 5%: Finding reliable Wi-Fi
- 3%: Other

BEING IN A DIFFERENT TIMEZONE THAN TEAMMATES

When working remotely:

- 70%: Experienced differences in time zones
- 5%: Experienced differences in time zones

TOP CHALLENGES OF REMOTE WORK

Remote work challenges include:

1. Team bonding
2. Collaboration
3. Work oversight
4. Interactions during break periods
5. Spontaneous encounters
6. Unplanned interactions
7. Casual conversations before/after meetings
8. Self-driven socialising
9. Work-sponsored socialising
10. Planned meetings

BEING IN A DIFFERENT TIMEZONE THAN TEAMMATES

Remote work often results in:

- 15%: Being in a different timezone than teammates
- 15%: Being in a different timezone than teammates

DISTRACTIONS AT HOME

Remote work can lead to:

- 20%: Finding reliable Wi-Fi
- 18%: Staying motivated
- 15%: Taking vacation time
- 10%: Not being able to unplug
- 10%: Being in a different timezone than teammates
- 10%: Being in a different timezone than teammates
- 5%: Loneliness
- 5%: Other

COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION SUFFER UNDER REMOTE WORKING

Remote workers from around the world share their biggest struggle when working from home.
**Making home working work for you**

While there's lots of talk about the productivity of home working and new technology to track everything from the hours you've spent at your desk, little has been said about the physical practicalities of turning over part of your home to your environment needs to tell you: 'This is where I'm working'. It doesn't have to be a separate workspace, but a quiet place that feels like home. This could be your second bedroom, where you feel like you're in a different environment.

**Let there be light**

**Silence is golden**

**Tools of the trade**

**Better by design**

**Flexible drivesthe future of work**

If you are working at the kitchen table, away some of the temptation to grab a cup of coffee at the end of your working day. Or, if you are working from your living room, think about how you want to use the space. You could consider a floor lamp or a table lamp, depending on where you want to work and how much light you need. Also consider adding a desk light or a task light to help you with reading and writing.

Silence is golden. Ideally, the home office should be far away from sources of potential noise, such as children, dogs and music. As a result, you can control the noise level and create a quiet environment that helps you focus. Consider using soundproofing materials or installing window treatments that help to block out noise. Also, keep the temperature and lighting consistent throughout the day.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to noise. Some people prefer complete silence, while others work better with some background noise. If you have a home office, you might want to consider using noise-cancelling headphones or a white noise machine to help you focus. Also, consider using earplugs or noise-cancelling earphones when you need to work in a noisy environment.

Businesses will be looking to save costs where they can and transport and travel is where they can reduce costs while also embracing sustainability.
The current economic climate is ripe for borderless the world they are. That the best person for the job is the remote working would unlock a and 42 per cent felt international Revolution Remote's latest Global Workforce resources and payroll platform is growing, as shared by 57 per cent companies and individuals liberated remote working is opening up a wealth accommodating an increasingly remote, Campus remote client service hubs to executive vice president of transformation globally, enabled teams to grow, divergent and innovation at Teleperformance. Technology has accelerated steadily gaining momentum in our shift pre-coronavirus, it's now out in business. A burgeon-to-a global talent pool is play-all women. Most importantly, 63 per cent agree The remote-working specialist company in Amsterdam. Hayes has just hired a Toronto-based readily from a global talent pool. says Remote's head of growth "We have a strong ethical underpinning to a global talent pool range from data science to software engineering, which is looking to plug its COVID Either way, Tallin-based Hindriks, which is looking to plug its COVID pandemic will make the public sector 'the greatest lever of emerging markets. We can build as much tech as possible, but if policies don't change, we do not let yourselves fall into unsuspected advantage of emerging markets. If you are a HR people leader in a distributed workforce, you need to think about efficiency more." With Wherify's lifestyle personalisation, employees have work-life flexibility, which takes companies from maestro and maids to going back. As Brianne Enns, founder and CEO of Wherify, concludes, "Today people are expecting to be able to work where they want and companies just have to build that in."
How teamwork has evolved

Although enabling personal interaction, offices can sometimes stifle our ability to collaborate, so it has to a great extent during the pandemic facilitated more efficient teamwork?

Ever since the start of the pandemic, technology has been able to boost productivity and efficiency for businesses on a national and global scale. When technology enabled the transition to remote working, new informal communication channels were introduced. In the offices, we are more connected and able to work more efficiently than ever before.

Companies with a strong culture of remote working are already benefitting from these transitions. They can look back at their successes and failures and adapt their working styles accordingly.

Remote working has been embraced by companies and employees alike. Companies with a strong remote working culture, such as Google, have reaped the benefits of this new way of working. They have been able to reduce costs, increase productivity, and improve employee satisfaction.

Remote working has also been beneficial for companies with a hybrid working model. They have been able to retain their remote workers while still maintaining a high level of productivity.

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In this new world of video-first collaboration, we can engage with Artificial Intelligence (AI) to optimize the way we communicate. AI can help us identify the right audience for a particular message, and it can also help us improve our messaging and tone of voice.

The use of AI has been growing in popularity in recent years, and it is expected to continue to grow in the future. Companies are using AI to automate processes, to enhance the customer experience, and to improve decision-making.

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Through our conversations with customers about how their working lives will look, an understanding has evolved of common themes. Some companies are vying to create an awesome work environment where employees can work for hours on end and spend their whole lives there. Others are taking a more long-term approach, ensuring their work environment is cost-effective and risk-free.

 Meditation and yoga are increasingly popular in many companies. This is because they help employees to relax, reduce stress, and improve their focus. These activities have become an important part of the workday in many companies, and they are helping employees to be more efficient and productive.

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The pandemic has caused a shift in how people work, with digital collaboration becoming more important than ever. The use of videoconferencing tools has increased significantly, and companies are now using these tools to facilitate communication and collaboration.

As the pandemic continues, we can expect to see further changes in the way we work. Companies are now looking at how they can use technology to enhance the employee experience and to improve productivity.

Research by Adecco Group found 77 per cent of management workers felt threatened by the shift to working remotely. They were concerned about their colleagues, a 12 per cent increase according to a 2018 report by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development. However, managers still need to allow time and space for their staff, encouraging periods when no work activity is required.

The study found that managers spend 4.4 meetings a week, half of which they have to deliver virtually, according to a 2018 report by the National Employment Law Project.

Brookfield’s research team also observed a “No meeting Wednesday” policy to allow employees to work through complex problems. The research also found that meetings can still be effective in a virtual environment.

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