

# THE FUTURE WORKPLACE

04 UPDATING THE TIME AND MOTION STUDY

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14 IS YOUR COMPANY CULTURE DYING?



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## THE FUTURE WORKPLACE

Distributed in THE TIMES

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### REAL ESTATE

# Smaller, healthier, flexible: the new office wishlist

When it comes to leasing an office for 2023 and beyond, employers are rethinking what good – and good value – look like in a modern workplace

Cath Everett

Three themes dominate discussions around the future of the office in 2023 and beyond: a 'flight to quality', employee wellbeing, and flexibility and choice.

Of course, these trends aren't new. But they are now accelerating, driven by the widespread shift to hybrid working, along with extensive talent shortages and other workforce trends, such as quiet – and actual – quitting.

As a result, it is clear that "the people agenda will dominate" most property considerations over the next few years, says Nicola Gillen, head of total workplace EMEA at real estate services firm Cushman & Wakefield.

On the one hand, there is a growing recognition of the vital role that offices play in attracting talent. But on the other, "employers are now understanding the value of their space in employee experience and engagement terms, which is leading them to make more purposeful choices," Gillen says.

Many of these choices – particularly for organisations adopting a hybrid working approach – are linked to ensuring that physical office space is suitable for "keeping people connected to the company's culture, purpose and brand", Gillen adds. This is leading to a shift in the way that offices are used.

Mark Sambridge is a partner and head of occupier services at property consultants Cluttons and agrees with this view. "The office is becoming a place where people meet with their teams for training, collaboration and the business development aspect," he says. "It's also become much more important from a wellbeing perspective, which involves the cultural and social aspects too."

Global talent and tech solutions provider Nash Squared has tried hard to reflect employee wants and needs in its new office space. After a 10-year lease came up at its London headquarters in Heron Tower, Bishopsgate, it decided to move to a smaller, refurbished site nearby – LDN:W in Noble Street – at the beginning of 2022.

Such a move is not uncommon. Once the time comes to move on, many customers are, anecdotally, cutting office space by 20% to 30%, Sambridge reports.

Ben Cullen is head of offices for the UK at Cushman & Wakefield. He points to the widespread flight to quality in such moves, which is now leading to a bifurcation of the property market.



more fresh air, nature, balconies, terraces and staircases for people to walk up and down rather than taking lifts, and there'll also be more ground-floor offices to provide a tighter knitting together of the building and the community to provide purpose there too."

A third important theme is flexibility and choice, which comes in different forms.

Nash Squared, for example, has nearly halved the number of its new stand-up desks because of its work-from-anywhere policy. It has also introduced many more formal meeting rooms, informal collaboration and break-out spaces, private pods and phone booths for staff to make confidential calls. This reflects its view that the office needs to be an adaptable gathering space.

Rather than investing in expensive real estate outside of London, the firm has opted for serviced or flexible office spaces, such as those provided by WeWork, to attract high-quality talent.

Such an approach is becoming increasingly popular, with some employers adopting a 'wait and see' attitude instead of acquiring new leases. Others are focusing on short-term, flexible leases or insist on the inclusion of break clauses.

As Sambridge points out: "The future is so uncertain at the moment that many companies feel it's important to have elements of flexibility in their property holdings to enable them to adapt."

Employers are also making sure that they get good value from their real estate by engaging with their employees and other stakeholders before any move or refurbishment.

The aim is to understand how they are currently using office space and what individuals and teams require if their wellbeing and productivity are to be optimised. Such information can subsequently be fed into the organisation's property and workplace strategy going forward to use in decision-making.

As Bev White, chief executive of Nash Squared, observes, best value is not solely concerned with saving money or about obtaining a great deal on a lease.

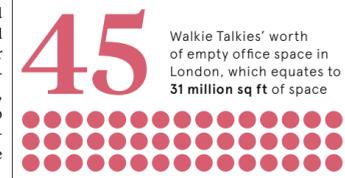
"It isn't a purely monetary consideration – it's also about investing in a place that makes a true difference for your people, clients, candidates, contractors and investors. There's a real correlation between engagement, productivity and business results, so it's important to consider a whole range of factors."

High-grade offices in prime locations meeting energy efficiency and wellbeing standards are in high demand and continue to command high rents. Second-tier spaces, on the other hand, are frequently being repurposed or sitting empty.

"The flight to quality will be the most significant theme of the next two to three years," Cullen says. "Also, we're seeing occupiers who are willing to pay significant rents for quality while reducing the amount of space they take to balance the books."

Nash Squared's new location offers a range of key attractions. It is light and airy, for instance, has a roof garden and is close enough to the original office not to inconvenience staff in commuting terms. There are 140 bike spaces, along with showers and lockers, while the kitchens are stocked with fresh fruit and beverages are available all day.

"Wellbeing remains a key focus, and employee engagement and experience is huge," Gillen explains. "So we will see



of all newly leased offices in the City of London between January and June were Grade A

the pre-pandemic average  
CoStar/Savills, 2022

## MANAGEMENT

# Remote control: tracking productivity beyond the office

Firms have long sought to measure employee productivity. They face unique challenges in the era of remote working, when they must gather the data they need while respecting people's privacy



Josh Duke via Unsplash

## Ouida Taaffe

Over the years, both bouquets and brickbats have rained down on Frederick Winslow Taylor, the American engineer who wrote *The Principles of Scientific Management*.

"Scientific management" meant analysing each aspect of a worker's role to find the most efficient approach. The amount of work a 'first-class worker' could achieve by following that method set the bar. Management was there to select and train employees and keep their noses to the grindstone.

For renowned management consultant Peter Drucker, Taylor was the father of productivity, responsible for "the tremendous surge of affluence" over the first 70 years of the 20th century. For others, Taylor

treated the people on the shop floor as human machinery.

Now, of course, technology can often radically 'Taylorise' the workplace, as shown by the worker surveillance technology in Amazon distribution centres. But what happens when staff are working remotely, on 'knowledge-based' tasks? Can managers get a 'scientific' view of their productivity? And how can they keep such workers on track?

Online lender Atom Bank recently introduced a four-day week after analysing about 170 different metrics of productivity as part of a trial.

"Productivity is such a difficult thing to put your finger on," says Anne-Marie Lister, the bank's chief people officer. It's a mix of lots of things, she said, which the bank

studied in detail before introducing the new working pattern. "If you also ask your people how productive they feel and what efficiencies they've found, that gives you a much better picture," she adds.

The bottom line is obtaining relevant data. James Gribben is head of communications at Be The Business, which was set up to tackle the UK's productivity challenge and is funded by the government and large businesses. "The important thing is that a firm has measures in place to track productivity," he comments.

For many tech firms, though, productivity measurement will never involve what Taylor had in mind.

"Once the initial software of a tech firm has been built, the marginal cost of reproducing it is practically

zero," says Karl Flannery, CEO of Storm Technology, a Dublin-based firm which helps businesses design, build and integrate digital solutions. "That means technology companies inherently manage productivity in a different way than carmakers."

As a bank, the metrics that Atom analysed at the organisational level included output, engagement, ethics and sickness days. At the departmental level, the more granular standards included things such as 'number of queries answered' or 'number of quality control checks'.

Atom also focused on finding the activities that didn't boost productivity. Top of the list was meetings. "We empowered people to question themselves: 'Where do I really bring value and what can I strip out of my day?'," says Lister. More than 90% of Atom's staff quickly found that there were meetings they could shorten or even cut out altogether.

A four-day week sounds like a recipe for overtime on each of those days, but Lister says the efficiencies people found meant overtime was down. Staff attrition and sickness days also fell, as did customer complaints, she says. Did that mean corner-cutting? "There was no customer detriment and no breach of compliance during the trial," she says.

The trigger for the four-day week at Atom was the pandemic. Lister says people began to focus on what they wanted from their job as part of their overall life. "It comes down to people valuing their time," she says.

But businesses, of course, also value their own time. 'Digital Taylorism' has seen some firms install software on their computers that measures remote keystrokes and mouse movements. There are also firms that sell software that mimics the 'jiggle' of an active mouse.

How do you track productivity in a tech or online company without being intrusive?

"There are bizarre behaviours in some companies when it comes to tracking staff but that shows a complete lack of trust. And it is counterproductive with knowledge workers, who are generally intrinsically motivated," says Flannery.

Software development, for example, is usually a team sport, he notes. "If you examine the activity of the coders to gauge productivity, you can do things like count lines of code, but that's not going to work." Instead, they should focus on the inverse. "Can you get the same outcome with fewer lines of code?"

"We don't track keystrokes on laptops," says Lister. "There are core hours of 9.30am to 4.30pm, and people have to be available during that time. But we would never take a Big Brother stance. That's not going to get the best out of people."

**“The emotional intelligence aspect of it, when something isn't right or isn't being done or said, can be harder online**

## 2/3

of people are more productive in the morning



## 11%

of workers feel they are productive all day

## 40%

of Brits work more hours than they are contracted to

Scoro, 2021

Even if firms aren't intrusive, working remotely requires highly conscious management.

"When all your people still worked in the office, you could sense how things were going by walking the floor, or you could easily have a sidebar conversation," says Flannery. "Now team leaders have to deliberately put aside time in order to proactively engage with staff. You have to be much more structured and much more proactive as a manager, scheduling regular reviews and frequent check-ins.

"Feedback up and down and across the organisation certainly helps to promote trust."

Lister says good management skills are central to a firm being able to "continuously build a team in a hybrid way... The emotional intelligence aspect of it, when something isn't right or isn't being done or said, can be harder online," she says.

Gribben notes that one of the main drags on UK productivity is that "the UK has a lot of accidental managers". Notably, relative to other developed economies the country tends to report lower levels of management capability.

There are concerns that working from home may exacerbate this issue. "It can be good for the individual. But is it good for the team?" asks Flannery. "In general, being completely remote is less effective as it doesn't foster the trust, collaboration and social cohesion that is needed in a team." ●

# Workspaces are an anchor for leadership in uncertain times

At a time when managers are struggling to unite their workforces, physical closeness can make a world of difference

The pandemic changed plenty of things about the world of work – but it also crystallised minds about the importance of the office in the future growth and healthy development of a business.

"More and more people in the last 10 years have been prioritising purpose at work over their pay cheque," says Steve Coulson, founder and CEO of office management firm Kitt. "Business leaders – to an extent – are embracing what company culture actually is." And at the heart of a company's culture is their office.

The pandemic brought about what Coulson calls "an enormous experiment" as businesses probed the importance of the workplace. Bosses began asking the question of what the office was for, and whether they needed one. "From our perspective, we believe company culture can be maintained remotely but can only be built in person, in the real world," says Coulson. He compares it to going to a concert or a friend's wedding – you want to be there in person, rather than watching it via an online video platform.

That insight is informed by speaking to and working with hundreds of businesses about their workplace strategy throughout the highs and lows of the pandemic. It acted as a real-time temperature check on how businesses were feeling about their workplace, and what they thought their future would look like. Would the office play a pivotal role in a business, or could it be quickly dropped as an unnecessary drag on the bottom line?

Their findings were, perhaps, counterintuitive given the prevailing thought at the height of the pandemic that pre-emptively wrote the office's obituary. A physical workplace acted as an anchor for leadership in the most uncertain times.

"Digitally, you're optimising for efficiency of information," says Coulson. "Whereas physically, you're optimising for trust, which actually speeds things up in different ways. And I think that's what lots of businesses have found, particularly the ones that work with us."

Coulson and Kitt's clients discovered that those businesses which made the bold decision to double down on an idea that was not in vogue at the time – that the physical workspace would retain both its importance to a business and its primacy in workers' minds – benefited the most when people began to come back. Because they'd made the brave bet, they boomed. "What's been interesting is that the success of these businesses has come about pretty much since they did what looks quite unpopular," says Coulson.

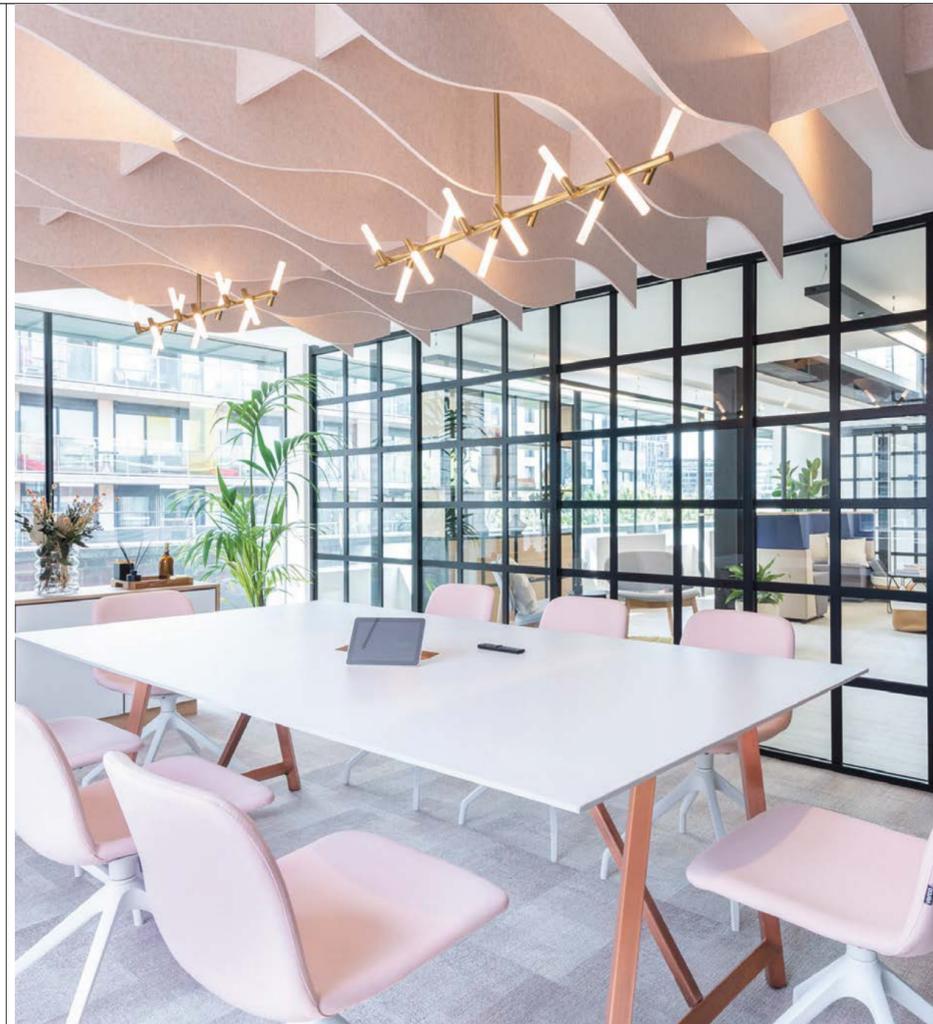
Among those brave businesses to buck the trend was Red Nucleus, a healthcare communications agency and client of Kitt. In December 2020, the firm faced a difficult decision: should it sign a lease on a physical office or follow the crowd and downsize the footprint?

"We decided post-Covid that we wanted to be an organisation that supported hybrid working, so we developed a strategy to return to working in an office environment for a minimum of three days a week," says Karen Williams, managing director for EMEA at Red Nucleus. The answer was to turn the office into a place that would "inspire creative working and where people would want to get back together", says Williams.

The challenge was that the decision to invest in new office space was made at a time when all predictions said that the new world of work wouldn't need a physical workspace. We had entered the 'new normal', the thinking

**“From our perspective, we believe company culture can only be built in person, in the real world**

## Commercial feature



goes – and would never turn back. Yet Williams' north star was a simple one: "Bringing people together drives innovation and creativity, and would also ensure it maintained our culture, which we believed was a driver to the success of our business," she says.

Williams ended up making the investment in a personalised office with Kitt. The benefits were apparent almost immediately. The company moved its European headquarters into premises in Farringdon in May 2021, and since then retention rates have improved. Williams' counterparts in the US recognised that improvement and asked her what she'd done. She explained it simply: they prioritised the physical workplace and authentic, real-world connections. "Bringing people together has ensured we have not only maintained our culture but enhanced it further and enabled us to build trust among our individuals so they can build great teams when working on the solutions for our clients," says Williams. "Ultimately, we believe this has given us a competitive advantage over other healthcare agencies."

In large part, Williams' decision was one that many company bosses consider week-in, week-out. Business leaders are expected to make strong decisions for the benefit of their company, and then justify them. Williams and Red Nucleus responded to

## 72%

of employees want more meaning from their jobs, and a sense of purpose at work

McKinsey, 2022

## 38%

of hybrid employees say their biggest challenge is knowing when and why to come into the office

Microsoft, 2022

uncertain times by taking a principled belief and backing it.

It's an approach that becomes ever more important given the way we seem to have lurched from one global issue to another. As the economy begins to slow and businesses begin to feel the pinch, leaders face other difficult decisions. But one difficult decision they shouldn't shy away from, says Coulson, is prioritising the maintenance or re-establishment of the physical workspace.

"One of the things that struck me is that there is so much utility to the workplace outside of work," says Coulson. The number-one place you are most likely to meet your spouse, statistically, is the office. It's a place where workers early in their career can escape crowded house shares and gain some respite. It's a home away from home – and that should be considered in how you design your office.

Coulson advises asking some key questions. "What is the higher purpose that we are striving towards? What role does being together in a space have to play in that?" Those questions are important, because they dictate why you need a workplace, and what it should look like.

"Leadership right now in a recession is more important than ever," says Coulson, "because it requires you to take big, scary calls that don't get unanimous consensus." Doubling down on the core functionality of the workplace is one of those big, scary decisions. But it's one that reaps its own rewards.

For more information please visit [kittoffices.com](http://kittoffices.com)



INTERVIEW

# ‘Forget all the rules’: the CEO who is doing work differently

**Vishen Lakhiani**, founder and CEO of Mindvalley, is rethinking how his teams operate and striving to adapt education to the modern world of work – all while putting in 21 hours a week



01

Lucy Handley

For many employees, hybrid working is now unquestionably the new normal. But the concept has stoked controversy: while Goldman Sachs CEO David Solomon has insisted that staff return to the office full-time, Salesforce boss Marc Benioff is reported to have said that “office mandates are never going to work”. But Vishen Lakhiani, founder and CEO of digital education company Mindvalley, takes pride in approaching the issue differently. He had invested in a Kuala Lumpur office space that was inspired by the coloured glass of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, complete with hypnotherapy rooms and nap pods. It was named as one of *Inc. Magazine*’s “most beautiful” offices in 2019. Yet, even so, his staff were unwilling to return to work there after the lockdowns were lifted.

“I thought that office was a true gift to my employees. I was wrong. After the pandemic, 70% of my employees said they did not want to return to the office,” he says. Instead, they prefer to work at home because it makes childcare easier, or means they can exercise at different times, Lakhiani observes.

For Mindvalley, there are no office mandates. Many of the company’s staff, including executive teams in London and Silicon Valley, now work from home. Mindvalley has taken the hit and is currently “tearing down” the Kuala Lumpur office and “selling parts of it at a massive loss”, Lakhiani reports. How does he feel about that? “It’s part of life. It happens,” he says.

Teams now use what he calls “rapid communication loops”, relying on WhatsApp voice notes and messaging via Slack to make quick decisions and avoid emails and meetings. Lakhiani has organised the business so that information is easily available. “Algorithms help derive information from our databases, so any information you need is at your fingertips,” he says.

Lakhiani founded Mindvalley in the early 2000s as a website selling meditation recordings on CD. Over the years, it has morphed into an online education and live events company offering entrepreneurs and company executives personal development courses with names such as Ultimate Leadership and Scale Your Business to \$1 Million. Tutors include bestselling author Nir Eyal and hypnotherapist Marisa Peer. Mindvalley itself is now worth a reported \$100m (£82m).

Lakhiani is no stranger to navigating workplace difficulties. A computer scientist by training, he worked in Silicon Valley before founding Mindvalley in New York. But when his US visa wasn’t extended he had to leave for his native Malaysia.

“When you are part of Mindvalley, you feel like someone who is on a quest to become the best person you can be

01 Vishen Lakhiani has given talks about “collective forgiveness”

02 Mindvalley offices have won plaudits – but 70% of employees prefer to work from home



02

He set about trying to attract people to work for him in Kuala Lumpur, a tough ask given the brain drain that was facing the country at that time. It was a challenge that he says he overcame by turning the company into a transformational brand.

“Transformational brands are companies like Nike. When you put on a Nike shoe, you feel like an athlete,” he explains. “When you are part of Mindvalley, you feel like someone who is on a quest to become the best person you can be,” he says. Lakhiani made the company attractive by focusing on a fun culture, flexible hours and team-building trips to exotic locations.

But building that brand hasn’t always been easy. Lakhiani spoke to

*Raconteur* after his presentation about collective forgiveness to the Global Citizen Forum, a conference held in the United Arab Emirates in November 2022. He believes that he overcame by turning the company into a transformational brand.

For instance, when a former CFO was found to be stealing from Mindvalley, Lakhiani tried to find ways to forgive him, he told the audience. He says he learnt a great deal from that experience.

“Every time something happens like that, which can really shake you as an entrepreneur, I try to understand what I can learn from this,” he says. “In that case, I screwed up. I didn’t have tight-enough security within our accounting department.

And so I do have to accept some responsibility,” he says.

Another blow came in 2011, when Lakhiani’s former business partner wanted to sell his shares. Lakhiani offered to buy him out but unable to set a price, they agreed that the partner would take all of the company’s profits for the following three years. This meant it was “a struggle to survive”, Lakhiani wrote on his website.

People work for the company from anywhere in the world, and that poses one of Lakhiani’s biggest challenges. “The issue here is time zones, right? So when you have someone in Silicon Valley working with team members in Malaysia, it means that, sometimes, someone is going to have to take a call at 11 at

night, someone’s going to have to take a call at 6 in the morning. And so we try to be very open about this in our hiring,” he says.

Another big issue is a lack of skills in computational thinking, a way of working that engineers use to solve problems. “We try to ensure that everybody who’s joining the company needs to basically know how to use tools like [coding platform] Airtable and can create their own databases and algorithms for their job,” Lakhiani explains. “There is a gap in finding these people because university systems have not caught up,” he adds. Currently, Mindvalley trains people to use such platforms.

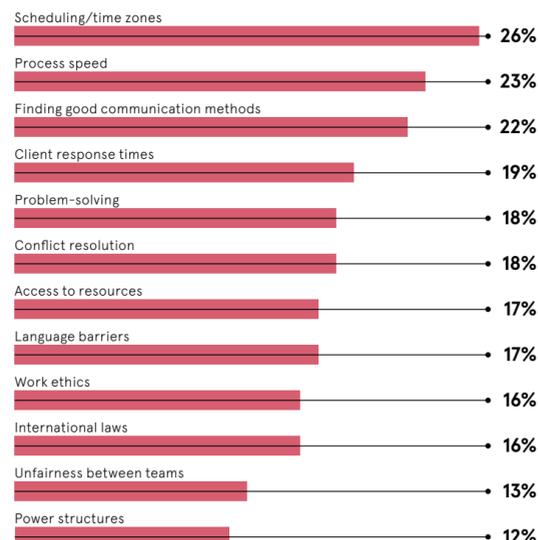
And when it comes to higher education, Lakhiani doesn’t hold back. “Universities are going to become obsolete. I’m convinced of this,” he says. He imagines a world where people spend 20 to 30 minutes a day on “lifelong learning”, with a focus on “personal transformation”, including creative and leadership skills. While he concedes that specialist expertise will still need to be taught, he says that the principles of personal growth can improve the application of that knowledge.

He looks to other CEOs for his own development, hiring the likes of former Chipotle CEO Monty Moran to teach a course named The Transformational Leader. “The teachers I want to learn from, I will sign as authors and bring them onto the platform. And then I study their programmes,” he explains.

And he’s a big advocate of shorter working weeks, especially for entrepreneurs. “You must build your company so that you only have to work 21 hours a week,” he says, adding that he aims to work seven hours a day, Tuesday to Thursday. “Here’s what happens: you create operational efficiency and then that means I’m able to free up my mind to look at new opportunities,” he says.

## MINDVALLEY IS NOT ALONE IN FINDING TIME ZONES A REAL CHALLENGE

“What are the biggest challenges of working in your global team?” (Survey of employees worldwide)



Globalization Partners, 2021

10 million reported users of Mindvalley worldwide

5x higher completion rate than other forms of online learning

300+ staff from 54 different countries

Mindvalley, 2022

This approach led to the launch last year of Mindvalley Certifications, which trains people in a variety of roles, from business coach to personal trainer. Courses cost upwards of \$2,000, and Lakhiani says the division brought in \$12m in revenue over 12 months.

What is Lakhiani’s advice to businesses navigating a changing working world and the great resignation? “Create companies that allow human beings to become the best human beings they can be,” he says.

“Forget all the rules. Are your people going to be better off working from home? Let them. Are your people going to be healthier if they don’t have to prescribe to a nine-to-five but can choose their own hours? Let them.”

# Sustainable, sociable, and healthy: breaking down Gen Z’s workplace checklist

Traditional cubicles may have had their day, but after months of lockdowns, it seems the home office is also on its way out. Will businesses answer young people’s calls for co-working?

The working lives of Generation Z began at home in bedrooms, living rooms and kitchens during the pandemic. With offices and co-working spaces closed, the youngest members of the workforce were forced to hone their skills and communicate with their new colleagues over Zoom calls, Slack channels and Whatsapp groups.

But going virtual has not been without its perks. Gen Z was spared the years of long commutes endured by their older co-workers and became accustomed to a more balanced way of working. With business as usual resuming, it was thought that younger workers would ditch the office in droves, favouring entirely remote, digitally nomadic opportunities. And just like that, the humble office would soon be obsolete.

However, this assumption misses the mark. In 2021 flexible workspace provider, Clockwise commissioned a survey revealing that 60% of Gen Z workers would prefer to work from an office space part-time. Nearly a third of those surveyed longed for social environments and struggled to create separation between their personal and work lives when working from home.

Early disruptors on the co-working scene tapped into something great, advocating for a more casual approach to corporate environments. But, since this concept broke into the mainstream in the early 2010s, little has been done to move this concept forward.

With employees being granted greater freedom over their schedules, increased digitisation, and a rise in freelancers and contingent workers, businesses are offering more flexibility across the board. However, organisations that advocate a flexible approach for their employees are still locked into fixed contracts as they would with a traditional office lease.

Innovations in communal workspaces are picking up. Clockwise, for example, allow businesses to scale their office footprint up or down depending on the growth of their teams. This demonstrates a keen awareness of how work is changing on a practical level. The agility that organisations nourished throughout the pandemic must now be reflected in the changing face of workplaces.

Alexandra Livesey, chief operating officer at Clockwise, spots a pattern emerging. “A growing number of big



“Young people need diverse office facilities that provide the opportunity to collaborate and socialise with colleagues but also space to work alone and focus

brands are taking smaller offices within our space,” she says. Two-thirds of Gen Z workers that relocated from urban areas during the pandemic don’t plan on moving back to big cities. Employers are stuck, Livesey explains: “They don’t want to commit to regional offices on a long-term basis, and they want to provide at least the same quality as their head office, which is improving staff retention.”

Employee benefits likewise reflect the changing business landscape. Alongside flexible work, almost three-quarters of Gen Z employees said added facilities were something they looked for as part of their working package when seeking new employment. But most employers do not have the capex, expertise or the time and energy to try and build these facilities out themselves for their teams. Paying for a small office and getting all the amenities included can be transformative.

For teams to make the most of time spent in offices, the approach must be more than skin deep. Livesey outlines the

rationale behind Clockwise’s carefully designed workspaces. “[Young people] need diverse office facilities that provide the opportunity to collaborate and socialise with colleagues but also space to work alone and focus,” she says.

Acoustic design and maximising exposure to natural light are vital considerations for Clockwise. Every detail is designed to aid energy levels, focus and mood. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Standing desks, breakout spaces, meeting rooms, outdoor terraces, kitchenettes, and even podcast recording studios allow workers to personalise their working environment, mix with coworkers and work collaboratively or alone.

To top it off, employers cannot overlook workplace sustainability. A recent Bupa survey revealed that 64% of Gen Z workers want their employers to act on environmental issues, and 31% said they would go as far as to turn down an employer with poor ESG credentials.

Rising to the challenge is not straightforward, but co-working could be a step in the right direction. Clockwise demonstrates how communal workspaces can continue to innovate, despite their already strong popularity. Their recently launched Positive Impact Strategy outlines four core ambitions: achieving carbon neutrality, operating in a circular economy, designing healthy workspaces that promote employee wellbeing, and ensuring a positive socio-economic impact.

As Gen-Z continues to dictate the future workplace, businesses that embrace sustainable, sociable, and healthy workspaces will have an edge.

For more information, visit [work-clockwise.com](http://work-clockwise.com)



# REMOTE WORKING & DISABLED STAFF

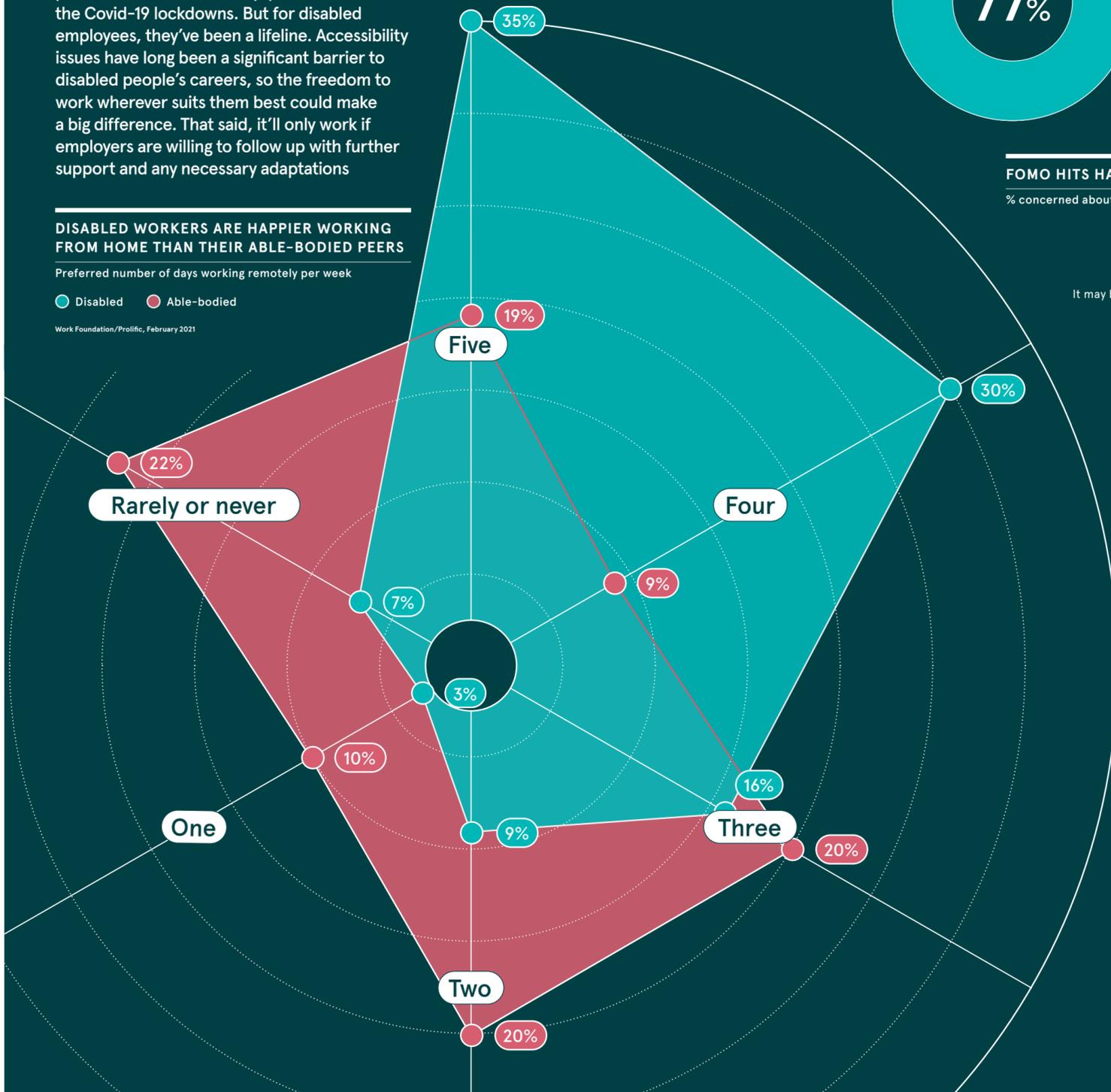
For many workers, remote and hybrid working policies were a welcome by-product of the Covid-19 lockdowns. But for disabled employees, they've been a lifeline. Accessibility issues have long been a significant barrier to disabled people's careers, so the freedom to work wherever suits them best could make a big difference. That said, it'll only work if employers are willing to follow up with further support and any necessary adaptations

## DISABLED WORKERS ARE HAPPIER WORKING FROM HOME THAN THEIR ABLE-BODIED PEERS

Preferred number of days working remotely per week

● Disabled ● Able-bodied

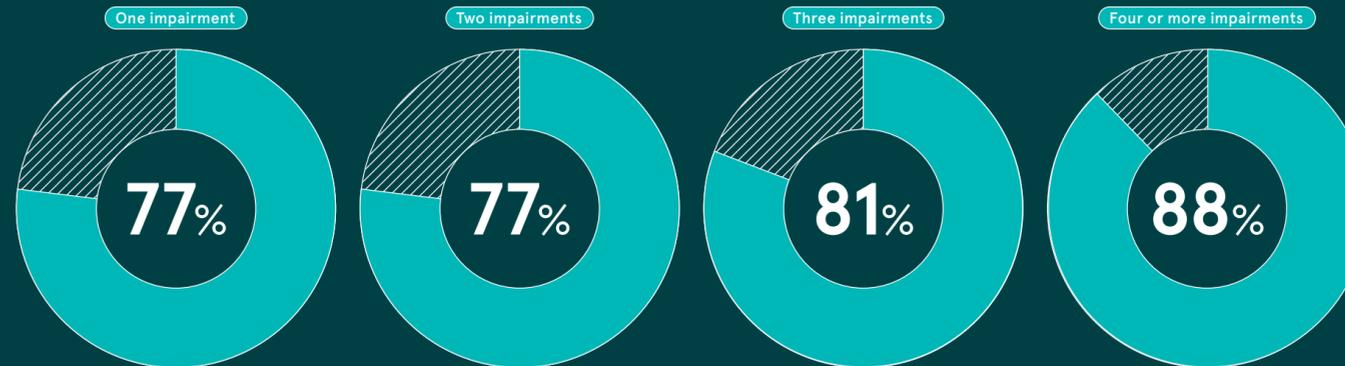
Work Foundation/Prolific, February 2021



## MULTIPLE IMPAIRMENTS INCREASE THE NEED FOR REMOTE WORKING

% viewing remote working policies as essential or very important

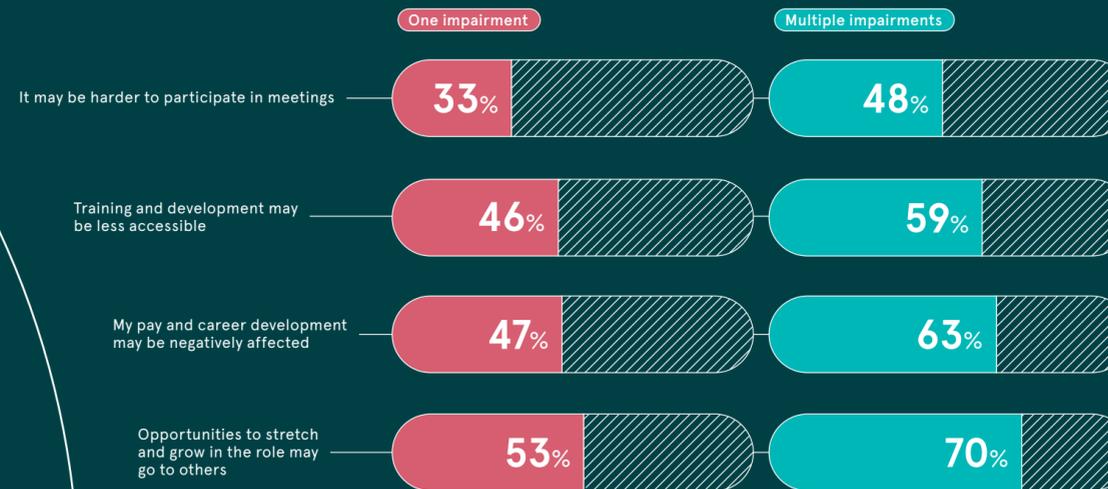
Work Foundation, July 2022



## FOMO HITS HARD FOR DISABLED WORKERS

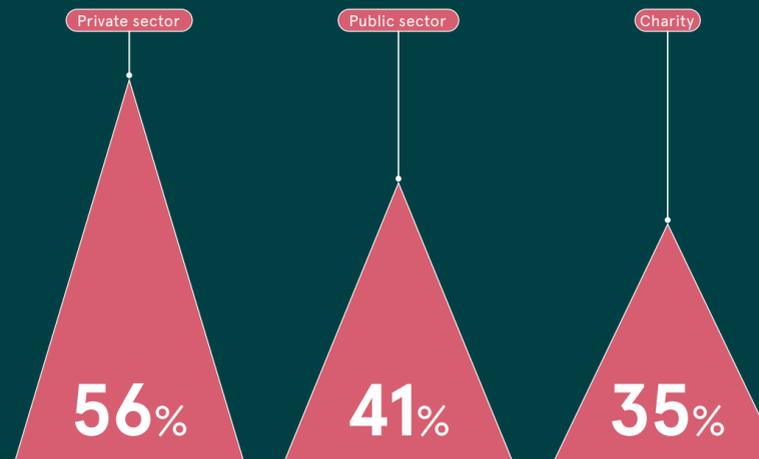
% concerned about how remote working could affect their careers

Work Foundation, July 2022



## DISABLED PUBLIC-SECTOR WORKERS GOT LESS SUPPORT FROM EMPLOYERS DURING COVID

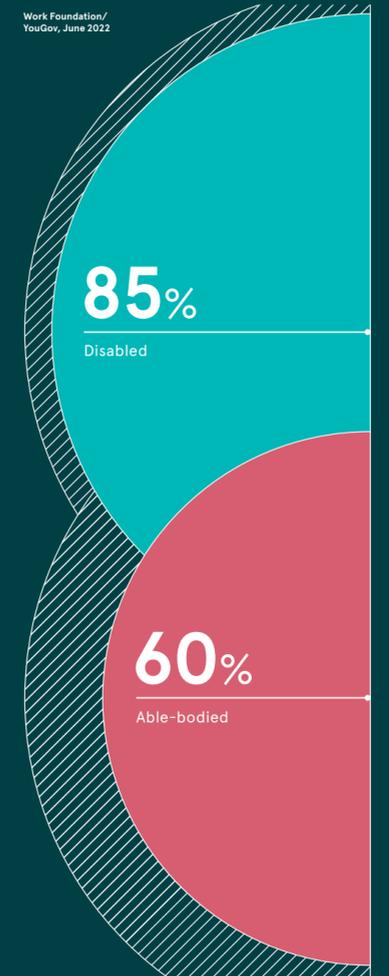
% reporting having received additional support during the pandemic



## A BIGGER PRODUCTIVITY BOOST

% reporting feeling more productive when working remotely

Work Foundation/YouGov, June 2022



One in five

disabled workers have had a request for extra support or adjustments refused while working remotely

70%

say that remote working being withdrawn would harm their health

80%

say that flexible working policies are essential or very important when they're looking for jobs



TECHNOLOGY

# Levelling up: hybrid offices seek lessons in video games

Meta is not the only big tech firm thinking about the metaverse and its applications in the workplace. Video game makers are getting in on the act

Will McCurdy

Microsoft was willing to plunk down \$68.7bn (£57.4bn) to acquire Activision Blizzard in January, which isn't the sort of money a company invests without good reason. For the tech giant the motivation is clear – the deal “will provide building blocks for the metaverse”. The apparent aim is to rival Meta's exploits in attempting to build virtual workplaces in the metaverse. It raises an interesting question. Will the hybrid offices of the future draw

more inspiration from the lush worlds of video games than the wonky Mark Zuckerberg animations we see on social media? Jason Kingsley is CEO of Rebellion Developments, a British games firm responsible for the immensely successful tactical shooter series *Sniper Elite*. He believes that while the metaverse is a recent addition to most people's vocabularies, it merely describes the type of simulated collaboration his industry has been doing for decades.

“The video game industry's culture of achievements could be useful in the modern office

The current trend is symptomatic of other forms of media and enterprise wanting “a piece of the action”, he says. For instance, one feature of Kingsley's industry that could soon make its way to the hybrid offices of the future is gamification – the application of typical elements of game-playing, such as point-scoring or competitions, to other activities.

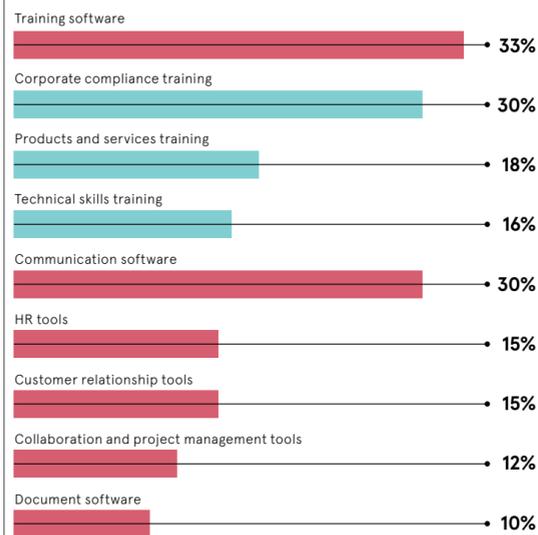
Kingsley asks us to imagine a situation where HMRC has embraced games. “Look, if you get your taxes done early, we'll give you a point and if you get five points, you get 1% off your tax bill.”

This type of rewards-based approach could be particularly useful for firms in meeting their ESG goals, he says, by rewarding or “nudging” employees to complete projects in a less emission-intensive fashion – or simply for commuting to work in a greener way.

Drawing on the video game industry's culture of “achievements”, he believes this approach could be useful in the modern office, comparing it to the “gold stars” students get in school or to military medals, which effectively influence human behaviour even though they don't have much material value.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR GAMIFICATION EXIST ACROSS DIFFERENT FORMS OF BUSINESS TECH

“Where would you like to see more game-like elements?” (Survey of US employees)



TalentLMS, 2019

“You rarely tell somebody directly what to do in a game. You offer them choices and you reward the correct choice,” notes Kingsley.

He highlights a point of psychology apparent within the gaming industry. If you give something to somebody and then their behaviour makes it go away, “it has a bigger impact on them psychologically than it would otherwise”. This could be an effective motivational tool.

Rainer Usselmann is co-founder of Happy Finish, a team of developers who work on augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) experiences and build virtual offices. He doesn't think the average office worker will be “sitting there wearing VR goggles” any time soon. But he is extremely confident that VR-fuelled collaboration will be indispensable in industries such as design and fashion, where virtual models can greatly cut costs such as shipping expenses.

“Imagine that you have a design lab in California and a brand team in Stuttgart,” says Usselmann. “They want to collaborate on a project and be able to look at digital twins of products, let's say a car part. With a digital twin of the real thing, they'll be able to look at and interact with it in a shared virtual space from a number of different devices.”

According to Usselmann, by virtualising this sampling process you can minimise the number of physical objects that you need to ship from one place to the other, shortening development cycles.

Notably, the tech that makes these virtual worlds run often draws directly from the video game industry. Usselmann's firm recently created a virtual space for fashion brands using Epic Games' Unreal Engine, which powers some of the world's most popular video games, including *Fortnite*, *Gears of War* and the latest *Final Fantasy VII Remake*.

Usselmann also highlights the work that BMW and other manufacturing firms are doing with Nvidia to build a virtual factory. Nvidia derives a big chunk of its revenue from producing graphic cards for video games; it creates much of the hardware that computers need to render these shared virtual environments.

Joost Rietveld is assistant professor at the UCL School of Management. He thinks that game engine makers, such as Epic Games and Unity, have plenty of incentive to diversify their revenues beyond the video game industry by exploring workplace applications for their tech. As we've already seen, this is making the video game industry an increasingly fertile picking ground for the likes of Microsoft and Meta.

Rietveld compares the situation to the late 1970s and early 1980s, when many people working for defence contractors and the US Army decided to put their skills to use in non-combat industries, including video games. “The pendulum has swung from video games attracting people from outside industries, to outside industries now attracting people from video games,” he says. As Kingsley points out, the significantly higher salaries offered by the big tech firms will contribute to that desire to jump.

Although big tech firms have always had a huge footprint in the video games sector, the rise of their metaverse aspirations could well lead to video games having ever more influence in the corporate world. Highly skilled video game workers who are in search of higher salaries may soon bring their skills to building the hybrid offices of the future. And video game firms will be looking to extract more revenue from their decades of experience in creating powerfully immersive virtual worlds. ●

# Three workforce strategies for weathering uncertainty

Businesses are battling uncertainty as the economic downturn looms. But those with an eye on the horizon are using real-time data to update workforce strategies to stay resilient

People are the lifeblood of any business, and optimising talent will be integral to recovering from the latest set of global disruptions. Between July and September 2022, unemployment increased from 3.9% to 4.9% in the OECD, 0.4% lower than pre-pandemic levels. By comparison, the US and the G7 unemployment rates are 3.6% and 4%, respectively. With inflation at a 30-year high, conditions are set for a candidate-driven market. Particularly in highly skilled roles, there is no longer a large pool of candidates to choose from.

As employers brace for economic headwinds in the aftermath of a global pandemic, many are adjusting their workforce strategies to adapt to a rapidly changing market. As such, there are three workforce strategies that companies may need to adopt to weather upcoming uncertainty.

**Tackling inflation**  
First, organisations will need to develop an inflation strategy. Leaders must understand the health of their program and address problem areas in retention and sourcing. Access to real-time data on critical hiring and retention KPIs allows businesses to compare themselves with country-specific benchmarks and forecast future talent

“Look at who among your competitors is hiring similar skills. Are they doing something more innovative?”

needs. This birds-eye view of the workforce is the first step in ensuring that hiring strategies always reflect market and labor changes.

Businesses should also compare this data to their forecast and understand possible future changes. For instance, companies can flex their extended workforce to account for gaps, but only if they can identify those gaps ahead of time. If they can forecast sourcing needs, CHROs can prioritize rate increases for strategic roles.

Workforce optimisation can help organisations pursue the correct initiatives to better position their program for success and offset inflation concerns. To weather inflation, a well-defined cost and talent strategy allows businesses to take action in the right areas. Access to real-time talent intelligence data will empower organisations to stay competitive as they work to attract and retain top talent.

**Increasing talent quality while driving cost efficiency**

A second strategy to prepare for oncoming uncertainty is to increase talent quality while driving cost savings. CHROs can consider temporarily suspending length-of-stay policies to keep high-quality workers in place at locked-in rates, as well as finding new openings within their business for existing high-performers. Similarly, companies can strategize rate increases by leveraging talent and market data to target rate increase costs toward the roles most strategic to business objectives.

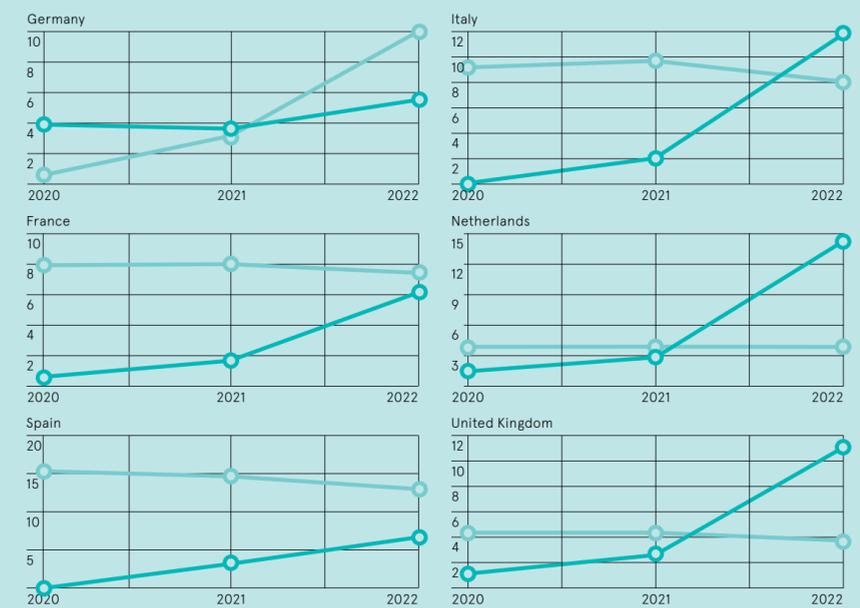
It is also important to monitor low-income workers and consider rate increases for employees who will be hit hardest by inflation. Companies can also look to retain existing talent with upskill opportunities rather than incurring sourcing and future inflationary costs.

While inflation is 9.6% in the UK, the cost of hiring talent has increased 14%.

Commercial feature

## HIGH INFLATION AND LOW UNEMPLOYMENT CONTRIBUTE TO A SHALLOW TALENT POOL

Recent European inflation and unemployment trends



Magnit, 2022

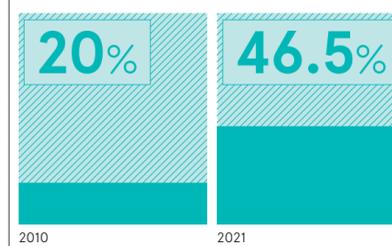
Under these market conditions, assuring talent quality is paramount. With visibility of the right data at the right time, decision-makers may find they need to do less hiring in the first place. They can use market data to target rate increase costs on the vacancies that best align with business objectives.

**Contingent workforce optimisation**

The third key strategy to stay resilient amidst market uncertainty is leveraging an extended workforce as a strategic advantage to deliver flexibility and cost savings. Extending active high-quality workers reduces the need for sourcing and keeps rates locked in at the initial negotiation rather than sourcing at a current rate defined by inflation. The contingent workforce also powers organizational agility, enabling companies to ramp up quickly as new projects arise or demand for products and services fluctuates.

Rapidly building a clear, comprehensive, responsive and accurate picture will be vital to getting the most out of a contingent workforce. “Firms should be looking at the demographics of the workforce that they're managing today, how people are self-identifying,

## AVERAGE ORGANISATION'S WORKFORCE CONTRACT, CONTINGENT OR NON-EMPLOYEE



Ardent Partners, 2021

their age or their life stage,” says Raleen Gagnon, VP and GM of Total Talent Intelligence at Magnit. “It changes the types of scheduling flexibility that you might want to offer and the structure of what a hybrid work environment might need to be. Look at who among your competitors is hiring similar skills. Are they doing something more innovative?”

Employee patterns reflect this shift to a contingent workforce. Since the pandemic, more people are choosing to be part of the contingent workforce as it offers them flexibility, better life balance and higher pay. CHROs and hiring managers will need to take stock of their retention and sourcing practices to mitigate rising costs. Bringing in or expanding the contingent workforce will provide scope for businesses to optimise their operations and ensure they can respond flexibly to a shifting market. And in order to maximize responsiveness, organizations will need access to real-time talent and market data that provides visibility into a rapidly changing labor market.

According to Sam Smith, EMEA and global president of client delivery at Magnit, the flexibility offered by this new breed of workforce is already proving critical to top firms.

“Global FTSE 100 organisations are purposely moving to a more flexible model. 70% or more of their headcount may still be full-time employees, but their flexibility is driven by the other, contingent part of their workforce ... and that's pretty significant,” says Smith. The nation is on recession watch, and this shift is more pertinent than ever. Employers can't afford to miss the mark on their human capital strategies. This data can also help business leaders assess where specific workers are best placed within their organisations. Smith explains: “You need to understand whether a role is better suited to a

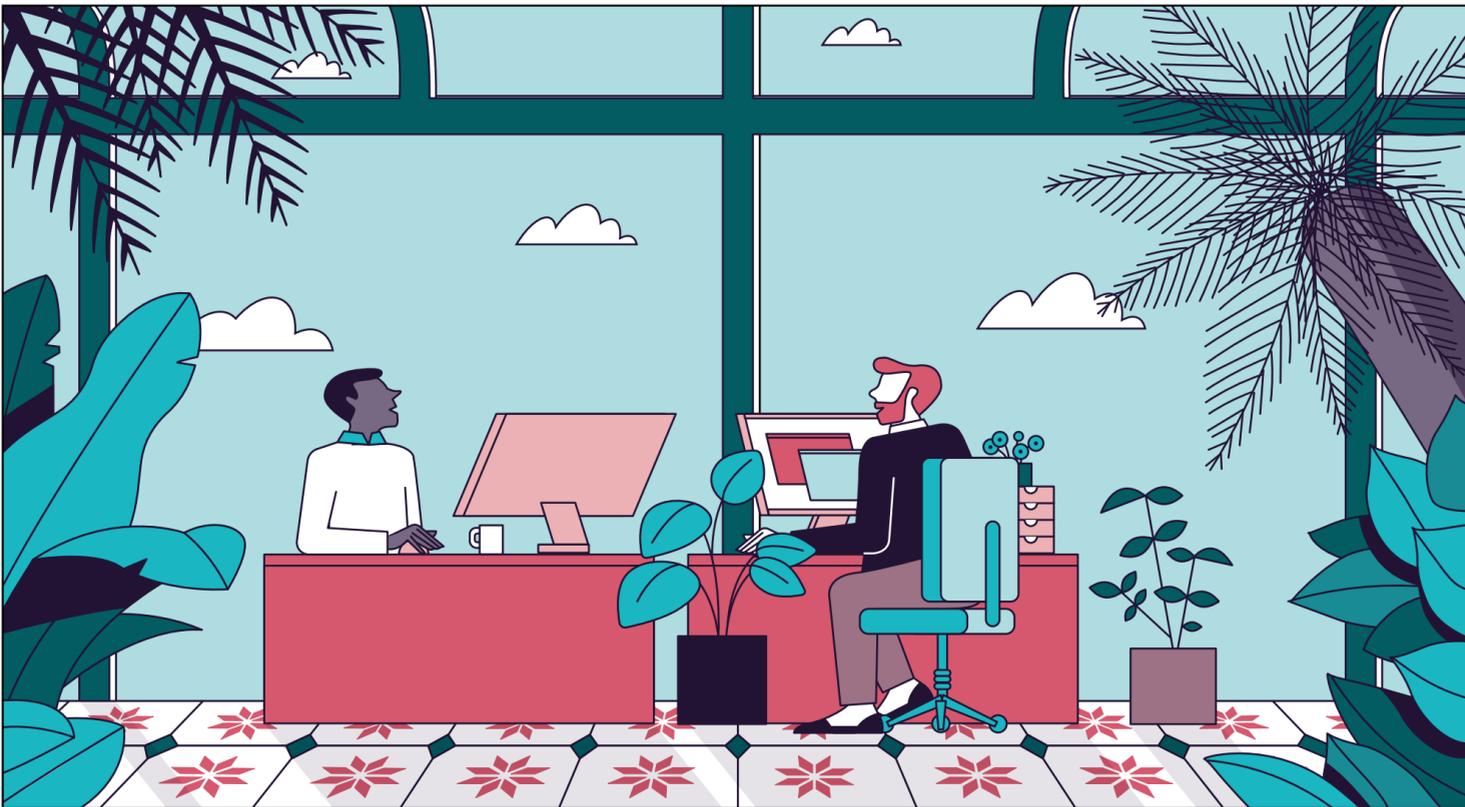
permanent employee, whether you should consider a contingent worker or a consultant or if this is a prime opportunity for automation. Managing a contingent workforce well comes from data-driven decision making, reporting and analytics that then deliver better outcomes.”

As workforce structures become increasingly complex, properly-managed data on contingent workers is critical when meeting legal obligations for a globally dispersed workforce. Regulations vary for independent labour across markets, and data is central to compliance, helping business leaders to understand whom to deploy and when.

There is an increasingly complex talent pool to navigate, where real-time market rate and hiring intelligence and solid, data-driven contingent labour programmes are a must. Businesses have a wealth of information at their fingertips. But they need the human expertise to validate this data and make use of it. Access to timely and relevant insights on their own workforce and the broader marketplace is key in an ever-changing economic landscape

Scan this QR code to learn more about data-driven workforce strategies





**WELLBEING**

# After Covid, offices must focus on employee health

As businesses focus on workplace wellbeing in the battle for staff, they are increasingly turning their attention to the built environment

Nick Easen

City centres have too many vintage office buildings with stained Styrofoam ceilings and condensation-covered windows. In the wake of Covid-19 and the growth of home working, real estate developers must up their game to entice businesses, putting employee wellbeing at the heart of the built environment.

According to real estate firm Colliers, 65% of all office transactions in London are for Grade A space, part of a recent 'flight to quality'. In the first six months of the year, the capital had 1.7 million square feet of refurbished office space available, the equivalent of almost 27 football pitches. And there's a lot more in the pipeline.

Renovations are now essential to entice workers to return to offices, but so are new building standards, as developers recalibrate what's important in office design.

"We're seeing occupiers rethink how they measure the value of real estate in their business. This was once about efficiency and cost, but now they're assessing a range of metrics, including the overall workplace experience as a differentiator in the jobs market," explains Lewis Beck, head of workplace for EMEA at commercial real estate firm CBRE.

Much focus has been placed on new amenities, everything from gyms to bike racks and from stocked pantries to office plants. But those

businesses that want to get serious about employee wellbeing would do well to consider the built environment itself. A survey of 3,000 employees across Europe found that 95% would like to see improvements to their physical workplace.

"There's more recognition now that employee mental health and wellbeing need to be a business priority – and central to this is how the physical workplace supports them," says Stuart Finnie, head of design at Unispace, the workplace design firm that conducted the survey. "If a building isn't designed to allow people to feel comfortable while they are in the space, it will negatively impact on how an individual performs."

Lurking behind this talk is the threat of sick building syndrome. This illness, recognised by the World Health Organization, occurs when occupants of buildings experience acute health and comfort issues that seem to be linked to time spent in a particular workspace. Sick building syndrome is known to directly increase absenteeism, so all businesses should take it seriously.

But it can be difficult for businesses to know how their physical office space is directly affecting employee wellbeing and how to improve it. That explains the growing interest globally in the International WELL Building Institute standard.

Launched in 2014 and more recently updated to Version 2, the WELL Building Standard has 10 strict criteria. These cover everything from air quality and flow, to water provision, good acoustics and optimised light, as well as thermal comfort and the materials used in the workplace.

While many of these aspects are frequently overlooked in office design, the WELL standard aims to regulate down to the detailed level of the glues and paints used.

"Where WELL differs from other certifications is that it isn't just about the specification of quantities of fresh air or noise levels or chemical composition of the water supply. It's also about measuring the performance of these on completion and then continually monitoring these going forward on an annual basis," explains Kavita Kumari, associate director at engineering consultancy Cundall.

Cundall implemented Scotland's first WELL-certified office with CBRE for law firm Pinsent Masons in Edinburgh. Cundall's team took a

biophilic design philosophy, which involves the integration of natural materials and plants, known to boost productivity.

"There can be challenges in implementing the WELL certification," says Kumari. "For instance, it requires higher levels of outdoor air to be introduced into the space according to the number of people in it. In Edinburgh, we had to install mini-air handling units and design devices and controls to vary the air volumes, depending on occupancy levels."

It helps that this certification has been verified by third parties and is evidence-based, underpinned by peer-reviewed scientific research. This found that workers in WELL-certified spaces reported improved satisfaction and increased levels of perceived health, wellbeing and productivity. Firms that implement it have seen drops in staff turnover and absenteeism.

"Despite the increasing evidence which shows the clear benefits of healthy features, it can still be a faith-based investment for corporate occupiers," observes Beck. "Work needs to continue to study the links between people and their

“Despite increasing evidence demonstrating the benefits of healthy features, it can still be a faith-based investment for corporate occupiers”

## How buildings can make you sick

The death of a two-year-old child because of mould in a flat in Rochdale recently highlighted the issue of sick building syndrome. But excessive damp, poor ventilation and condensation are not limited to poor-quality social housing – they can also affect office buildings, leading to a constellation of health problems for those working in them.

Before the turn of this century, such problems often included symptoms such as headaches and nausea due to poor air quality and flickering fluorescent lighting. Illnesses were caused

by rusting drinking water facilities and mechanical ventilation systems that were poorly maintained, with filters rarely changed and dirty ducts and grilles. Any deep cleaning that was carried out likely involved noxious products.

"But there is more regulation and a better understanding now about how these things affect wellbeing," says Kavita Kumari, associate director at engineering consultancy Cundall.

There is even an NHS page on the subject. Crowded spaces, lack of cleaning and toxic contaminants in furniture and building materials worsen the situation. It will take a persistent campaign of investment and improvement to root it out.

environment to demonstrate the return on investment in creating healthier buildings. There is also still work to do in translating the technical aspects of this certification into the 'so what' for the tenant or workers using the space."

Standards like WELL raise the bar by highlighting the importance of physical factors in an office environment. Many businesses have adapted quickly to changing work patterns post-Covid, but these shifts haven't always been reflected in the fabric of buildings or subsequent investments in refurbishments.

Developers find that many heritage buildings, which are legion in the UK and Europe, present unique challenges when it comes to ventilation, lighting and acoustics. Many need a complete overhaul. Yet the illness of our architecture isn't necessarily at the forefront of the C-suite's mind.

"All of these changes require a wellness mindset that places the

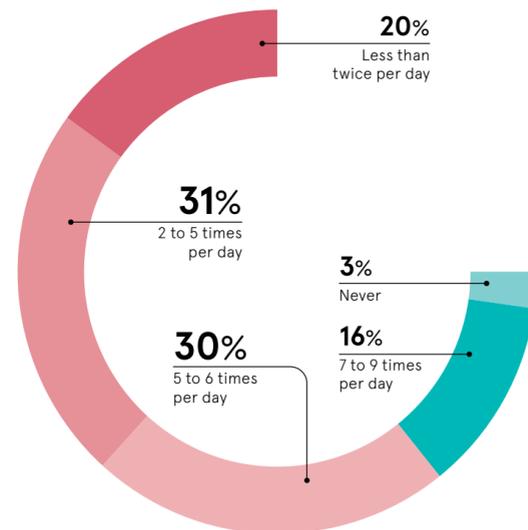
experience of the people who will be using the space at the centre of all decision-making about it," explains Emily Smith, chief operating officer of workspace provider Argyll. "With a recession now on the cards, the emphasis should clearly be on quality, quality, quality."

For the moment, sustainability and the race to net zero are the main areas of focus for the commercial real estate sector. But over time, the two topics are likely to merge, as strong employee wellbeing is embedded in the idea of a sustainable built environment.

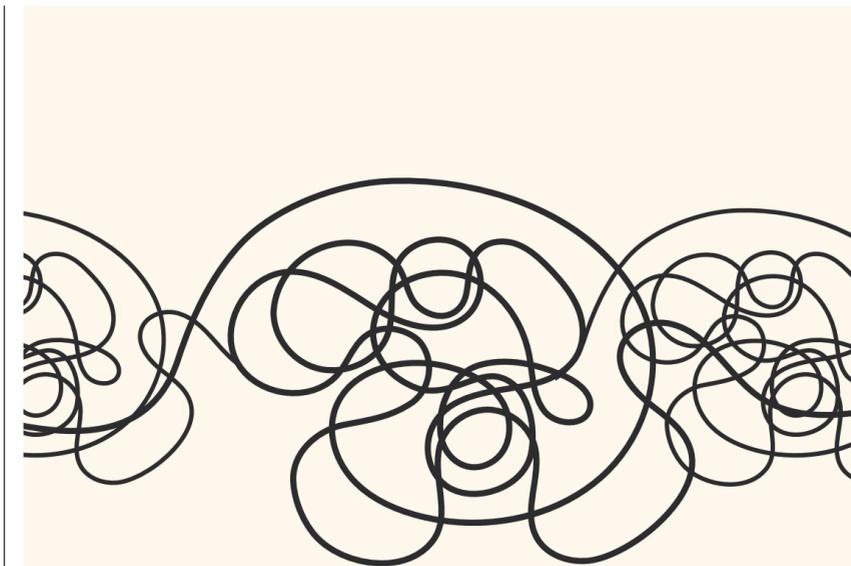
Coen van Oostrom, CEO of Netherlands-based property developer Edge, thinks this shift will soon become business-critical. "The topic of wellbeing is crucial for a healthy return to the office," he says. "Proving the performance of your workplace is key. We also need to keep pushing the boundaries of what is feasible and be able to prove the value of investing in your workspace." ●

## NOISE IS A PERSISTENT PROBLEM IN UK OFFICES

"How often is your work interrupted by noise?" (Survey of UK office workers)



Remark Group, 2019



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HYBRID WORKING

# Five signs your company culture is suffering

It's no mean feat to maintain strong workplace camaraderie under hybrid working. If you recognise these warning signs, you may have a problem

Chris Stokel-Walker

Company cultures are hard to maintain at the best of times. In the era of hybrid working, it's even more challenging to manage the blend of personalities – and clashing egos – while steering company direction and keeping goals in focus. When your staff are distributed and working in a hybrid set-up, it's much harder to keep tabs on who is happy with their lot and who is unhappy. And the problem is going nowhere, with the workplace of the future likely to involve some element of distributed, hybrid working. One in four employees in the UK has a hybrid working pattern, according to the Office for National Statistics, with 84% of staff planning to blend working at home and in the office in the years to come.



## 1 New staff don't know what to do

One of the most crucial moments in any employee's engagement with a business is their first few days and weeks with the company. It's then that they learn the ropes and begin to broker friendships. Unfortunately, this can be difficult to orchestrate, especially when working remotely. Human resources platform Applaud got rid of its offices during the pandemic and plans to stay fully remote. But its leaders recognise the risks involved. "We have to put more effort into supporting our workers through all stages of their journey with us," says Ivan Harding, co-founder and CEO of Applaud. "That applies from the day an offer is accepted through those crucial weeks of onboarding and into career development and progression."

The company developed a framework for new staff to ensure they feel fully equipped to join the company. "They have their calendars pre-booked with meet and greets, learning sessions, a handful of socials and, crucially, calendar breathing space to take it all in," says Harding. In addition, each new starter is allocated a buddy. "In the old days, this used to be your desk neighbour," he says, "but nowadays it's someone waiting to give their buddy support over instant messaging or a web-conferencing application."

should have. This can have a negative impact on employee wellbeing, lead to constant staff turnover – and tank your company culture anyway. An extensive survey by MIT Sloan School of Management analysed 76 companies with more than 1,000 employees each. It found that when companies introduced one meeting-free day per week, productivity rose by 35%. Slash a second day of meetings from the company calendar and productivity rose 71%. It is of course a fine balance to strike, but if you can instigate meet-free Mondays while keeping employees abreast of exactly what is expected of them, then you can improve the workplace culture. Even when your staff are distributed,



## 2 People have difficulty switching off

Work/life balance used to be an easier seesaw to manage. You would work your allocated hours, then travel home and turn off your working brain and relax for the evening. But when your commute is from the bedroom to the dining table or a home office and your work devices are constantly within reach, that idea of discrete shifts becomes more difficult to realise. It's one of the odd ironies that can blight a company even when it is offering something that initially looks like a boon for workers. "For employers, hybrid working provides a means to create a happier and healthier workforce, resulting in higher levels of employee engagement, retention and ultimately productivity," says Emma Parry, professor of human resource management at Cranfield School of Management. "But unless it is carefully implemented, hybrid working can unfortunately lead to a blurring of the lines between work and life – therefore damaging employee well-being and satisfaction."

There remain some things that are too important or difficult to do well remotely. In a hybrid workplace, at times you might struggle to convince people who are used to working from home that some things are best done in person. "While we're embracing an open approach to flexibility for our people, it does mean that coordinating those 'together moments' – which are an important part of our culture – is more challenging," says Elizabeth Hardwick-Smith, group people and culture director at architectural practice Pick Everard. "All of our people are working different patterns that suit their own needs, but also any working pattern must allow



## 3 Meetings dominate the work calendar

One of the greatest challenges of hybrid working is retaining strong, clear communication without bogging people down to such a degree that they're unable to interact with each other – or do their jobs. "Without the face-to-face environment of an office, proper communication can slip among hybrid and remote workers," says Parry. Communication and a shared purpose are key elements that contribute to a company's culture, so you need to have regular check-ins. But go too far and you risk clogging up calendars with endless Zoom calls about how many Zoom calls you

## 4 Conversations revolve around work

Casual chats in the office kitchen or around the watercooler have long been the bane of business leaders' lives. The idea that some staff dawdle in those breakout spaces has often been seen as a problem for productivity, with hard-line managers keeping track of time away from desks and cracking down on anyone who 'drags' on the company's efficiency. Yet responsible employers recognise the soft benefits that those conversations have on a company's culture. "Like many companies, we found that the introduction of hybrid working required a change in

how we approach communication between teams," says Alexander Wiede, HR director at SAP UK & Ireland. "To help make sure that staff don't feel isolated from colleagues, we launched our Never Lunch Alone digital initiative. It connects remote-working employees around the world for virtual lunches during the working day." The idea is to provide a time when staff don't have to talk solely about work and aren't beholden to an online meeting agenda. Instead, they can converse about whatever they want. This could see them raise issues that can be thrashed out among themselves before they possibly spiral into bigger problems.

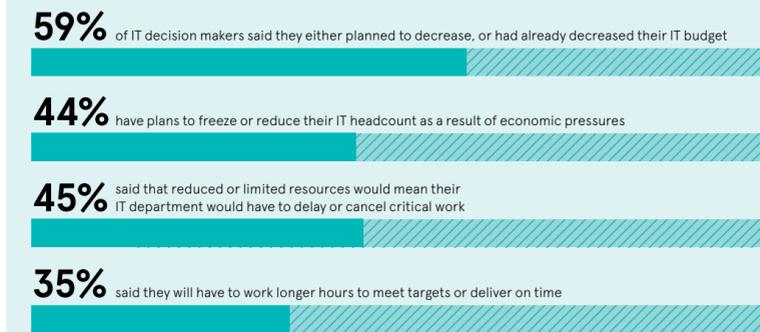


## 5 Staff won't always work in the office

us to continue to uphold our obligations to our clients." Some Pick Everard staff have previously queried whether they need ever return to the office. "We've had to set a policy that if you are needed for a particular piece of work, a discussion or event, then it has to be in person," says Hardwick-Smith. That's important because of the sense of togetherness it brings. It also helps to cut back on the duplication of work involved with catching up employees who couldn't be there in person. "We've also pushed ourselves to think more broadly about ways in which we can bring people together," she says, "so that such events are more accessible for everyone. Maintaining a mix of virtual and in-person occasions works well."



### NEW RESEARCH FROM SNAPLOGIC REVEALS THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN'S IMPACT ON IT TEAMS AND THEIR WORKLOADS



# Workplace IT needs a rethink as pressures mount

IT is now facing the perfect storm and workplaces will have to adapt. Automation, integration and better data insights can help

In many workplaces, IT professionals are feeling the strain. The economic downturn, as well as inflationary and recessionary pressures are squeezing budgets, and the war on talent means that there's less human capacity to deliver. It's why IT teams are having to do more with fewer resources. Research shows that 87% of IT decision makers in the UK and US say their workload has increased in the past six months. Nearly two-thirds polled have either already decreased their IT budgets or plan to, while another third are managing the burgeoning workload by users to take on routine tech tasks. In fact, over four-fifths of respondents said they have either already handed over more responsibility to non-IT users or are considering it. IT work is now being disseminated across the business with significant advantages. "In the current economic climate, businesses need to rethink the definition of an IT team. For example, there's real value in creating a blended team of talent, combining rookie and veteran experience levels. You can also bring in people from other areas of the business who wouldn't usually be classed as technical, because with self-service tools, they don't need to be experts to do the job well," details the CTO of SnapLogic, which is valued at over \$1bn and has more than 300 employees in five offices across the world. "The economic downturn creates the motivation to do away with waste that has been there all along, but tolerated. Action now will allow businesses to emerge stronger and better able to compete and thrive when the economy recovers again."

portfolio, and where to make smart investments with an incredibly quick payback – we're talking ROI within 60 to 90 days," explains Jeremiah Stone, chief technology officer at SnapLogic, a global provider of enterprise automation and intelligent integration, which conducted the survey.

Automation and IT self-service are key The poll also showed that IT decision-makers are turning to technology to alleviate some of these pressures. Over half are investing in AI and automation to eliminate manual work. A similar percentage is also empowering non-IT users to take on routine tech tasks. In fact, over four-fifths of respondents said they have either already handed over more responsibility to non-IT users or are considering it. IT work is now being disseminated across the business with significant advantages.

Time to join up the data dots This is why UK businesses are now starting to think about solutions which will enable the whole workforce to get more from their IT investments and boost productivity. This involves digitising critical but low-value tasks, systematising workflows, adopting self-service IT and integrating different business functions, breaking down data silos. Companies are also using low or no-code platforms, which allow employees who have no knowledge of coding but have extensive business knowledge to do relatively straightforward IT tasks for themselves. "Automation is only part of the solution. Utilising data company-wide and joining up the data dots is crucial. The 'I' in IT should stand for integration, because today's challenge is all about how businesses integrate data. No large firm can escape the problem – they all have complex, fragmented tech assets that weren't designed to talk to each other," states Stone from SnapLogic, which was recently named a visionary by Gartner for its data integration tools. "Data visibility across an organisation allows the C-suite to all be on the same page. In turn this allows rapid business innovation and decision making, leading to enhanced competitiveness – always a positive in times of turbulence," concludes Stone.

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