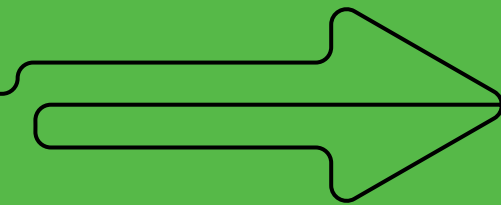
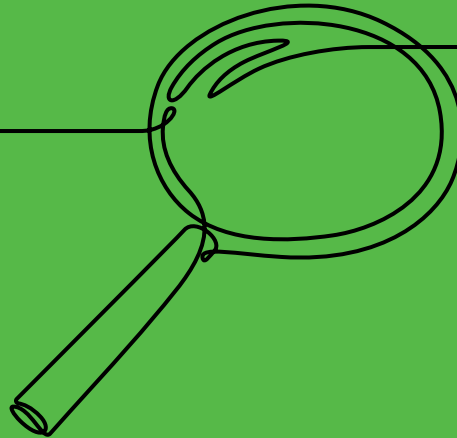


Go Forward To Work



Considerations when designing the future workplace
Mark Hauser and Cliff Ettridge, The Team
July 2022

Foreword



Back in 2019, I wrote a book – The Joy of Work – a cultural study that riffed off my experience of injecting enjoyment into workplaces like Twitter. In the introduction to that book, I wrote “Our jobs – no matter what they are – can help give meaning to our lives. While we might be reluctant to profess our fondness for them, we should never be ashamed of feeling proud of being made happy by our work.”

Today, our work, workplace and home life has blurred. The events since then have completely changed the way we work and, without wishing to revert to cliché, they present us with huge opportunities to be even happier – or not.

So, what are we going to do? What work culture will we design for ourselves? Right now, as of today, we haven't found the answer. Big business personalities and our media pull us this way and that. Back to the office. Stay at home. Work your way. Switch off. Switch on. To say that the world of work is in turmoil is an understatement.

Getting the design of our workplaces and how we work will be critical for our future happiness at work and our productivity as a nation. Considering every opportunity, trying it, testing it before rushing to conclusions will be the course of action that the wise brand takes.

And for you and me – well, we need an employer that's going to check in on us every now and then. Not in a looking over your shoulder sort way – because we need to be trusted to get on with work – what we really need is an employer who's making sure we're not burning the candle at both ends. That's what'll unlock a new relationship with work.

Bruce Daisley, eatsleepworkrepeat.com, July 2022



Our jobs – no matter what they are – can help give meaning to our lives. While we might be reluctant to profess our fondness for them, we should never be ashamed of feeling proud of being made happy by our work.





Go forward to work

As with anything, when evaluating the optimal decision, it pays to consider the broader context. And so, as we consider the future of the workplace, it makes sense to take a quick rewind to understand how we arrived in the current...

It's April 2020, and the impact of an increasingly evident global pandemic was frantically being evaluated and re-evaluated. Lockdowns, mask-wearing, regular testing... a vast swathe of measures were touted and introduced across different countries. Before long, even the more hesitant of governments were advocating that all workers who can work from home do so. Some business leaders had already made this move.

A period of adjustment followed. Workplace budgets diverted towards enabling home-working. Laptops, home computers, desks, ergonomic chairs, second phones, second screens, stationary... such was the uptake, we encountered global supply shortages. Managing a workforce remotely also threw up some new and immediate questions. How do we ensure their staff are OK? How do we provide stability when we've no idea how stable things are? How do we adjust to new dynamics of trust? How to ensure productivity remains? How do we navigate the differences in our employees' individual contexts, in some instances falling across multiple continents? In one fell swoop a global working experiment started.

Within this experiment we saw a variety of different scenarios play out... Kitchen tables converted to co-working spaces. Lounge floors transformed to multi-purpose home gyms. Commutes disappeared. Work "attire" informalised. New parents could share responsibilities more equally. Those with care responsibilities had different dynamics to adjust to: some made easier, some more challenging. Friday "after-work" drinks were lost. Impromptu lunches with colleagues stopped. And that intangible connection of common purpose between two colleagues sharing an office space vanished as most people retreated into their individual units – a natural survival instinct.

As pandemic transitions to endemic, and with survivorship bias likely showing that those businesses who have survived did so through some form of remote working, the questions circling leadership and management centre around what the future of the workplace is. And to that, we'll now turn our attention.



An hour to solve the problem

“If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask... for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes.”

Albert Einstein

We take inspiration from Albert Einstein and realise the value in clarifying the question we really want to answer? Some leaders are exploring how to get people back to work, without necessarily knowing if that truly is what they want and need. A better question to explore might be something closer to “What is the future role of our workplace in service of our organisational objectives?” or “What do we want the future of work to look like?”. Either way, we start to place the workplace as a tool to achieve an outcome, rather than being the outcome itself.

When exploring this question and identifying the outcome to which we’re in service, it merits attention to establish through which lens(es) we wish to view the question... Recognising the complex systems within which we operate, it clearly doesn’t make sense to answer this from just one perspective. At one end of the spectrum of possible perspectives, a “me only” approach is likely to amplify existing inequalities and exclusionary practices in the workplace.

Conversely, at the other end of the spectrum, a consideration for each and every stakeholder involved, extending to the sandwich shop around the corner who’ll suffer from reduced footfall or even the taxpayer who’d potentially need to cover the increased costs of running a less efficient train service, yields so much complexity that it would likely paralyse any decision-making process. To find a manageable equilibrium, we propose three primary lenses through which to make the decision, accompanied by two secondary considerations.

The three primary lenses we advocate looking through are that of:

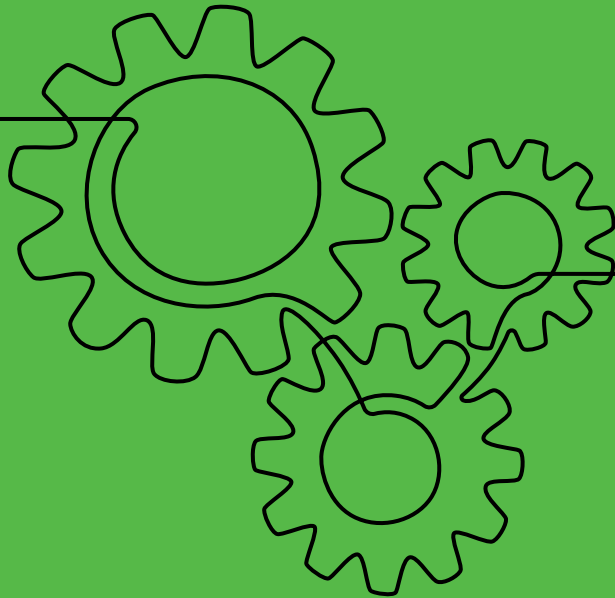
1. the Employee (i.e., the individual),
2. the Collective (i.e., the broader team and group of employees),
3. the Organisation (i.e., the interests of the business as its own entity in delivery of its purpose and commitments)

Additional considerations should be given to:

- a. Society (i.e., the broader system of people who have a touchpoint with the organisation)
- b. Planet (i.e., the environmental considerations of our decisions)

This can be referred to as the sCOPE framework.

When we consider these different lenses two things occur. Firstly, we’re likely to identify the “true north” outcome we’re seeking to achieve as an organisation. Secondly, we’re likely to find the optimal decision in what the future role of the workplace is in service of that outcome.



The office

When imagining what the future office could be, it is important that we don't impose a fixed image of what the physical workspace is, based on what it was previously. It is important we have the flexibility to re-think the desk beyond being a sub-let space at which to do all work in the office. In some ways, the tech companies may have had a head start on the rest of the working world by advocating for a flexible desk policy, and providing different spaces within the office to serve different outcomes. We should want the office space to serve different goals. Whether creativity, collaboration, focus, client solutions, intellectual rigour... we need to think about how we best secure these outputs for the people within our organisation.

Susan Cain, in her book *Quiet*, provides sufficient evidence to squash the notion that dynamic collaborative spaces are a pre-requisite for creative work to occur. As a consequence, it pays to understand the psychological and cultural dynamics of one's workforce when thinking about how to best secure the desired outputs.

At The Team, we strive for client solutions at the intersection of science, strategy and creative design. We notice a tangible benefit when we spend at least some of our time collaborating together, be it amongst ourselves, or with clients and external experts. It also fits the personalities of our workforce, and aligns with the culture of collaboration we've cultivated over the years.

While collaboration serves business, collective, and employee goals, the connection from being in a shared environment and speaking, jamming, smiling with other people is predominantly an individual employee benefit.

"We're social creatures and, so long as the workplace culture does not promote or facilitate anti-social behaviours, there is a scientifically validated benefit to enjoying human connection at work."

"Social connectedness generates a positive feedback loop of social, emotional and physical well-being" explains Dr Emma Seppala of Stanford Medicine. Similarly, a Harvard study on adult development, led by Dr Robert Waldinger, has tracked the lives of 724 men (starting in 1938) and found that good relationships are the key factors that keep us happier and healthier.

This irrefutable evidence on the value of healthy relationships should prompt two questions for the role of the workplace. Firstly, how can we create workplaces and work environments which foster such relationships amongst peers and colleagues, without being enforced and overly manufactured? Secondly, how can we shape work practices to enable meaningful relationships to thrive outside of the workplace? If one's partner or best friend is feeling particularly low one day, could our new-found remote capability enable us to be a true friend or supportive partner when needed?



Redressing the balance

It is rare that we get a chance to step back and take stock of our situation. It is even rarer to have a clear opportunity for change. Behavioural science suggests the best time to change behaviours and habits is at a moment of marked change... A wedding... Moving to a new town... Starting a new role... A new arrival in the family... The loss of a loved one... A pandemic?

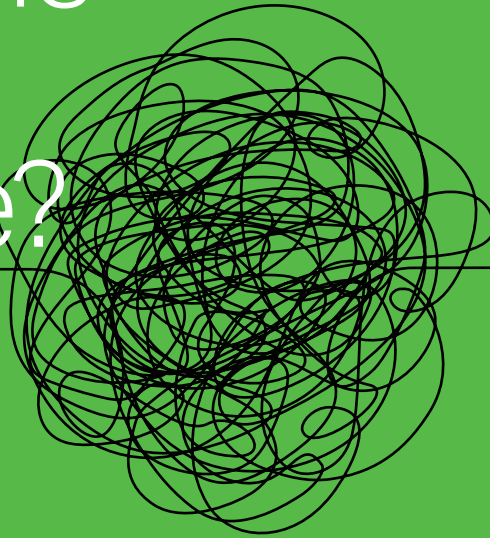
Knowing we're presented with this opportunity in the coming weeks and months, it makes sense for us to evaluate some of the learnings from our experiment from the last couple of years. What did we lose during this period? Did we lose connection with our colleagues? Did we drop in productivity? Did we see a reduction in employee wellbeing? Did we lose key people from our team? If so, why?

Similarly, we can reflect on the gains. What surprised us? Did we find we can trust our workforce without close observation? Did we find a new measure of value, moving towards output

and quality versus perception and quantity? Did we uncover latent talent/team players within our organisation who had previously been in the shadows? What, if any, were the gains from not commuting?

We can take the above questioning to guide which of the features of work we've experienced we wish to carry forward, which we want to avoid developing into a longer-term dynamic, and which features have potential to bring real value with some adjustments?

Making the future attractive?



Understanding employees at an individual and social level, through psychological insight, brings immeasurable value as we design the future of work.

A dose of realism is required with the sCOPE framework for planning the future workspace. If it doesn't cut the mustard at an individual employee level, it isn't going to fly. At least not with any kind of long-term ambition. At the core of much human behaviour is the pursuit of individual goals. These goals ultimately anchor around our drive for survival, fulfilment, and pleasure. In this pursuit, we experience a range of psychological motivations, from a need to feel valued and recognised to a need to connect with others. Or from a need to feel safe to a need to expand and experience liberation. While the pursuit of these motivational goals underlies much of our behaviour, they can also manifest in more explicit (and often short term) goals. A desire for a pay-rise might be rooted in a desire to feel recognised for the value someone brings, it might form some kind of social contract within a shared group identity, or it might be intrinsically linked to one's perceived ability to survive. Either way, the manifestation is a request for a pay rise.

Understanding employees at an individual and social level, through psychological insight, brings immeasurable value as we design the future of work. Providing safety, providing reasonable, fair and clear boundaries within which to explore and create their

own ways of working, providing opportunities to collaborate with others, opportunities to learn and develop, chances to connect meaningfully with teammates, managers and direct reports... all of these matter to varying degrees, with different people.

Understanding these needs, leaders have the opportunity to design a new workplace which satisfies the underlying motivations of its people, while simultaneously delivering its own commercial objectives. Win-win.

Once we've identified the desired outcomes we seek, and the behaviours needed to deliver those outcomes, it is on us to design the work ecosystem towards the achievement of those outcomes.

A key part of this is to motivate those desired behaviours while simultaneously reducing the motivation for any behaviours which run counter to the outcomes we seek. By bringing in that psychological understanding of our workforce, we can nurture opportunities to drive intrinsic motivation, known to result in longer-lasting behaviour (and often at a much lower cost). Some decent ideas for this surfaced during a recent roundtable with senior leaders from a handful

Making the future attractive?



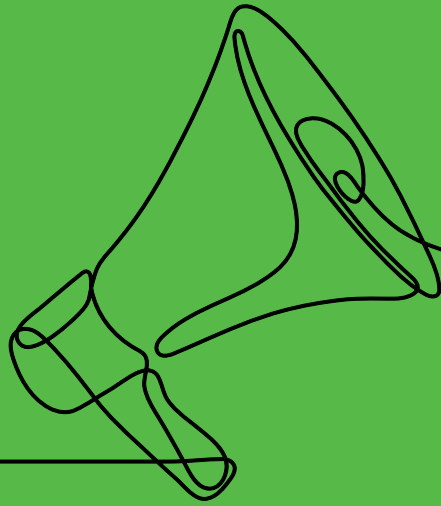
of our FTSE 100 clients. Developing exciting events in the office space with external speakers, enabling greater personalisation of benefits so as to meet an individual's specific needs, surprise "delight" encounters delivered at work on a random basis... The workplace takes on a new role in this light.

Linked to the concept of attraction is the notion of ease, to which we're naturally, and unconsciously, drawn. The work of Israeli psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky introduced us to the concept of dual-system thinking. "System 1" (as it is commonly referred) is a reflexive, energy efficient system, which bypasses deliberate thought and instead relies on our cumulative experience and contextual cues to direct our behaviour. System 2, by contrast, is a more reflective, energy intensive, logic-oriented, and deliberate system. At the heart of this two-system model is the recognition that we are inherently drawn towards efficiency, meaning we will use System 1 whenever possible. The relevance of this understanding is to ensure that we work with these dynamics rather than against them, facilitating the desired behaviours wherever possible, and possibly adding friction to undesired behaviours.

One of the surest ways of securing ease is by leveraging the power of defaults. Defaults determine the natural pathway of behaviour and their power has been shown to inverse behavioural trends in a variety of contexts, including organ donorship, green energy supply and even increasing future pension contributions.

We can leverage defaults in a similar manner to nudge the desired behaviours in our future workspace. This might mean establishing a default pattern of being in the office during certain days, or blocking out 12:30-13:30 in the office calendars as a no-meeting zone to ensure that everyone has time carved into their day to grab some lunch and take a walk. Or auto-enrolling every employee to a training activity, while providing them each with the chance to change this activity for something more relevant...

Defaults leverage the inertia which accompanies decision-making. I encountered this first hand recently when, upon waking, I found myself torn between working from home for the day or going into the office. After enduring enough of a crippling battle to work out what I truly wanted to do, I gave up, meaning the default mode of working remotely played out. This was a moment of realisation as to why our understanding and recognition of the recent context (i.e. Covid) is highly relevant to the way we work going forward. Pre-Covid, a work norm would have typically been to go into the office, with the opportunity to work remotely seen as a privilege or special dispensation for some. Government and pandemic-led welfare practices flipped the default switch to "remote", around which many people have developed habits. This leaves us needing to proactively shape the new defaults we want to build our future workplace around.



Mind Your Language

“Designing the future ways of work” has a far more constructive undertone, alluding to a reimagination of what work *should* look like.

As we communicate about the future of work, be it amongst leadership circles or together with our workforce, we need to be mindful about the language we use.

Encouragement to “get back to the office” is likely to trigger many more associations with the previous way of working (including some of the maladaptive features), than is probably intended. Consequently, it pays to use constructive language which alludes to a fresh and proactive design approach which takes into consideration the various perspectives we identified earlier.

“Designing the future ways of work” has a far more constructive undertone, alluding to a reimagination of what work should look like, instead of a myopic view that work has to be done in the office. This focus on the multiple perspectives might be key to reducing any resentment amongst those who would otherwise see the changes as a personal loss.

Similarly, when we talk about the new dynamics of work and increased use of the office space it can help to ensure two things. First, it’ll serve to avoid notions of loss when we communicate with our employees. We are twice as sensitive to loss as we are to the equivalent gains, meaning that any focus on the liberties we lose by going back to the office will likely be felt much more than we’d think.

Secondly, and perhaps serving as a solution to avoid notions of loss, we might wish to set the comparison point for our future way of work as the way we worked before the pandemic, rather than using the last two years as a frame of reference. There are too many contextual elements intertwined with the pandemic for it to be a solid reference point. Furthermore, as captured at the start of this article, many of the changes to the way we work were driven by a survival instinct, rather than understanding how we thrive. And as we know from Eldar Shafir’s research into decision-making in different contexts, our brains function differently in contexts of scarcity, when survival dominates our decision-making.

The two scenarios offer exactly the same working set up, but with different points of focus. Consequently, one could expect different responses from employees, shaping how they feel about the relationship with their employer.

Mind Your Language



The way we frame our communications will impact the way our employees feel about the future of work. Imagine two scenarios for a moment. Imagine, first, being told you're a remote-first business, with an obligation to come into the office 2 days per week.

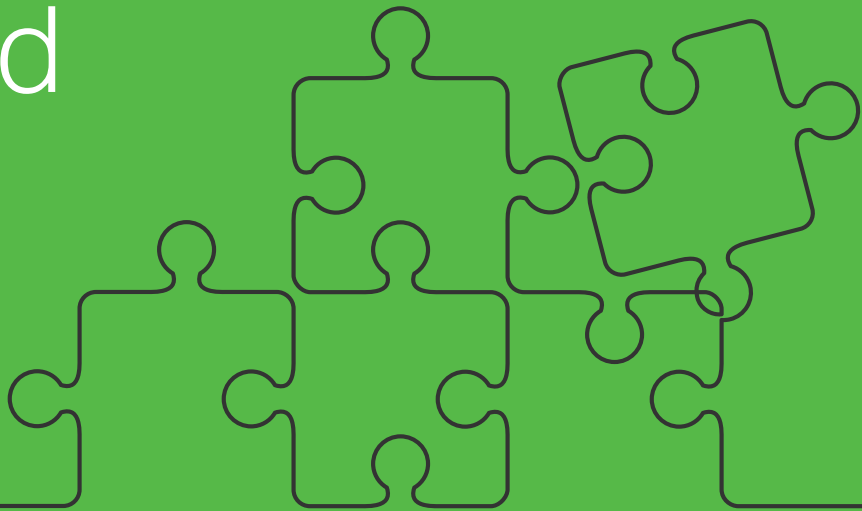
Now imagine being told that you will be returning to being a predominantly office-based organisation, but with people having the flexibility to work from home for 3 days per week.

There are too many variables across size, industry, location, and culture to determine what the ultimate framing is. But imagine, again, how empowering it would be to become a trust-led organisation. One where employees are trusted to use the tools at their disposal and their judgment and decipher when it's best to see customers, and when work is better done in a quiet space. Imagine being shown the benefit of the office and when face-to-face

collaboration is needed, with the pre-requisite being to ensure everyone is contributing to the collective and delivering what is required of their role.

One is adult-to-adult, the others very much parent-child. Yes, a framework is often needed, but it's the positioning that matters.

They did what?



Whatever the future of work looks like for your organisation (and we'd love to work with you to shape that), it'll be key to ensure the right socialisation process takes place.

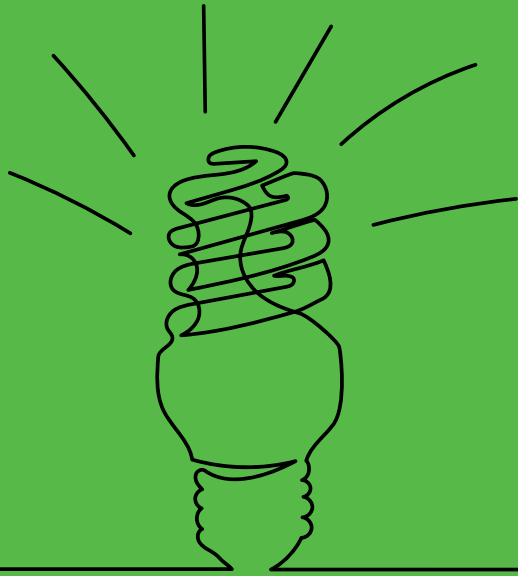
We're social animals. We often look towards others to see what behaviours have a social value. It'll be particularly important that any desired behaviours are role-modelled by leadership. The establishment of new normative behaviours is likely to live or die based on the uptake of key people of influence. Naturally authoritative figures will fall into this category, but influence goes beyond titles. Those who work around us will have a natural influence on our work, meanwhile I'm sure we can all think of someone else in the office whose opinion matters to us... that is influence.

It is on each and every employee to understand that they have a role to play as part of a larger group. Groups work based on levels of collaboration, trust and respect flowing through them. If we realise that our individual behaviour impacts on another colleague, we're more likely to find an intrinsic value in doing something which conflicts with our own interest. And if we cultivate a culture in which how we treat our colleagues matters, then we're likely to build happier, healthier, more productive teams, with lower attrition rates.

John Amaechi nicely describes an organisation's culture as the worst behaviour which is tolerated. And similar applies to establishing the new ways of working. If leaders operate solely in their best interests, expect others to do the same.

One of the losses we often hear about from the last couple of years of remote-first working is the loss of dynamism and connection between colleagues who are not on the same team. This is often a source of creativity and innovation in some organisations, but in all organisations it will reaffirm the culture and group to which one belongs. As a consequence, there will be many instances in which we will need to manufacture opportunities to nurture these social connections. When events run in the office, leverage their social value. When someone achieves – recognise them in front of the group. When someone celebrates a life moment of importance, acknowledge them in a suitable way... Show people that they belong.

It is on each and every employee to understand that they have a role to play as part of a larger group.



What others are doing



Spending the time with your team and that connection, the emotional connection and physical connection to a certain extent – it makes you feel like you know this person. It's about making work personal again. And for me that is really important.



In a recent workshop with HR and Communications representatives from three global Technology, Finance and Energy companies, we asked them about some of their key concerns.

Collaboration

"I think collaboration is something we need to make physical. We're happy to go and socialise and collaborate in our private lives, but we're not yet happy to come and collaborate in the office. What is the difference? And that's the conversation we try and have with people, because if you're willing to do dinner with friends I think you should want to come and work with your colleagues. Collaboration is the big thing we should be trying to drive. Collaboration is a powerful tool. And there's only so much you can collaborate on through a machine. Technology is a great enabler, but collaborating face-to-face, getting into groups, working with people; that saves time and gets the juices flowing."

CHRO, Global Enterprise Technology Services Business.

Change the infrastructure to change habits

"People like personalization. We've all seen the office evolve and we've had cleared desk policies for a long time, but they've become very sterile places, so that people feel completely disconnected to them. We need to be looking at how to make collaborative spaces more personal. I think the concept of the 'no-desk' environment is quite an interesting thought. It's about forcing change to how we work. And that's the conversation we need to have. How do we learn to do things totally differently in the office, different to what we do at home. Changing habits, that's one of the big challenges."

Senior Communications Manager, Global Energy Business



What others are doing

We are not all the same

"What I think we as communications and HR professionals wrestle with is the attitudinal stuff, and the link to the business challenge. It's true that we need collaboration spaces and meaningful connections, but if you work in a contact (call) centre, then we need to look at each end of the spectrum and what that looks like for different people. A lot of people enjoy avoiding the rush hour traffic, but a lot of people, because the day is still very rigid and structured, they don't come in to collaborate, they come in to do their job and go home. So, there's this full range, and we are defining those different groups."

Head of Communications, UK Bank

Leaders need to make it personal

"Spending the time with your team and that connection, the emotional connection and physical connection to a certain extent – it makes you feel like you know this person. It's about making work personal again. And for me that is really important. We've all been desensitised to emotional connection through digital. And digital was a big vital solution. It solved a massive problem and made businesses think we can redo this. The thought of ever putting traders at home – it was just no, no. Well, obviously that myth has been busted. But we should not replace the physical, emotional connection."

**Senior Communications Manager,
Global Energy Business**

Careers need the workplace

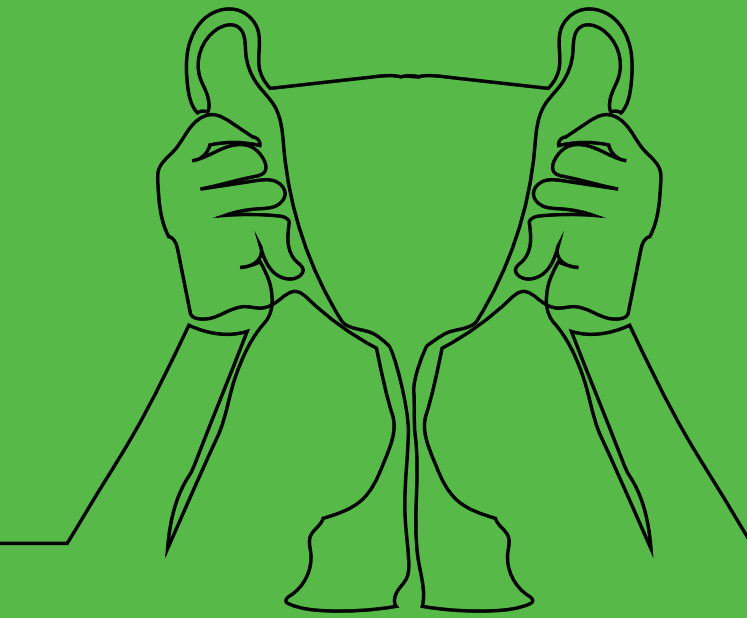
"If people want to develop their careers, how are they going to progress and get the promotion they want from home? Sitting at home in the middle of Idaho, or wherever you are, that might be the right decision for the individual, but if they have aspirations to develop a career, they need to show their face. Who's going to get promotion? Is it going to be the person that comes in and collaborates and works together and is visible, or the person that's going to be in their home office? People do need to catch onto this."

**CHRO, Global Enterprise Technology
Services Business**

Watch others carefully

"That sense of flexibility and freedom, and having rules, I think is important. Some other businesses in have taken the approach of going back to how things were before. I can think of one brand that went early with a 'back to the office at least four days a week' mandate. They were going back to normal and discovered it didn't work."

Head of Communications, UK Bank



Bringing things together



How we work and where we work will always remain key levers in determining our propensity to stay with any employer. They are key levers that shape company culture.



As communicators, HR practitioners and marketers we owe it to our shareholders and colleagues to think very carefully about the decisions we are making that'll shape the future workplace. Too many employers are rushing to decisions, either closing offices and moving online and demanding a return to an arbitrary set of hours. Others are busy throwing away desks and filling their offices with scatter cushions and posh coffee machines.

Instead, we should design iteratively in the delivery of a strategic goal. To do this effectively, we need to be clear what we're truly seeking, ask the right questions, listen attentively, be imaginative with solutions, retain humility and keep the multiple stakeholder perspectives in mind throughout.