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WORK

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SESSIONS

COOL

ZOOOOM !

As where and how we work changes, it is Vitra's intention to provide you with the latest insights and learnings to help guide you through this process. We draw on the knowledge of our network of thought leaders, experts, scientists, designers, architects, customers and on our own findings gained from the implementation of projects with our partners and clients, in our own showrooms and workplaces and on the Vitra Campus. The permanent impact on our work patterns is still unknown, but we learn more every day. Our papers about the future of shared spaces present the most recent findings. You can read the current versions at vitra.com/distributed-work.

Status March 2021

Stay in the know and get our latest insights on our social media channels.

The e-paper on distributed work is interactive and hides definitions behind blue stars on the pages. Make sure to use Adobe Acrobat Reader to have full access to the information. Try it out!

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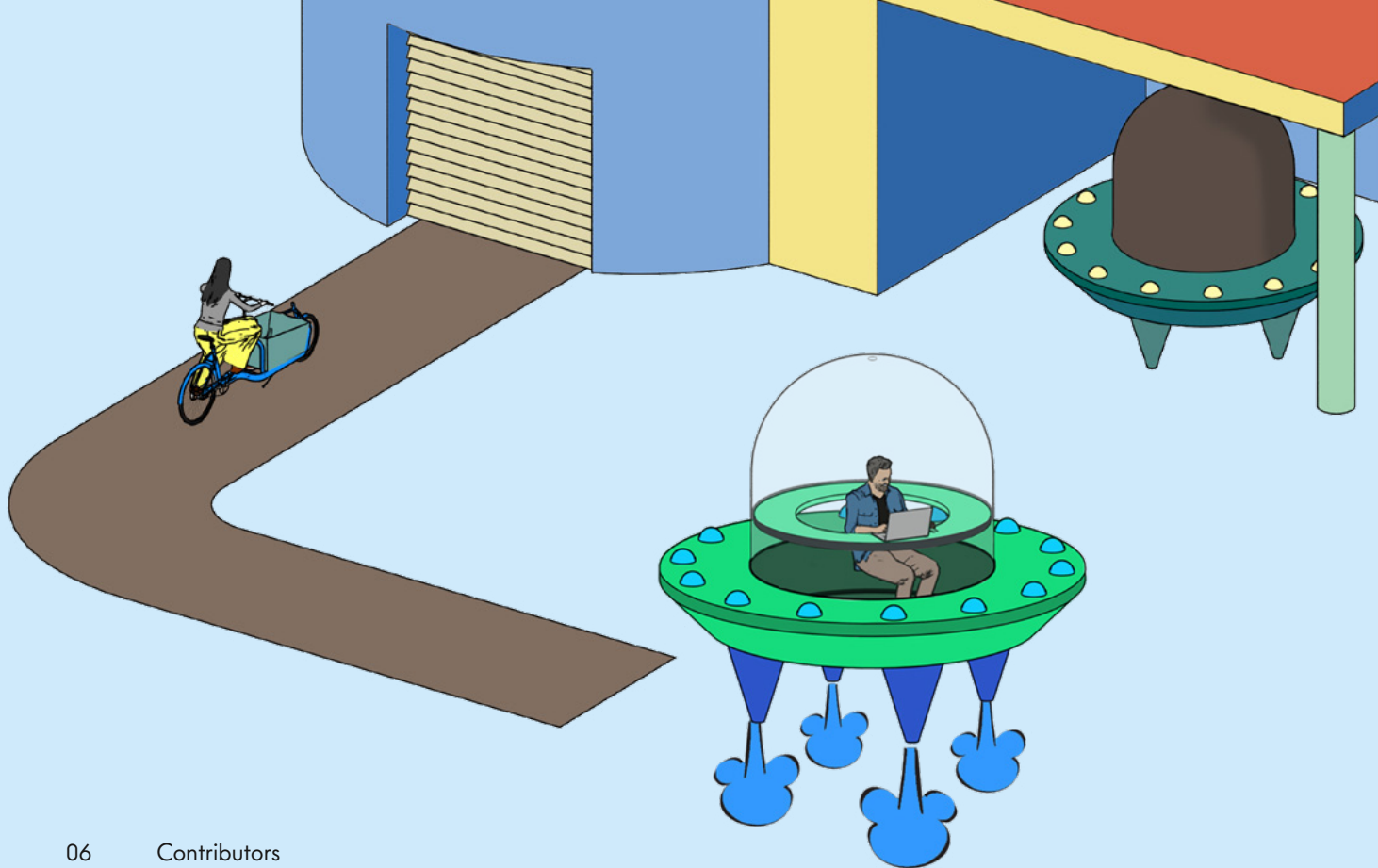
Profound change in the behaviour of organisations and individuals does not come easily. The technology and digital connectivity that enables work from home has been available for years, but it took a global pandemic for remote working␣ to lose its stigma and for us to begin thinking about the broader implications of distributed work␣.

Now, with vaccination programmes proceeding in many countries, we are all wondering: is remote working here to stay? There is much to learn from this extraordinary period. The benefits of a distributed workforce include a smaller real estate footprint and access to a global talent pool. Daily commutes can be avoided and an individual work routine established more freely. That said, we miss the informal communication in the workplace, which boosts morale, creates a deeper connection to the company mission, and can lead to serendipitous problem solving. Without the chit-chat at the coffee machine, companies will have to rethink their communication patterns and decision-making processes. Faced with the choice between remote and co-located work␣, many companies are looking to implement a hybrid model␣, the most challenging of the three. This new hybrid working world poses a series of design problems – for homes and offices – and for a design company nothing is more exciting than a design problem.

In this e-paper we share our own hybrid work model, the implications it has for how we use our workspaces at Vitra, along with the latest research and best-practices from thought leaders, individuals and organisations we admire.

Nora Fehlbaum
CEO, Vitra

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Contributors

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As Head of Consulting & Planning Studio Germany for Vitra, **Pirjo Kiefer** and her team help companies design their workplaces. Even prior to Covid-19, she took a keen interest in the radical changes taking place in the world of work on the back of factors like digitalisation and globalisation.

Colin Nissan is a freelance copywriter and creative director based in New York City. Having worked at some of the most prominent agencies in the US, he has assisted clients in countless business wins. His work has won many major awards, including the Webbys, gold at Cannes and an Emmy.

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Matt Mullenweg is co-founder of the open-source publishing platform WordPress, which now powers over one-third of all sites on the web. He is the founder and CEO of Automattic, the company behind WordPress.com, WooCommerce, Tumblr, WordPress VIP, and Jetpack. Additionally, Matt runs Audrey Capital, an investment and research company.

Emma Jacobs writes features with a particular focus on work and office life. She is co-author of the satirical column 'Work Tribes'.

Mikael Krogerus, born in Stockholm, graduated in 2003 from the Kaospilot School in Denmark. He worked for youth TV show 'Chat the Planet' in New York and in Zurich for NZZ Folio, the monthly magazine of Neue Zürcher Zeitung. He is now an editor with DAS MAGAZIN, Switzerland's biggest weekly supplement.

Sonja Hornberger is Chief Human Resources Officer at Vitra and a member of the management team. In this role, she is in charge of the global Vitra team and aligns it with the company's strategic goals.

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WHAT'S THE RIGHT MODEL FOR YOUR ORGANISATION?

The distributed work   paradigm implies that where you're located should not be a factor in your performance and participation. There are still time-zone issues, but the lack of co-location   itself puts a larger premium on asynchronous   modes of communication and collaboration. A study conducted by McKinsey Global Institute on over 2000 activities and in more than 800 occupations found that the potential for remote work is heavily concentrated among highly skilled, highly educated workers in a handful of industries, occupations, and geographies.

More than 20 percent of the workforce could work remotely three to five days a week as effectively as when they work from an office. The events of the past year have helped to break through the cultural and technological barriers that prevented distributed work in the past, setting in motion a structural shift in regard to where work takes place, at least for some people. Before deciding on a distributed model, organisations face the following questions →

Is your organisation located in an area with a high cost of living?

What is the average commute? Is public transport readily available and easy to use?

Where is your company present? And how do you show your own products (samples, exhibitions etc.)?

Which activities and moments require in-person collaboration, where and when?

What resources are the most valuable and difficult to recruit? Do they require IRL work (e.g. production, laboratories, creative work with colours/materials)? How difficult are they to recruit to where your company is located?

How do I set up effective and inclusive digital and physical collaboration patterns that bring productive outcomes?

Does your team value in-person collaboration and a sense of community?

Are you ready for the much more diligent, transparent, open and constant communication that a remote working scenario requires?

If you allow nomadic work, then be ready to answer these questions: Is the salary (value and currency) based on the location of the company or the employee? Which labour laws apply? Which benefits are given? Are work permits required? How are nomads integrated into a team? How are new recruits on-boarded? How is the existing team trained in this new mode of collaboration?

If you allow or encourage remote work, how will you support your teams' home office setup?

Is your leadership team ready to be a role model and orchestrate a remote work culture with all the changes in mindset and process that it entails?

How many new members of the team are hired and how often? How can you on-board them most effectively?

How do I retain existing talents and attract the talent of tomorrow?

How do I best lead my teams remotely?

What work model serves my company and my team best?

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Five levels of distributed work

We recognise five different levels of distributed organisations, which vary in their operational trajectory depending on the connection to the physical office and the flexibility given to the employee in choosing where to work.

1 Fully co-located with one campus

2 Fully co-located with a campus and hubs
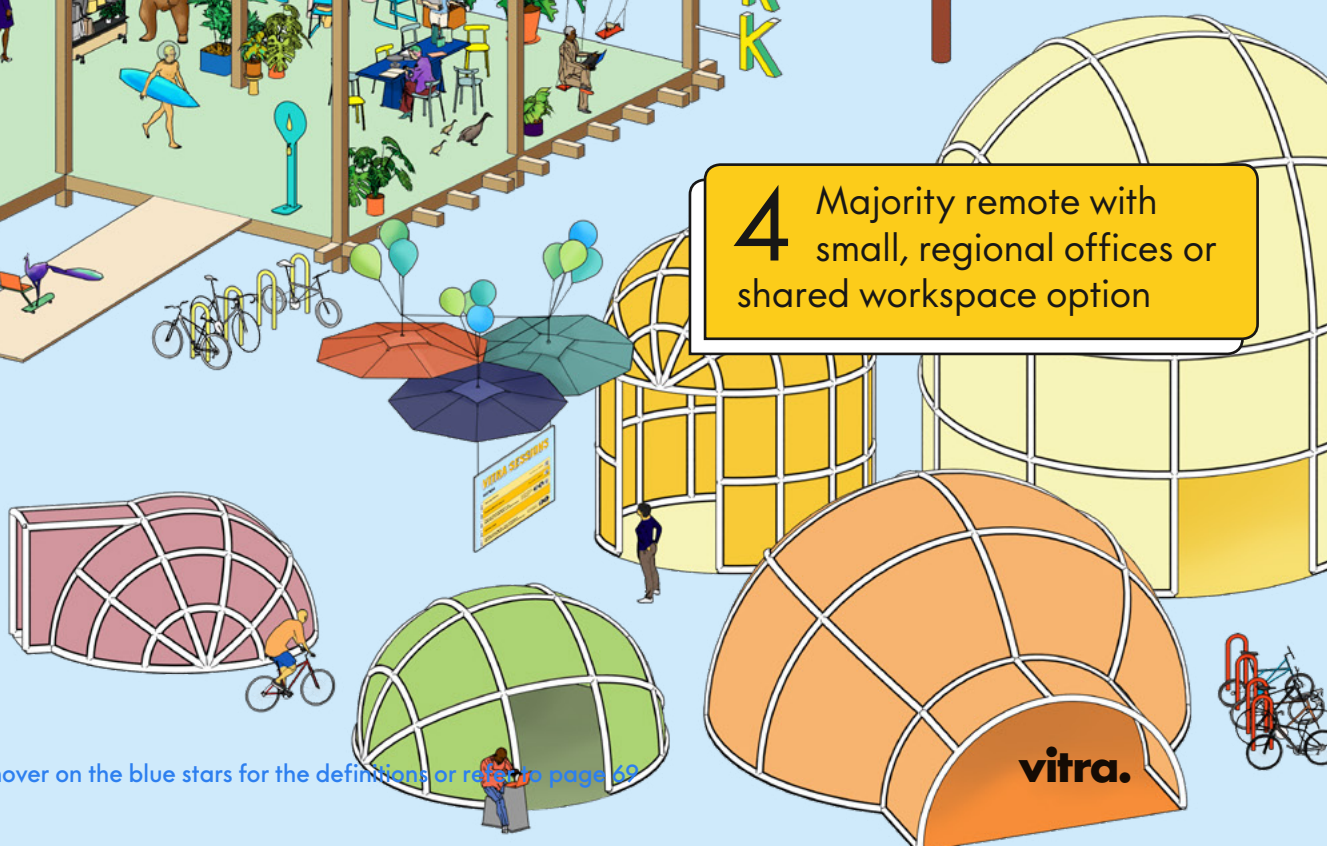
3 Majority co-located with offices (hybrid model)

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5 Fully remote

4 Majority remote with small, regional offices or shared workspace option

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*hover on the blue stars for the definitions or refer to page 69

Five reasons why distributed work   is here to stay

Between May and November 2020, a survey was conducted with 22,500 working Americans (Barrero, Bloom & Davis, 2021) over the course of multiple Covid-19 waves to analyse the evolution of WFH   arrangements during and after lockdown. The findings suggest that even though the number of people working from home has decreased, the percentage working at their business premises is still far from pre-2020 levels. The workers in the study report that their employers expect them to work 22 percent of all paid days from home, which would equate to a 50 percent increase. A general shift in mindset can be observed with regard to remote working   .

1 **Companies were able to evaluate how well WFH worked for their entire organisation.** Multiple surveys suggest the WFH experience of 2020 has been positive and better than expected for a majority of firms and employees.

2 **Substantial investments were made in equipment and infrastructure to facilitate WFH.** The average worker has invested over 14 hours and about $600 in equipment and infrastructure to enable WFH, while companies have made sizeable investments in back-end information technologies and equipment to support remote work.

3 **Social distancing with strangers will most likely remain after the pandemic.** Employees will most likely want to keep avoiding the subway, crowded lifts and indoor dining at restaurants. Travel will be permanently reduced, but co-workers will be eager to engage in real-life social activities post-vaccine.

4 **The innovation rate for technologies that facilitate remote working has accelerated.** WFH has boosted the market for communication technology equipment and software and spurred research and innovation.

5 **The stigma of remote working is fading.** Perceptions about WFH have improved since the pandemic. Both employers and employees are now more willing to engage in it.

Sources: Barrero, J.M., Bloom, N.; Davis, S.J. (2020): COVID-19 Is Also a Reallocation Shock. Becker Friedman Institute, Working Paper No. 2020-59. Barrero, J.M., Bloom, N.; Davis, S.J. (2021): Why Working From Home Will Stick. Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México, Stanford University, University of Chicago Booth School of Business and Hoover Institution

Organisations on their path to distributed work

After the remote work   experiment of 2020, many companies did not wait long to confront the new reality of working. The examples show that the option of remote work is linked to important structural changes – at the management level, in the overall use of physical offices and work equipment, but also in the benefits offered to employees in the future.

Twitter

The social network Twitter announced that the company would allow employees to continue working from home indefinitely, if they desired to do so and their role and situation enabled them to work remotely. The company has been preparing for distributed work for years and is now offering its employees flexible work schedules and monitoring their physical, emotional and mental health as a benefit.

Netflix

A radically different position is taken by the media network Netflix, a winner of the pandemic. Its CEO Reed Hastings declared in a Washington Post interview that 'He does not see any positives' in working from home, adding that 'Not being able to get together is a pure negative.' He expects his 8600 employees to return to the office. Period.

'We've done several surveys of our employees – and one specifically for working parents. And overwhelmingly, we've heard people are really struggling with defining their schedules. So, we've been monitoring this, and we're seeing something like meeting overload. What used to be a quick conversation in the hallway has become a 30-minute meeting, and people are just getting really overloaded. In response, we've refreshed our meeting guidelines: If you're going to host a meeting, you must have a specific agenda. We're encouraging people to call into a meeting by phone. We've pushed to establish team-wide agreements where members share when they're going to be online and when they're going to be offline. People have found that sharing that information helped alleviate some of the pressure to always be on. (...) One of our biggest learnings has been how important frontline managers are to the success of any kind of major transition. It's not only their ability to manage remote employees, but also their ability to make sure that they're keeping their hand on the pulse of how their employees are feeling. They're that first line of defence to help us understand what's happening and what's needed.'

Jennifer Christie, Chief HR Officer, Twitter

*hover on the blue stars for the definitions or refer to page 69

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Microsoft

Microsoft plans the shift to a hybrid workplace where employees will be allowed to work from home for less than half of their work week. Pending manager approval, some employees will be allowed to work from home full-time.

Dropbox

Dropbox announced plans of becoming a Virtual First company. Remote work (outside an office) will be the primary experience for all employees and the day-to-day default for individual work. By creating collaborative spaces in different locations – so-called Studios – the platform wants to push collaboration and community-building instead of solo work. Of course, some people may not wish to work from home. Perhaps their living arrangements would make that challenging, or they are more productive when surrounded by others. That's why the name of the model isn't 'WFH First'. If employees wish to work virtually from a co-working space, that's fine – and Dropbox will cover a membership pass, say, as a corporate perk. The company plans to implement so-called 'non-linear workdays'.

HSBC

HSBC announced that they will reduce 40% of their office footprint. Working remotely carries the benefit of productivity – more hours worked, at the risk of sacrificing culture – less connection to the mission of the company.

Swiss & German industry

Computer-based office work is most prevalent in the United Kingdom and United States, whereas Germany has the highest indoor production from its large manufacturing base. This results in different potentials for distributed work. In the Swiss / German work culture, white-collar staff has traditionally been expected to come to the office, just like production workers are bound to their factories. A survey conducted among 1000 SMEs reports that 49% of respondents either plan to offer the same amount or even less remote working days than before 2020. In this work culture, personal presence will continue to be highly valued.

Goldman Sachs

The CEO of Goldman Sachs considers working remotely an 'aberration that they are going to correct as quickly as possible'.

'What we found is that people's calendars would have entire days of 30-minute meetings with short breaks between them, and there's no structure or flow to their days. Dropbox's answer is to set aside a four-hour work block in the day that is specifically for synchronous collaboration within a team or a region. Then there's a block of time that is just preserved for asynchronous working. Not only will this help promote meaningful solo work, unencumbered by interruptions, but it will also help colleagues respect each other's scheduling boundaries – a hot-button issue for many remote workers.'

Laura Ryan, Director of International Human Resources, Dropbox

Sources: Bloomberg: Goldman CEO Warns Remote Work Is Aberration, Not the New Normal. Sridhar Natarajan (2021); Bloomberg: Crooks, N.: Dropbox Makes Remote Work Permanent in Virtual First Shift. (2020); Wired : Why Dropbox's 'Virtual First' model could be the future of work. (2021); Business Insider: Gilbert, B. Microsoft to reportedly allow its 150,000 employees to work from home permanently, the latest tech giant to do so. (2020) ; The Guardian: Makortoff, K.; Farrer, M.: HSBC to slash post-Covid office space by 40% as profits drop by a third (2021); The New York Times: Wakabayashi, D.: Google Delays Return to Office and Eyes 'Flexible Work Week'. (2020) ; McKinsey Global Institute (2021): The postpandemic economy. The future of work after COVID-19. Manyika, J.; Smit, S.; Woetzel, J.

FROM REMOTE TO DISTRIBUTED WORK

Experience has shown that distributed working works: studies suggest that it can even lead to increased productivity. The forced experiment of 2020 in WFH of 2020 allowed employers and employees to see that remote working functioned well over the short term. However, there seems to be little evidence on the long-term implications of remote work. While we observe a general mindset shift towards remote working, the distributed work approaches that have already been announced by international organisations reveal that there is less consensus on how well it actually worked. Innovation, experimentation and sharing of learnings and best practices have never been more important. In the meantime, organisations and employees are challenged to test new strategies to promote productivity, creativity and employee well-being in a distributed setup.

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HYBRID WORK ARRANGEMENTS WILL ALLOW ORGANISATIONS TO RETAIN AND ATTRACT TALENT

In the context of distributed work , the needs and requirements of workers are also changing. Multiple reports indicate increased productivity during lockdown. However, the question remains whether these effects are long-term and under what conditions they occur. The mixed approaches that organisations are planning to adopt for distributed working show that the solution is not black and white, but that the future of work will most likely be a hybrid one. Companies that offer their employees the flexibility to choose between working in the office and working from home have a comparative advantage.

Remote working   and the productivity paradox

Employees and managers have different views on the productivity outcomes of WFH

Many workers reported they were being more productive working from home during the pandemic than they were on business premises prior to lockdown. However, many of these reports are mostly based on the subjective self-assessment of the employees. On the other hand, surveys conducted at company level in 2020 show that business owners and managers overwhelmingly perceive productivity to have be lower during the pandemic. Assessments of WFH productivity during the pandemic are only partially applicable to future scenarios, as social factors like school closures and pandemic-related stress have a significant effect on the results.

Increases in productivity while WFH seem to be often linked to longer working hours and fewer breaks

To get a better understanding of the impact of working from home on productivity levels, we must look at earlier studies, such as one conducted at a Chinese call centre back in 2010. In fact, far from shirking, home workers improved their performance by 13 percent, of which 9 percent came from working more minutes per shift (home workers took fewer breaks and sick days) and 4 percent from making more calls per minute, an outcome attributed to a calmer, more beneficial working environment. Home workers also reported improved work satisfaction and their attrition rate halved. On the negative side, in spite of their improved performance, their promotion rate fell as they were less frequently considered for possible career opportunities, due to the smaller number of in-person interactions with their supervisors. A more recent study conducted in 2020 by the Harvard Business School confirms the finding that employees working remotely put in longer hours. By examining e-mail and meeting data on thousands of firms in 16 major international cities, the study shows that employees working from home attend more (but shorter) meetings per day, send and receive more emails, and experience a lengthening of the workday by almost an hour.

*hover on the blue stars for the definitions or refer to page 69

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High cognitive performance is linked to conducive workspaces

Cognitive performance decreases amongst elite chess players when WFH

On the other hand, findings suggest that lockdown had a negative effect on performance in the creative fields. Research conducted on elite chess players competing from home during the pandemic showed a significant decrease in performance. An explanation is that WFH is less conducive to peak performance in cognitively demanding tasks.
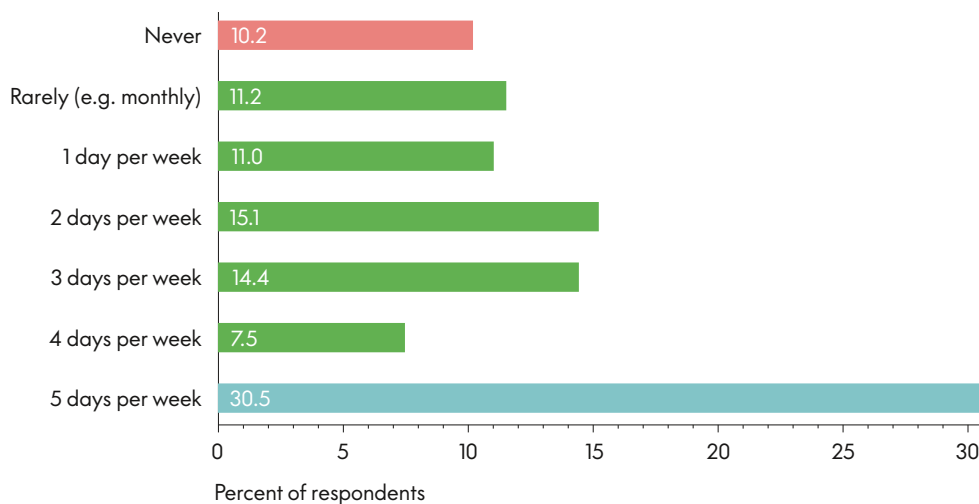
Workspaces must be designed for productive outcomes

A significant implication of the productivity increase experienced during lockdown is the need for high-quality office space. Many employees report that their pre-lockdown office spaces did not enable them to achieve their optimal work performance. Scientific evidence from the 2010 case study at a Chinese call centre relates the immediate, dramatic increase in the productivity of the call centre's home-based workers to shortcomings in their company's workspace. The study suggests that their traditional workplace was not the best setting for professional interactions and activities, possibly being overcrowded and too noisy. Rather than simply sending workers home, employers must address the workplace itself, a process that requires the consideration of multiple factors including not only design, but also location and scale. There are many potential benefits when a proportion of the workforce operates at home part of the time. In order to reap those benefits to the fullest, employers and employees need to learn from experience and embrace choice and hybrid solutions.

Working from home for part of the week can be offered as a benefit to employees

The WFH ⭐ opportunity is valued as highly as an 8 percent pay rise

Workers value the opportunity to work from home as a perk. In fact, evidence from a study co-authored by Stanford University shows that the benefit of working from home for a couple of days per week is valued as highly as an 8 percent pay rise by employees.

Desired amount of paid work from home days

Category	Percent of respondents
Never	10.2
Rarely (e.g. monthly)	11.2
1 day per week	11.0
2 days per week	15.1
3 days per week	14.4
4 days per week	7.5
5 days per week	30.5

Percent of respondents

Most employees opt for hybrid working modes when given the choice

Giving employees choices – and allowing them to change their minds – is crucial to the successful implementation of a distributed working model. Forty-eight percent of employees opt for part-time WFH – ranging from rare occasions to four days per week. Having options and a sense of control can dramatically improve employee satisfaction and productivity. Also vital are structures that allow home workers to connect with their colleagues both professionally and socially.

*hover on the blue stars for the definitions or refer to page 69

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Holding talent in the age of remote work and nomadic professionalism

Essay by Gianpiero Petriglieri

It's been a year since companies were forced to ask those employees who could do so to work from home. We've had time to go through a whole range of concerns about what that would do to work and the workplace. First, we had the fear that productivity would collapse. Then the surprise and relief that it didn't. And then, slowly, the realisation that, well, it's complicated. There are benefits to working remotely – and it can be a source of stress. When we work from home, away from the office, the distance between our private and working lives diminishes, and we are freer to work when and how it suits us. That's liberating. But the distance between us, our co-workers, and our organisations increases. When we're on our own, working remotely, then, it's easy to feel committed and disconnected at the same time.

We're often told that this is the new normal, and we just need to get used to it, but this experience is not entirely new, at least for some. Over the past twenty years, the combination of a deep personal relation to one's work and a loose attachment to one's organisation, has actually become the norm for more and more people. Especially those people that companies often label 'talent', but I think are more accurately described as nomadic professionals.

If you scratch under the surface, in most organisations, when we talk about talent, what we are really talking about is mobility. We call talented those employees who have the ambition, ability, and flexibility to move – not just to move up, but to move around, either within the orga- nisation or across organisations.

In fact, the pandemic has only accelerated the trend. Many more of us feel like nomadic professionals, whether we understand it – and like it – or not. We're more spread out and stressed out than ever.

It's likely that, if you are watching this, you share that mindset. You don't think of yourself as a cog in a corporate machine, you think of yourself as an artist. You tell yourself 'I might be here today and somewhere else tomorrow, but it does not matter as long as what I do lets me express who I am. I'll find a place.' This is a very different attitude from what we once expected of talent.

Once upon a time, what we expected of talent was devotion to one organisation. That is no longer a requirement for being considered talented today. It was Jack Welch who spelled out the shift most clearly in a famous speech at the turn of this century. At the time, he was the celebrity CEO of General Electric, and was invited by the Harvard Business School to address a large group of MBAs. And what he told them was that even if they were as smart and driven and fortunate as he was, they should never expect to have the kind of career that he had had, a steady climb up the ladder of the same large corporation.

The deal had changed forever. Companies, he said, 'can guarantee lifetime employability by training people, making them adaptable, making them mobile to go to other places to do other things. But [they] can't guarantee lifetime employment.' It was around the same time when companies were letting talent loose that McKinsey declared that the same companies were fighting a 'war for talent', and talent

Gianpiero Petriglieri

retention became a top item on the agenda of corporate leaders. If talent is supposed to be mobile, the challenge becomes how to make it move towards you, and make it stick around when you want to. How do you do that if you neither expect nor promise loyalty?

I remember visiting a large investment bank, and the MD who was taking me around showed me the floor where her team worked. She was clearly very proud of how good they were, and she told me, 'You know, these people could get a job at our competitors tomorrow. And I can't tell them you should be loyal to us, because they'd laugh, and I can't tell them we'll pay you more, because it's not true. All I can say is, if you stay here one more day, you'll learn more than what you'll learn anywhere else.' That MD was revered because she had figured out what makes talent join and stick around some organisations more than others. It's not the promise of loyalty. It's the promise of learning.

What does it mean to keep the promise of learning at work? First, that you offer the opportunity to do good work, that is, work that is meaningful to the person who does it and valuable to others. Second, that you offer more than the resources to be productive. You must also offer space to keep learning while doing that work. These could be formal training courses but more often they are chances to meet other talent and learn from them in informal and unplanned ways. When an organisation helps us do work that matters surrounded by people who make us better, then it truly keeps the promise of learning.

In that respect, talented people these days see good employers a little like universities, places where they can do something meaningful, learn something useful, and meet interesting people along the way. And corporations in fact have been adopting the rhetoric of universities, calling their headquarters campuses, their former employees alumni, and so on. Research shows that it works. Nomadic professionals are most likely to be attracted, and remain attached to, bosses and organisations that help them learn what they need to be able to grow and move, when they have to or want to. Paradoxically, talent is most committed to those people and places that make them feel most free at work.

Good leaders understand that intuitively and try to cultivate cultures that foster a combination of autonomy and community. You can see those efforts reflected in office architectures. Many offices try to provide a balance of sociality and solitude, with spaces to be productive without too many distractions, and spaces to be together without too many constraints. Some of us, and some types of work, require more solitude, others require more sociality, but in general, when we can move between the two without much effort, we tend to feel good. Those offices make a manager's job easier, because they help managers bring people together when they need to, and leave them alone when they must, which fosters the productivity and learning that everyone values and benefits from.

In a way, the best offices are like hospitable homes, but for our working selves, welcoming without being overwhelming, providing some refuge, some conviviality, and a place, so to speak, to go from. So what happens when we lose those work homes and work moves into our private homes? Our autonomy might increase, but our sense of community risks being weakened. Our productivity might well remain intact but our learning, especially the kind that comes from informal and serendipitous encounters, could suffer. This is why I, and many others, suspect that even those who appreciate the flexibility of working from home, will continue to appreciate the office as long as it becomes even more of a space for social learning. To feel lonely and stressed at work, the kitchen table and the laptop are enough. But to feel alive and supported, we need more than that. We need to continue doing work that is meaningful and valuable, and we need to have opportunities to learn from and with others while doing it. We don't just need good digital tools. We still need each other, too.

I notice this in my own work as a professor, as well as in the work of many managers I have spoken with throughout this year. We have all done the best we could, given the circumstances, and learned to appreciate and use digital tools to do our work and to stay in touch. I doubt some of the wasteful travel just for a short meeting will resume, it seems silly that it even happened. But I have no doubt that when it comes to an interactive workshop, or a strategic team
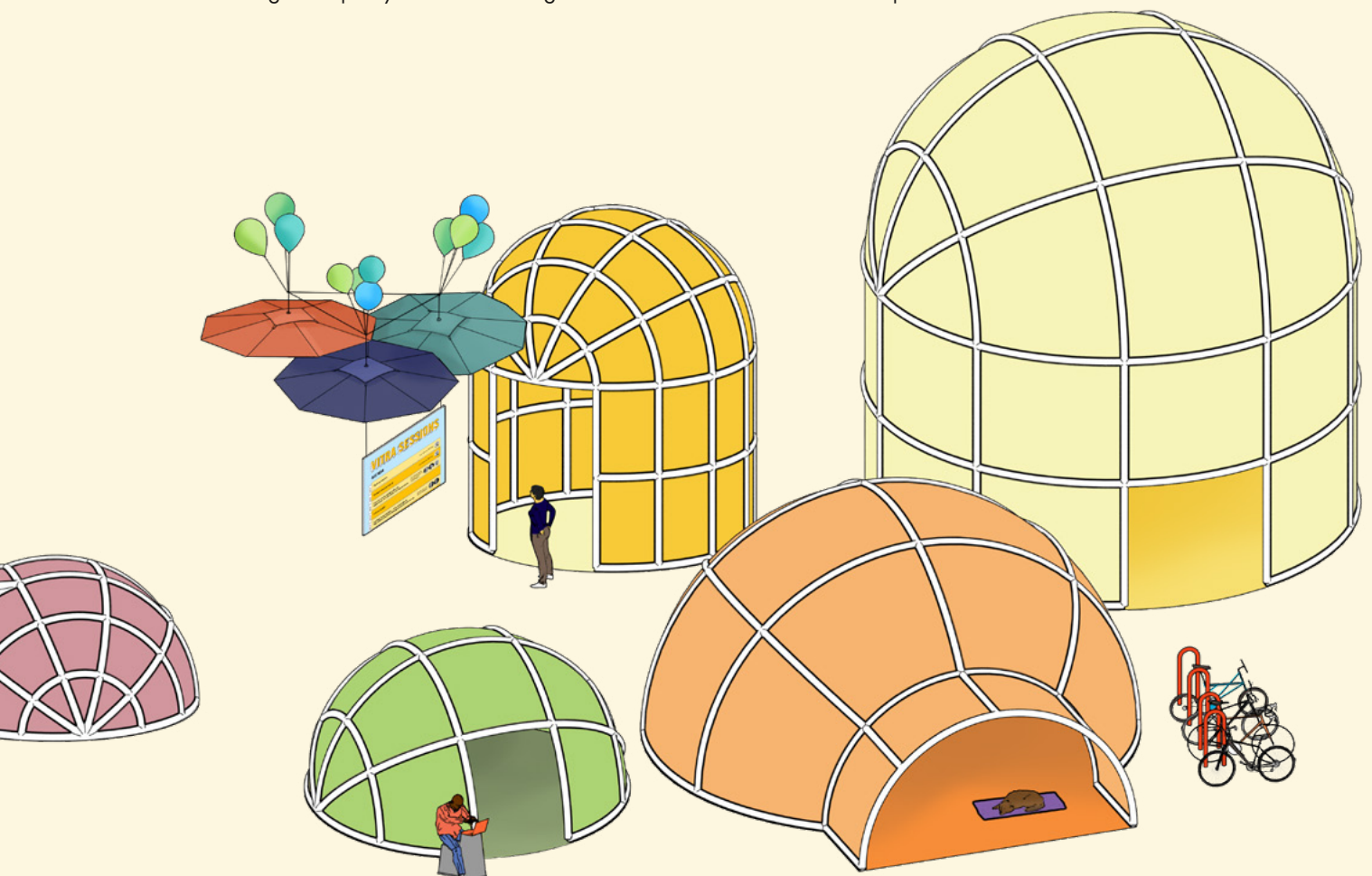
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retreat, for example, we'll want to come together and take advantage of the opportunity to share a meeting room as well as a meal, a walk in the forest, or just a chat over coffee. To do those little things that make us feel that our managers and our organisation are keeping the promise of learning.

Meanwhile, how do you keep that promise when people can't physically congregate? By making sure that in the stress of this moment, you don't go back thirty years and narrow your focus on productivity alone. If anything, this is the time to double down on a broader focus on both productivity and learning. This is the time when you can show your talent that your promise of learning was not a ruse, but a genuine commitment. Not only because that will keep them motivated, but because it will help them find new ways to work.

What I have found is that the most important thing a manager can do when talent is spread out and stressed out is to hold them. You must remember that the office won't do the work of managing, so it is up to you, as a manager, to make sure that people stay connected to work that matters and people who make them better. That's how you keep the promise of learning. It is up to you to care enough for each

individual to explain why their work matters and who will benefit from it. It is up to you, as a manager, to make sure that people have enough space to work without distractions and enough opportunities to stay close to their co-workers, even remotely. Keeping the promise of learning matters most to nomadic professionals because what they are seeking, especially in a moment of crisis, is not security but agency. In a crisis, you won't attract or retain talent with the empty promise that 'this will go away', because they know it won't. You attract them and retain them with the promise that 'we will learn what it takes to get through this'.

In summary, in the age of nomadic professionalism, attracting and retaining talent requires making and keeping the promise of learning – at work and around work. Talent might be more mobile than ever, but it tends to dwell in those places that hold it well, that is, that allow it to connect to meaningful work and interesting people. This year has made it more obvious how important that is and how hard it can be. But if you can keep the promise of learning, you will build the strongest culture of all. A culture that makes people feel committed but not captive – and connected even when we are dispersed.

DROPPING OUT

A coffee machine's perspective on the lack of serendipitous encounters during lockdown

Illustrations by Studio AKFB & Atelier CTJM
Words by Katharina Adler

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WHERE'S THE SPARK?
DIGITAL COLLABORATION & CREATIVITY

There is hardly an arena in which the physical place of work is of more central importance than in the creative industries. Whether they're called studios, ateliers or workshops, the practice of exercising a joint creative activity in a separate environment dates back centuries. For creative endeavours, the workspace is the place where ideas take physical form.

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How lockdown caused a creativity crisis

Review by Emma Jacobs

Doomed. That was the prevailing mood at Color, a 50-person creative agency, when the pandemic shut its offices in Seattle and Los Angeles. 'Among the many business fears that Covid brought on,' says Elie Goral, executive creative director, 'the concept of needing to isolate our creative energy was one of the scariest. Creative ideation is that frenetic spark that happens when a group of people are together, face-to-face, beers in hand, pacing back and forth against a messy whiteboard.' A 'close-knit culture' had traditionally helped his colleagues to share abstract ideas and feedback. He worried about the impact of remote working 'without the ability to casually socialise in the spaces around our offices specifically designed for impromptu conversation'.

Coronavirus forced organisations to innovate, from French luxury group LVMH redeploying production lines to make hand sanitiser, to musicians performing to online audiences and restaurants becoming grocery stores. Yet with much of Europe and North America now facing new lockdowns, there are growing fears that months of virtual work are taking their toll on creativity. Nicholas Bloom, economics professor at Stanford University, says that among the chief executives who have approached him to discuss his research on homeworking and productivity, 'creativity is the biggest single issue'. He adds: 'New ideas and new customers and new segments and new business models are all the CEOs are concerned about' in the long term.

28 percent of homeworkers said they were unable to collaborate on creative work while at home

A recent survey of 145,000 workers worldwide by Leesman, which measures employee experience, found that 28 percent of homeworkers said they were unable to collaborate on creative work while at home. And with the office likely to be only an occasional hub of activity rather than a full-time location for the foreseeable future, managers face a growing problem.

These worries were articulated by Andy Haldane, chief economist at the Bank of England, in a speech last year. 'Exposure to new and different experiences – sounds, smells, environments, ideas, people – is a key source of creative spark (...) These external stimuli are fuel for our imaginations and the imagined, made real, is what we typically mean by creativity. (...) Homeworking can starve us of many of these creative raw ingredients – the chance conversation, the new person or idea or environment. Homeworking means serendipity is supplanted by scheduling, face-to-face by Zoom.'

Missing ingredients

Creativity, according to some researchers, is best seen as a continuum – from problem-solving consultants to grand projects by artists and musicians. Teresa Amabile, a Harvard Business School professor, defines creativity as the 'production of ideas that are not only novel – different from previous ideas in some way – but also appropriate: useful, valuable, correct. In physics, an idea cannot be considered creative unless it works. But in other domains – the arts, for example – appropriateness is quite a different thing.'

Creativity is important not just to a company's bottom line but also to workers. As machines take over repetitive tasks, it is the very human capacity for creativity that will be in demand in the future.

Aspects of work such as medical development and scientific research provide relatively clear benchmarks to measuring creativity. Employees play table football during their lunch break at the Amazon office campus in Hyderabad, India. 'Some researchers have used the number and impact of patents' to compare levels of creativity, says Glenn Dutcher, assistant professor of economics at Ohio University. 'In the research world, researchers have used the number, and impact of, research articles.'

Workplace creativity, however, is harder to measure. Stephen Garrett, founder of Character 7, an independent UK production company that recently worked on HBO's The Undoing, sums up one of the challenges of measuring creativity under a pandemic. 'I don't look back on the past year and think the collaborations I've been involved in are any less creative than before. But I don't know what I've missed.'

The switch from office to home has made it harder to hold creative discussions at a distance, says Chris Hirst, global chief executive of French advertising and communications group Havas Creative. 'Problem-solving requires an element of friction, it requires disagreements without falling out. Much of how we deal with a conflict with somebody is about how they say things, their body language. We are able to moderate our words through a combination of our actions and our words. That doesn't happen on the screen.'

Some technological tools can interfere with brainstorming. Abigail Sellen, deputy lab director at Microsoft Research Cambridge UK, says remote technologies can make us think about the tools we are using rather than the ideas we are generating. 'As soon as the tools become the focus of the interaction, then the energy [can be spent] figuring out how best to express ourselves, and making sure others can see what we are doing. The cognitive effort then is exerted in the wrong place, and interaction becomes stilted and cumbersome.'

Nicolas Bloom
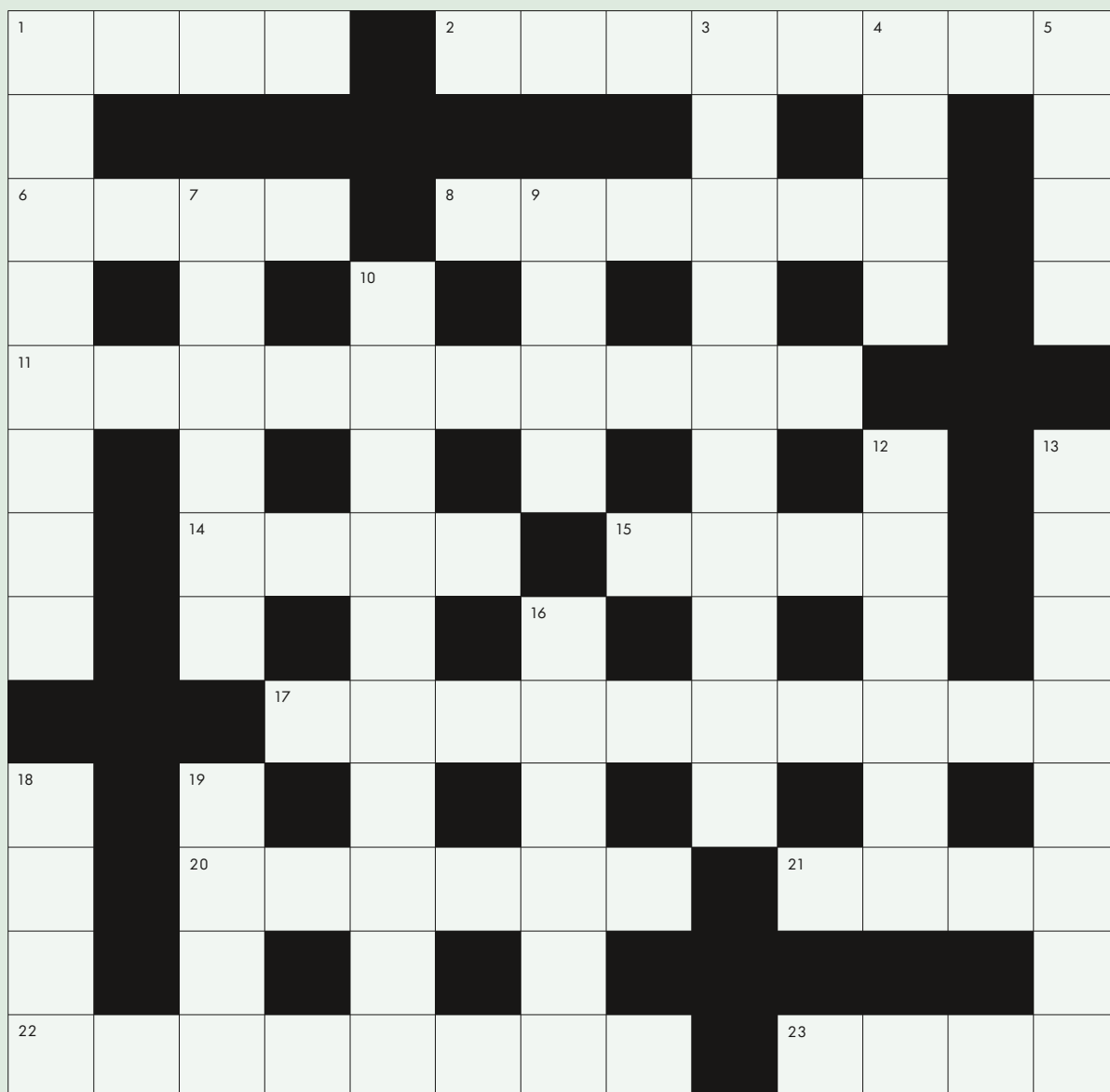
Andy Haldane

Chris Hirst

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How much do you know about distributed work ? Test your knowledge and get the chance to win a Vitra chair.

The EVO-C chair is a successful, uncompromising iteration of the principle and characteristics of the classic cantilever chair in 100% recyclable polypropylene.

In this first ever Vitra crossword, we're putting your knowledge of distributed work and office design to the test, disguising a number of the key themes and issues of this e-paper behind a series of fiendish clues. You will also be tested on some of Vitra's rich design history. Working remotely (no comparing notes, please), can you solve the puzzle?

As an added incentive, we're offering all those who submit correct solutions a chance to enter a prize draw to win the new EVO-C cantilever chair, designed by Jasper Morrison. The deadline for entries is 15 April. The winner will be notified by email.

ACROSS

1. 'You're on ... !' (4)
2. Employers do well to ensure that a distributed workforce gets enough of this. (8)
6. Mark an email as important. (4)
8. The new ..., a term frequently used to describe life in the time of Covid. (6)
11. Nicholas Grimshaw, Zaha Hadid, and Tadao Ando, three ... represented on the Vitra Campus. (10)
14. Connect one device to another, especially through BlueTooth. (4)
15. Remember to mark this as your status when you take a break. (4)
17. An overwhelming desire to travel, brought on by multiple lockdowns for many. (10)
20. Allstar and Rookie by Konstantin Grcic, for example. (6)
21. ... Mari, the late Italian designer of the influential Autoprogettazione project. (4)
22. A dome like this can be found on the Vitra Campus, courtesy of Buckminster Fuller. (8)
23. A video conferencing app which saw a meteoric rise in 2020. (4)

DOWN

1. Slack and Asana, both platforms on which colleagues can send each other internal ... (8)
3. Large swathes of the working population have been asked to do this since the spring of 2020. (6,4)
4. Employers' fears that distributed work would make employees ... have been proved wrong in the past year. (4)
5. A new cantilevered chair from Vitra by Jasper Morrison. (3-1)
7. You might do this in response to an e-vite. (6)
9. What to do with a new email. (4)
10. The pandemic has made it abundantly clear that we live in the ... (7, 3)
12. By clicking 'Raise Hand' on 23-Across, I am indicating that it is ... to speak. (2,4)
13. Microsoft Teams is a digital co-working ... (8)
16. At least you no longer need to worry about this when eating lunch at your desk. (6)
18. Most office desks now feature at least one. (4)
19. A voice-controlled Amazon device which lets you make calls, search for information, and listen to music, among other things. (4)

*hover on the blue stars for the definitions or refer to page 69

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How to foster dispersed creativity

Tips by Gill Parker & Colin Macgadie

With the events of 2020, many creative practices moved their teams online. How did this affect the creative output of design studios and agencies, and how does it continue to shape the industry in 2021? Can routines and office spaces designed to foster creativity be successfully replicated online? What are the specific ways in which studios have adapted, and have these changed over the course of the past year? Gill Parker and Colin Macgadie of the London-based architecture firm BDG spell out 5 tips and best-practice examples to maintain the creative spark in a distributed setup.

1 **Systematise communications and programme extracurricular activities** to ensure people stay attuned to the working culture: monthly studio get-togethers, bake-off chats or photography competitions keep the creative spirit alive.

2 **Create a digital 'studio wall'** that anyone can view and contribute to, and where ongoing projects – which used to be pinned up on physical walls in the work-space – are now virtually accessible to your teams.
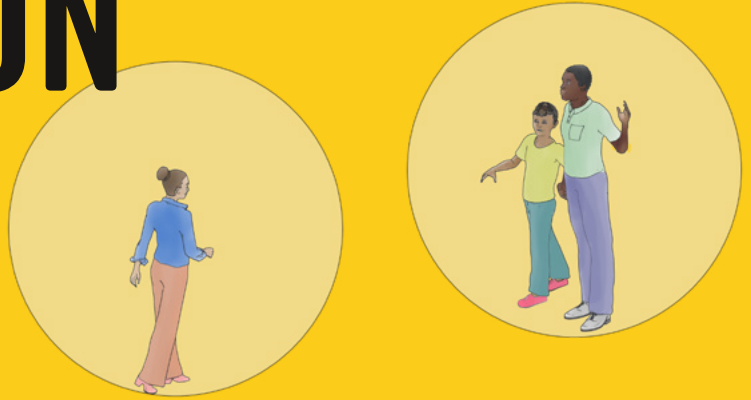
3 **Pool talent internally:** in pre-pandemic times, some of your team members may not have been involved in specific discussions because of their geographical locations. In a distributed work situation, you can bring talent from different departments into client conversations where they would not have been included before. As a result, teams become more fluid and a level playing field is created.

4 **Try out new technologies and systems**, such as a mobile app that lets team members check who else is coming to the office and allows them to align their schedules and plan to meet on certain days and times.

5 **Change your perspectives** while working remotely: work from different spots in the house, or even outside in the garden.

EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING & PROFESSIONAL ISOLATION

It's easy to get caught up in the obvious advantages for employees of working from home – no commutes in the morning, which results in less emissions in the atmosphere and more time spent at home with loved ones. Further benefits include: no unwanted conversations in the hallways with the awkward colleague, no boss constantly watching over one's shoulder, and the flexibility to manage one's life-work balance. Nevertheless, a study conducted by Buffer on over 3500 remote workers   in 2020 reveals that 20 percent of respondents regard 'collaboration and communication' and 'loneliness' as their biggest struggles while working remotely, followed by 'not being able to unplug' among 18 per cent of respondents. There are good explanations for this contradictory phenomenon. On the one hand, we are more often in meetings while working from home, work longer hours and are constantly exposed to direct eye contact with our colleagues due to the increased frequency of video conferences. On the other hand, the informal interactions, such as hallway chatter and conversations with mentors and work spouses, seem to vanish in between Zoom calls.

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The challenge of 'Zoom fatigue'

Virtual meetings have helped us stay connected over the past year. The numbers speak for themselves: the video-conferencing software provider Zoom grew its database from 10 million users in December 2019 to a record of 300 million users only five months later (Iqbal, 2020). In fact, 'Zoom fatigue' seems to cause greater stress than meeting in real life due to an 'overload of non-verbal communication' via endless video calls throughout the workday. Aside from the obvious psychological challenges that come with these meetings, such as the average 1.2 second delay that constantly makes people interrupt each other, a recent study published by Stanford University (Bailenson, 2021) identifies four explanations for virtual-meeting exhaustion:

1 **Excessive amounts of close-up eye gaze.** In an IRL   meeting, people will variously be looking at the speaker, taking notes or looking elsewhere. In conference calls, by contrast, everyone is watching everyone, all the time. Listeners and speakers get the same exposure. Furthermore, depending on the user's screen size, the faces appear disproportionately close, thereby violating the internalised norm of acceptable social distance, especially for meetings with colleagues.

2 **Cognitive loads.** With video calls, the most natural and spontaneous form of interaction – a face-to-face meeting – now has to be constantly staged. A camera needs to be positioned at the correct angle, lighting must be adjusted, microphones have to be muted and unmuted, agreements and compliments have to be exaggerated, thereby asking a full digital performance of the employee at all times. This increases the cognitive load as more mental calories have to be used to communicate.

3 **Increased self-evaluation from staring at video of oneself.** Being exposed to one's own reflection makes the user more critical of their appearance and presentation, which induces additional stress.

4 **Constraints on physical mobility.** While audio meetings and phone calls allow us to move about, video calls often tie us to our desks. Since mobility is linked to cognitive performance, this also has a direct impact on the quality of our work.

"Look, I don't come into your home office and tell you
to get out of the tub."

Cartoon by Alexander Andreades

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Professional isolation impacts employee development and career opportunities

Professional isolation is strongly connected to an employee's personal development in the organisational context (Cooper & Kurland, 2002), and the overall development of the workforce is a critical factor for a company's ability to adapt to unexpected structural changes, as the events of the past year have demonstrated. Informal development can be more critical to employee development than formal activities such as workshops and training sessions. Research suggests that informal experiences account for almost 70% of employee development. The social isolation of employees working from home puts them at risk of missing three types of informal interactions that are critical for their professional development:

1 Interpersonal networking. Employees who work remotely miss out on informal interactions that only occur in the workspace, such as spontaneous discussions with colleagues in neighbouring departments, in the canteen and other social meeting areas, or even in hallways or elevators. Early research (Davis, 1953) suggests that managers use informal communication to disseminate information they cannot share formally, for organisational reasons. Being able to create interpersonal networks is beneficial to employees, as it gives them to access to information that will allow them to advance in their professional careers.

2 Informal learning. Whereas interpersonal networking will likely contribute to an employee's career progression, informal learning will impact their personal development. Remote employees miss out on these spontaneous learning opportunities that usually happen face-to-face.

3 Mentoring. Mentoring is a critical element in professional advancement and can be linked to salary levels and promotions (Scandura, 1992). The mentee-mentor partnership involves emotional support, feedback, counsel and facilitates informal exchanges of information about work and non-work experiences (Kram, 1985). These relationships are often built on-site in the physical workspace. The reduced amount of informal development opportunities in remote workers can result in a lower overall skill growth compared to co-located workers . This further results in reduced personal growth opportunities within an organisation. These findings were also confirmed by the study conducted in a Chinese call centre in 2010, where remote workers had fewer growth opportunities compared to employees working in the office, even though the remote workers proved to be more productive. As remote workers are off-site and out-of-sight, they seem to miss out on organisational rewards.

```
Incident Type  . . : I work from home      Priority . . . . . : UNKNOWN
Caller . . . . . . : Robert                Text by  . . . . . : Colin Nissan
Complainant  . . . : UNKNOWN               Report Required   : YES
Source:  . . . . . : On Patrol             Dispatch by. . . . : The New Yorker
```


INCIDENT NARRATIVE

. . . .

911 OPERATOR: 911—what's your emergency?

ROBERT: Hi, I . . . uh . . . I work from home.

OPERATOR: O.K., is anyone else there with you, sir?

ROBERT: No, I'm alone.

OPERATOR: And when's the last time you saw someone else? Was that today?

ROBERT: Uh, my wife . . . this morning, I guess.

OPERATOR: Anyone else?

ROBERT: I don't think so. Well, the mailman, but that was through the blinds. I don't know if that counts.

OPERATOR: I'm afraid not. (Pause.) I'm going to ask you to open the blinds, O.K.? Let's go ahead and let some light in.

ROBERT: How much light??

OPERATOR: Just a little is fine.

ROBERT: O.K. (Pause.) I did it. (Pause.) It's bright. It feels so bright on my face.

OPERATOR: That's good. That's how it's supposed to feel. (Pause.) I need you to tell me what you're wearing, O.K.?

ROBERT: You know . . . just regular clothes.

OPERATOR: Outside clothes or inside clothes?

ROBERT: Hold on, I'll check. (Pause.) Pajamas. I'm wearing my pajamas. I could swear I'd changed into regular . . . I thought these were jeans!

OPERATOR: It's O.K., sir. Calm down.

ROBERT: Wait, this isn't even a shirt. It's just my skin! Goddammit.

OPERATOR: So just pajama bottoms, then. Can we assume that you haven't showered today?

ROBERT: I don't know.

OPERATOR: I need you to walk over to the bathroom to see if your towel is damp. O.K.? Can you do that for me?

ROBERT: I think so.

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OPERATOR: Great.

ROBERT: I'm walking over there. (Pause.) O.K., I'm here. I'm in the bathroom. I see my towel . . . . (Muffled sobs.)

OPERATOR: Sir?

ROBERT: It's dry.

OPERATOR: O.K., that's O.K. Let's get you back over to the window where the light is, all right? Walk toward the light. (Pause.) What's your name, sir?

ROBERT: Robert.

OPERATOR: Hi, Robert. I'm Cherise.

ROBERT: Hi, Cherise.

OPERATOR: You did the right thing by calling today, Robert. I'm going to get some people over there soon to help you, O.K.? And I'll stay with you on the phone until they get there. Do you understand?

ROBERT: I think so.

OPERATOR: Now, Robert, did you eat anything today?

ROBERT: Yes. Many times.

OPERATOR: Are you eating now, Robert?

ROBERT: I keep putting things in my mouth a lot.

OPERATOR: O.K., can you tell me what food you've eaten today?

ROBERT: You mean everything?

OPERATOR: Yes.

ROBERT: I don't know exactly. I mean, I started out with breakfast before my wife left for work . . . scrambled eggs with toast and coffee . . . and then I think I maybe had a bowl of cereal when she left

OPERATOR: Is that it?

ROBERT: Like an hour or so later . . . I had a banana with peanut butter.

OPERATOR: Did you slice the banana?

ROBERT: No. I dipped it right into the jar, because no one was watching. (Pause.) No one watches.

OPERATOR: So no plate or anything?

ROBERT: No.

OPERATOR: And that was it until lunch?

ROBERT: No.

OPERATOR: What else did you have?

ROBERT: I made a quesadilla . . . another bowl of cereal, I think . . . and some pretzels, the flat ones that are like chips. I love those.

OPERATOR: Those are good. (Pause.) And did you have lunch after that or was that lunch?

ROBERT: (Pause.) I remember ham . . . lots of ham.

OPERATOR: In a sandwich?

ROBERT: No. No sandwich. Just ham pieces. (Pause.) There were also some . . . spoonfuls of chocolate frosting, two or three . . . green peppers, I think, and yogurt. A large tub of yogurt. Peach.

OPERATOR: O.K., Robert, you understand that what you just described isn't really lunch, right?

ROBERT: It is lunch. When there are no rules, it is lunch, Cherise!

OPERATOR: Did you at any point dip the green peppers in the peach yogurt?

ROBERT: Probably. Sorry.

OPERATOR: That's O.K. (Pause.) Now, Robert, did you get any work done today?

ROBERT: I don't think so. I was supposed to make a deck for a meeting and I . . . I started it . . . I started the deck.

OPERATOR: And then you stopped?

ROBERT: The Internet has fun things for me to do . . . so I did them. (Pause.) I think I played some guitar, too . . . oh, and I separated all the dimes from my change jar, which took a while.

OPERATOR: Why did you do that?

ROBERT: I have four hundred and seventy-nine dimes.

OPERATOR: (Pause.) Anything else?

ROBERT: Then I got sucked into watching a YouTube video about meerkats.

OPERATOR: A documentary?

ROBERT: Yeah. (Pause.) And then that led me to . . . other videos . . . that weren't documentaries. . . . It's not important.

OPERATOR: So you started to watch pornography?

ROBERT: Yes.

OPERATOR: You went from meerkats straight to pornography?

ROBERT: That's right, yeah.

OPERATOR: (Pause.) And how long did you spend watching videos?

ROBERT: It doesn't matter because I make my own schedule . . . you know? (Pause.) Cherise?

OPERATOR: I understand. Now, since you didn't get any work done, do you think you may have exercised today?

ROBERT: I don't remember. . . It's possible, I guess.

OPERATOR: Can you look around the house for me and tell me if you see any signs that you may have exercised? Sneakers, gym shorts, ThighMaster? Anything.

ROBERT: Uh . . . I don't see anything, I don't think. (Pause.) Wait, I see a yoga mat.

OPERATOR: Oh, O.K., good. Is it your yoga mat?

ROBERT: No. (Sounds of hysterical sobbing.)

OPERATOR: Robert? I need you to stay with me, O.K.? The E.M.T.s should be there shortly, and I'm going to need you to let them in. Can you do that?

ROBERT: O.K.

OPERATOR: You mentioned a meeting earlier. What time is your meeting today, Robert?

ROBERT: Four-thirty.

OPERATOR: O.K., well, the E.M.T.s are going to help you get that deck ready and get you showered and changed.

ROBERT: It's just a conference call.

OPERATOR: Regardless. And they'll help tidy things up around there before your wife gets back, O.K., Robert?

ROBERT: Thank you.

OPERATOR: But, until they get there, no more eating and no more meerkat videos, O.K.? (Silence.)

ROBERT: I work from home.

OPERATOR: Shh-shh-shh . . . I know you do.

. . . .

Leading teams digitally

Tips by Mikael Krogerus & Roman Tschäppeler

Why informality is important for decision making in remote work   setups.

The past year has made it easy to distinguish between good and not-so-good managers. Without the hardware of the office, soft skills are more in demand. Interpersonal interaction calls for digital reinvention. Mikael Krogerus and Roman Tschäppeler, the best-selling authors of 'The Decision Book', share their insights as to why informality is crucial for decision making in remote work setups.
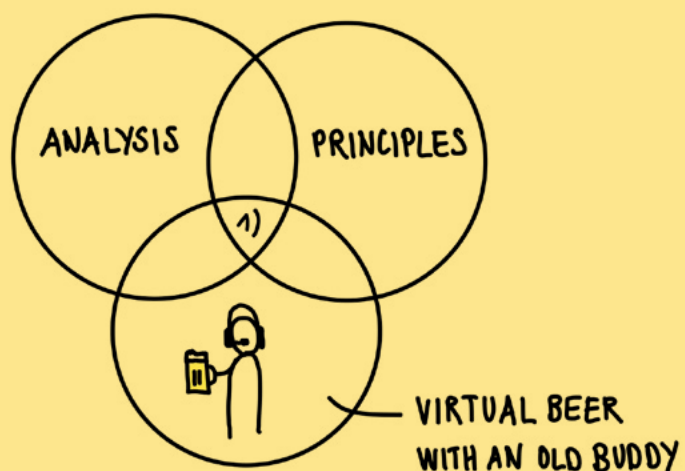
1 There are four different kinds of decisions: no-brainers, no-changers, big choices and hard choices

2 Try to 'formalise informality' in your team in order to boost random input

3 Informal, random and spontaneous meetings and inputs are helpful for our decision process

4 Minimise risks by imagining different outcomes for your hard choices

5 Remote work reduces random yet significant chitchats and increases uncertainty about hard choices

ANALYSIS

PRINCIPLES

1)

VIRTUAL BEER WITH AN OLD BUDDY

1) WHAT YOU NEED TO MAKE A HARD CHOICE IN A REMOTE SETTING

Soft Work
Edward Barber
& Jay Osgerby
2018

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REDESIGNING SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

The implementation of a distributed operating model – whether it's fully co-located, partially remote, hybrid or fully remote – involves creating working conditions that are as equal as possible and that promote the safety, well-being, productivity, creativity and further development of the individual employee. This will have consequences for the design of these new workspaces – whether in an employee's home, in company offices or in a co-working space.

Six workspace challenges

Although some reports last year predicted the end of the office, employee surveys (see page 19) increasingly show that workers, if given the choice, would prefer to return to the office, with the option of working remotely a few days a week. This is an indicator that hybrid   remote-working models will increase in prevalence. Since not all workers can be physically present or seen by managers in hybrid organisations, it's best to identify and address potential sources of difficulty in advance. These issues will shape the design of workspaces in a distributed setup. And it is important to remember that some groups of staff might face several of these challenges.

Challenge	Implications	Design imperatives	Workspace
Health	Sanitation · reduced density · air conditioning, social distancing · easy-to-clean surfaces	Safe at work	Office
Creativity	Creativity · access to resources & materials · IRL interactions · strategic problem-solving	Workshop	Office
Well-being	Belonging · comfort (materials) · aesthetics · sustainability	Welcome and lounge areas	Office
Productivity	IRL collaboration · agile workspace · focus & retreat areas · hybrid meeting · formal learning opportunities · planning for serendipity · cross-departmental exchanges · quick solution finding	Flexible collaboration	Office / third spaces
Isolation	Inclusion · corporate culture & identity · informal interactions	Marketplace	Office / third spaces
Self-determination	Reduced commutes · flexible work hours · remote-working allowance	Working from anywhere	Home / third spaces

*hover on the blue stars for the definitions or refer to page 69
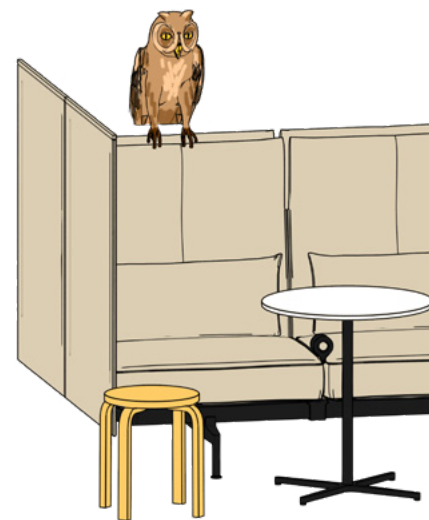
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Understanding your team

Understanding the structure of your workforce is a key step in identifying which model of distributed work   will suit your organisation. Which employees need to be co-located and which employees could easily work from home? How are they distributed across your organisation? There are many ways to answer these questions. Internal surveys, staff interviews or assessments based on people's roles or the departments they work in can all be informative. Based on what these investigations reveal, it is possible to define the extent to which remote work   can be introduced in a company. At Vitra, we identified four employee types: workplace residents, workplace enthusiasts, workplace citizens and nomad workers.

Workplace resident

Workplace residents are fully co-located and spend most of their time in the office. Their tasks are bound to the workplace and cannot be performed remotely. Therefore, their physical presence is essential and remote work is not feasible.

Till is the Creative Director Scenography at Vitra. He works with colours and materials, and tries out products and settings to create the living spaces of tomorrow. Till loves his job and needs to be close to the products he focuses on. He's an office resident and comes into work on a daily basis. He spends his time either in the Research & Design department (Vitra headquarters, Birsfelden), where he tests material combinations, or in the VitraHaus on the Vitra Campus in Weil am Rhein, bringing ideas to life.

Workplace enthusiasts

Workplace enthusiasts spend most of their time in the office, but their tasks allow them to work remotely for at least part of the week.

Have you met Tim? He leads the Consulting & Planning Studio International at Vitra and is therefore in daily contact with the hubs. Before the pandemic, Tim travelled to clients and teams around the world on a weekly basis; now coordination takes place digitally. These days, Tim also takes the opportunity to work from home one or two days a week. When he is in the office, Tim works with his team at the Studio Office in Birsfelden, where he is in close contact with the Research & Design department and colleagues across the globe.

Workplace citizens

Workplace citizens are not assigned a specific workspace. They are agile workers, who divide their time between the campus, the hubs, client meetings and working from home.
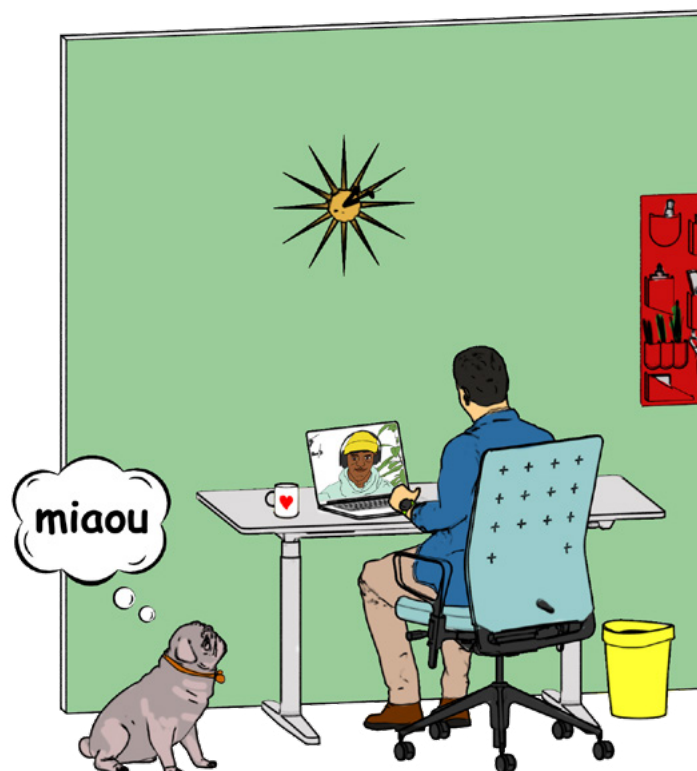
Meet Pirjo. She leads the Consulting & Planning Studio Germany. Pirjo is a workspace citizen – she works in the Citizen Office on the Vitra Campus and at home. In addition, she's often on the road to help companies plan offices that bring their work culture to life and meet the ever-changing needs for productive work. Or do they need areas for strategic problem solving and creative exchange? Pirjo and her team will develop spaces that meet exactly these demands.

Nomad workers

As the tasks of nomad workers are not bound to the physical workspace, they can work from anywhere and be fully remote   .

Rapha is MIA. Indeed, our Future of Work Trend Scout is OOO as he's mostly WFA   . Today he's WFH   in the countryside of south-east Bavaria, surrounded by seven dogs, two horses, two ponies and eight cats, and a lot of mice. As a trend scout, Rapha seeks inspiration outside the office – in encounters with thought leaders, architects and thriving organisations. He therefore spends little time in the office. In his day-to-day life, Rapha focuses on researching and reading to inform the Vitra teams and anyone else who wants to know about the latest trends in the working world.

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Designing safe interactions

Social distancing and increased hygiene measures will probably be here to stay even after everyone has been vaccinated. These will be important to ensure the safety and general well-being of staff, particularly those who have to work in the office. Proper sanitation measures, easy-to-clean surfaces and good air-conditioning will remain relevant, as will reducing the occupancy rate in the workplace to allow for social distancing.

'Safe at work' planning files

Joyn Workstations (440 x 180)
with front and lateral screens,
AC 5 Work (leather),
AC 5 Swift (leather), Toolbox

Joyn Platform (440 x 180, with
front and lateral screen), Allstar,
Follow Me 1, Toolbox, Happy Bin

CDS Workstations, Physix Studio,
Happy Bin, Toolbox

Alcove Highback Work,
Happy Bin, Stool E60 (Artek)

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Prioritising employee well-being

Lounge areas can encourage interaction and team spirit, while the careful choice of sustainable materials and interior design elements throughout an office helps generate a nurturing atmosphere that promotes relaxation, as well as creativity and ideas.

'Welcome zones' planning files

Soft Modular Sofa four-seater, Fauteuil de Salon, Guéridon Bas, Tabouret Solvay, L'Oiseau, Akari BB3-33S

Dancing Wall, Organic Highback, Nelson Bench, Metal Side Tables, Cork Family, Eames House Bird, Cork Bowl small, Desk Clocks – Diamond Clock

Soft Work, Grand Repos, Occasional Low Table, Cork Family, Wall Clocks

Vlinder Sofa, Citizen Highback, Bovist, Visiona Stool, Metal Side Table, Vases Découpage, Herringbone Vessels, Eames House Bird, Kiki Low Table (Artek), Wall Light A330S (Artek)

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Shaping creative workspaces

As well as having access to resources and materials, being in touch with other creatives plays a crucial role in generating visionary work. Workshop spaces need to be productive platforms for real-life interactions, allowing co-workers to explore ideas and solve problems.

'Creative workshop' planning files

Dancing Wall, WorKit on castors, Uten.Silo I, Toolbox, Happy Bin, Bar Stool 64 (Artek)

Dancing Wall, WorKit on castors, Stool-Tool, Uten.Silo I, Toolbox, Happy Bin

Dancing Wall, Map Table, Toolbox, Uten.Silo I, Atelier Chair (Artek), Stool E60 (Artek)

Dancing Wall, Map Table, Tip Ton, Toolbox, Stool E60 (Artek)

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Creating productive workspaces

Office interiors should be designed to actively promote interaction. Agile space planning can enable employees to put their own stamp on the workspace. Meanwhile, retreat areas for concentrated work are equally important.

'Flexible collaboration' planning files

Dancing Wall, Soft Work, Caddy, Occasional Low Table, Tabouret Solvay, Toolbox, Eames House Bird, Herringbone Pillows

Dancing Wall, Joyn Conferencing, EVO-C, Physix, Toolbox, Stool E60 (Artek)

Dancing Wall, Joyn Conferencing, Allstar, Toolbox, Happy Bin

Dancing Wall, Click, Physix, Toolbox, Happy Bin

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Fostering inclusive workspaces

Making space for spontaneous group conversations creates valuable informal learning opportunities. These meeting places can say a lot about a company's values and identity.

'Market place' planning files

Dancing Wall, Bistro Table, .03, Herringbone Vessels

Plate Dining Table, Guéridon, Guéridon Bas, EVO-C, Visiona Stool, Cork Family Model D + E, Hexagonal Containers, Herringbone Vessels, Crinolette Armchair (Artek)

Soft Work, Citizen Lowback, Metal Side Tables, Herringbone Pillows, Herringbone Vessels

Soft Work, Petit Repos, Plate Table, S-Tidy, Herringbone Vessels

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Working from home

For those employees who are able to do so, working from home is increasingly seen as a benefit. As a company, you can offer your employees support in planning and creating an ergonomic and aesthetic home office , as well as finding ways to keep them feeling connected to their co-workers.

'Home office'   planning files

Tyde Workstations, ID Trim,
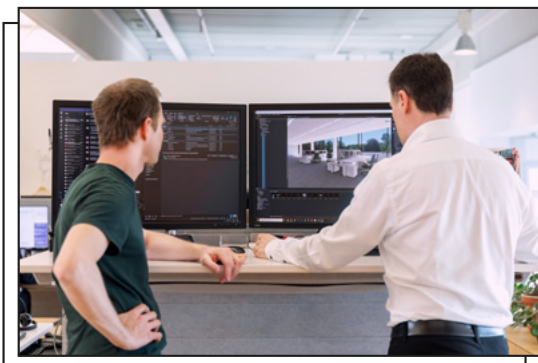Happy Bin, Uten.Silo II, O-Tidy,
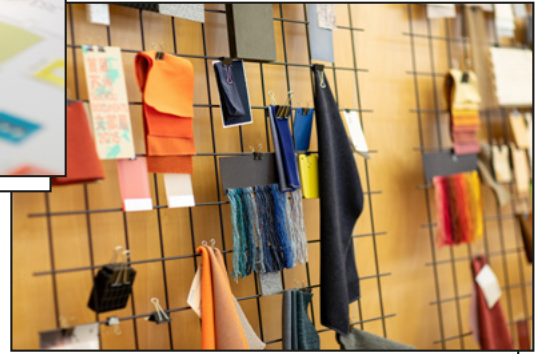Wall Clocks – Asterisk Clock

Eames Desk Unit EDU, Physix,
Eames House Bird, Happy Bin, Uten.Silo II,
Wall Clocks – Ball Clock

Compas Direction, EVO-C,
Uten.Silo II, Lampe de Bureau, Corniches,
Hexagonal Containers

Tyde Workstations, Soft Pad Chair EA 219, L'Oiseau,
Hexagonal Containers, Happy Bin, Uten.Silo II, Wall
Clocks – Fan Clock
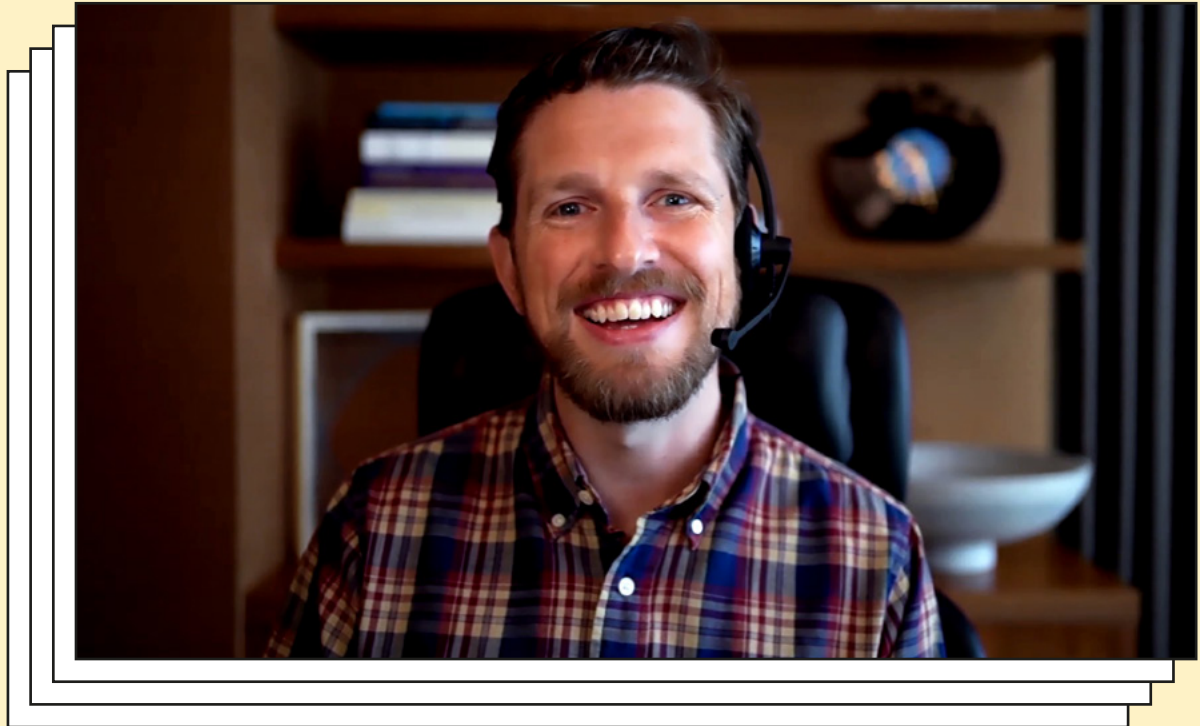
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Consulting & Planning Studio

Investing in an innovative workspace is a strategic decision for the future of any company. Inspirational and curated office concepts give companies an identity and employees a home, which is vital to attract and retain talent. With decades of experience, the Vitra Consulting & Planning Studio offers consultancy services and tools to assist partners, decision-makers and employees in rethinking their offices and transforming them into future-proof workspaces. A tried-and-tested process yields the foundations for a customised interior. Our teams will advise you on how to reinvent your offices with the focus on your employees' needs and design improved work experiences for your entire organisation.

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AT WORK

Some companies have already faced the new hybrid   reality and communicated the steps they are taking to accommodate it to the outside world. But what about behind the scenes? How does this shift in mindset play out in practical terms? Three companies provide us with exclusive insights into the ways they have adapted and how they make a fully or partially distributed organisation work.

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Automattic goes fully remote

A conversation between Nora Fehlbaum and Matt Mullenweg

Some companies championed fully remote setups long before 'remote', 'distributed' and 'WFH'   became buzzwords. In fact, Automattic, the company behind WordPress and Tumblr, was founded as a fully remote organisation back in 2005. Today, the web giant boasts 11,000 employees in about 70 countries. What does it take to run a fully remote organisation? What rules need to be enforced to keep communication flowing effectively in a virtual setup? For the Vitra Summit last October, Vitra CEO Nora Fehlbaum connected with Matt Mullenweg, the founder and CEO of Automattic.

Play the video to get Matt's insights.

Rookie
Konstantin Grcic
2018

THE OFFICE REMAINS THE PLACE TO BRING THE CULTURE TO LIFE

A conversation with running shoes brand On.

Since it was founded in the Swiss Alps in 2010, On has focused on the importance of the physical experience, designing and engineering elite-level running shoes and apparel. As the company's creations have racked up design awards and athletics titles, On has also enjoyed rapid growth and has had to adapt accordingly. From a start-up in Zurich, the company now has employees around the world – with offices in the USA, Germany, Japan, China, Vietnam, Australia and Brazil. As a running brand, On's ethos is built upon flexibility, mobility and forward-facing technologies, however the company is still dedicated to the importance of physical office spaces – something that has remained consistent throughout the pandemic, particularly in the brand's decision to create a new space in Zurich. To find out more about On's approach and the emphasis it places on the physical workplace, we spoke to David Allemann, the company's co-founder, and Nicolas Martin, its Head of Retail Expansion and Office Spaces.

On headquarters in Zurich

'These days, nobody is coming back to the office for a desk,' says David Allemann, co-founder of On. 'What we're missing right now is the social interaction. It's being in a space and really problem-solving together. It has to be an exciting space that you go back to in order to meet your community.'

It should come as no surprise that Allemann does not see the office as a site for desk-bound monotony. Since founding On in 2010 with Olivier Bernhard and Caspar Coppetti, Allemann has built the company into a major force that now stands as the fastest-growing global running brand. Based on collaborations with leading athletes (Roger Federer joined the company as a partner in 2019), cutting-edge technology and design, and the physical experience of running, On has rapidly developed its own unique work culture.

'On is a community where a lot of interaction is happening, be it in the creation process or outdoors,' says Allemann. 'I see the outside as part of our office because, of course, it's ultimately a sports and running culture.'

This ethos, as well as the challenges posed by Covid over the past year, have influenced the company's approach to the physical workspace. 'It's about making sure that the office provides something, a competitive value and an excitement in your day-to-day life, that your home doesn't,' says Nicolas Martin, On's Head of Retail Expansion and Office Spaces. 'What that means is that the office is more about experience, it's more about collaboration, it's more about the specialised tools, and it's more about the community that you don't

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get at home or via a screen in a post-Covid world.'

In early 2020, On was in a high-growth phase, with around 800 employees worldwide and work underway on a new 17-storey space in Zurich. 'We are not changing our plans there,' says Martin. 'In terms of physical investment, we're also building a hospitality team for the first time ever, a facility management team and expanding real estate functions. That shows our belief in physical space.' For Allemann, the office is a way to reinforce and complement On's company culture, fostering collaboration and serendipitous encounters between different departments and teams at a time when the brand is quickly expanding, while working to retain its early, communal ethos. Many spaces within On's office are undifferentiated, with team members encouraged to work flexibly. 'It's a

culture of sharing and entrepreneurial spirit, and our biggest ambition beside growth is to not become corporate,' explains Allemann. 'I feel that coming to the office can be something very democratic – if you have everybody just around the same table, then it becomes super communal.'

During the pandemic, however, On was forced to rely upon remote working . Prior to lockdown, the company had already experimented with this, although it was nearly always complemented by time spent in the physical office. It was, Martin explains, 'extremely rare' for an employee to work fully remotely . The key for On, he says, has been to see remote working as one tool among many in building a successful office culture. 'Virtual working really worked for us, but a lot of the benefits that came out of that were only

possible because we were such a tight group with a very strong spirit and energy to begin with,' he says. 'When I think back to pre-Covid, it wasn't that we had a set working-from-home policy. It was a case of: as long as you get your stuff done, know how to manage and navigate your team, and you're there for everybody, it doesn't matter where you are at certain times. You can figure out the best solution for you and for your project. That's still what the policy is.'

This flexibility and trust between colleagues, however, finds its roots in On's physical spaces. Moving forward, the company plans to enable employees to work two days a week from home while also reducing the density of its spaces, particularly in the early days of the return to the office. 'But that really doubles the social value of the office,' says Allemann. 'How can

you create spaces where you can meet each other, do some sport, eat together, and bring people in from the outside to support that community in a wider sense? How do we create that social office?'

These are the questions that On will grapple with over the coming months, particularly as it introduces 100 new members of staff, who have joined over the course of the pandemic, to the physical offices that lie at On's core. 'They have only met their team on a screen, but for us the function of the office is to really get to know people,' says Allemann. 'That's so important because the friendship among the team is the fabric that keeps the organisation together.'

*hover on the blue stars for the definitions or refer to page 69

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DISTRIBUTED WORK AT VITRA

When the pandemic hit, conventional working models were thrown into disarray. Companies hurriedly vacated their offices, and employees were forced to adapt to remote working . Now, a year on, it has become possible to analyse these changes and begin planning for the future. Over the coming pages, we tell the story of how Vitra met the challenges posed by the past year, as well as revealing the new hybrid working model that we developed in response to the crisis. In a time of radical change, we're sharing our experience.

'It's a story familiar to companies around the world,' says Nora Fehlbaum, CEO of Vitra. 'When the pandemic hit, our team at Vitra went into lockdown and we had to initiate a working from home (WFH) programme with little experience or time for preparation.'

It was the sort of change that could have wreaked havoc. 'Crisis mode,' remembers Sonja Hornberger, Vitra's chief HR officer, 'but crisis is also an opportunity to develop new frameworks and ideas.' Pre-existing digital infrastructure was adapted to support the transition into remote working, while supplementary initiatives were launched to help fill gaps created by the lockdown: from bi-weekly audio messages from Fehlbaum that provided overall direction, to spontaneous coffee mornings, healthy cooking sessions and e-learning events. 'We were forced to work remotely, but wanted to create a framework that could be valid for Vitra moving forward,' says Hornberger, 'not just for the pandemic.'

Our initial focus was on meeting the immediate demands of the crisis and 'navigating the entire organisation through these uncertain times,' explains Hornberger. Yet as national regulations relaxed, our teams began returning to the workplace under strict health and safety measures. 'For me and my team, the intention was always to come back,' says Tim Reusch, nternational head of Vitra's Consulting & Planning Studio. 'We all experienced the challenges of working from home – there was a little bit of a lack of intuition, speed, and knowledge transfer.' The importance of this return is similarly acknowledged by Pirjo Kiefer, head of Vitra's Consulting & Planning Studio in Germany 'Coming back to the Vitra Campus after almost three months, I was jumping for joy!' she says. 'I could reconnect to the spirit of Vitra and it felt like coming home. We all need a physical connection to the company we work for, and even more so to the people we work with, be they colleagues or customers.'
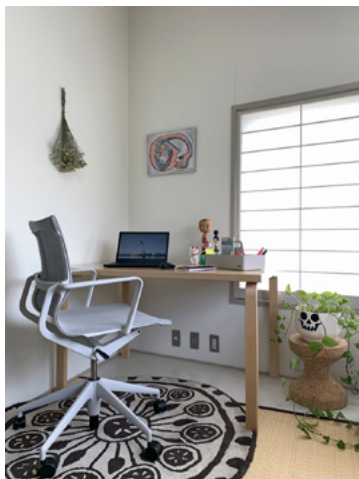
At Vitra, we never considered a majority WFH workforce. Throughout the pandemic, we relied on our production workers to be present at our factories. As restrictions eased, it was important to recognise the efforts of all our employees, and not establish a two-class system. 'When I look at what staff missed, it's

Vitra CEO Nora Fehlbaum at her desk in the open-plan Studio Office at Vitra's headquarters in Birsfelden, near Basel

people and the community, but also being visible with what you do in your work,' says Reusch. 'You miss the spontaneity of interaction.' In this vein, we observed a clear drive to return to communal spaces. 'We believe that our thoughts and feelings are shaped by our surroundings – whether at home, at work or on the go,' explains Fehlbaum. 'Our own working culture is firmly anchored in our offices, even though we choose to do certain tasks at home in other settings.'

The result of this philosophy is a hybrid working system – something Kiefer describes as a 'fluid mix of collaboration in the office and deep work back at home or in a suitable third place'. It is an approach that grapples with the realities of contemporary work. 'The pandemic helped us to understand work differently,' says Reusch. 'We had a lot more time to reflect on things, which has allowed us to challenge some habits.' More collaborative tasks may naturally draw a worker to the office, while focused, individual work may be better done from home. At Vitra, this means that no workplace will be reserved for an employee who is only present for part of the week, just as WFH is no longer seen as a privilege, but a normal mode of work. 'We've moved from crisis mode into a

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The home office setups of some of Vitra's employees, photographed during the lockdown. In early 2021, we invited our staff to share images showing their dedicated home office spaces – one of many initiatives launched by Vitra's teams to promote team spirit and stay connected while working from home.

strategic direction for the future,' says Hornberger.

Most companies are looking to implement a hybrid model of this kind, but the model calls for interpretation. As a team, you may decide that certain days of the week require personal presence, or you may allocate set days for specific activities. Flexibility, too, must be managed. At Vitra, the roles of individual team members have been codified into four categories: office residents, who exclusively work from a company space; workplace enthusiasts, who spend three to four days a week in the office; workplace citizens, who split their time between the office and remote work evenly; and nomads, who exclusively work remotely, only coming to the office for pre-planned visits. In each case, the decision to work in a particular way has been mutually agreed upon, after a few simple questions. Can I do my work outside of a defined workplace? Do others rely on me to complete their tasks? Do I need to be present to collaborate in person with partners? 'In the long term, we're giving employees the option to work from anywhere for up to half of the week, but we are nevertheless focused on supporting real-life interactions within our teams. It's a mix of both worlds, which is perfect,' says Kiefer. 'You can focus back at home, but you're still part of this ecosystem.'

Even this hybrid model has a direct impact on office spaces. To respond to expected changes in the use of our physical environments, we have developed the Club Office   – a new concept that responds to the changing face of work, the first example of which has just opened at our headquarters in Birsfelden. 'I don't think that offices need to be completely redesigned after the pandemic, but there is a need to establish transparency within a company,' says Reusch. 'The Club is the idea of having one spot which can connect everyone and from where everyone's journey starts. The people, their work and their collaboration all become transparent.' Just like members of a club, employees get together voluntarily and on their own schedules. The office becomes a site for collaboration, sharing ideas and building energy for a larger goal.

The Club's joyful, warm and welcoming interiors invite conversation and collaboration, with every seat a potential workstation. Open hospitality spaces stimulate debate, learning and exchange between guests and members, 'because an office should be about bringing people together and a place where you feel the spirit of a company,' explains Kiefer. Meanwhile, team members can hold workshops in flexible spaces in the back of the office that easily adapt to the needs of the day, with a third part of the Club consisting of more discrete workplaces – although much of this function has been filled by home offices. Fehlbaum adds: 'Remote working is an integral part of the Club Office. But we believe in our shared office spaces, where we can come together in pursuit of our common goals and where Vitra's unique company culture comes to life.'

A recent study from the Becker Friedman Institute estimates that the post-pandemic world will see remote work in the US increase from 5% to 22% of work days.

'Team spirit actually improved, which was a very positive experience.'

Sonja Hornberger

'While this is a fourfold increase, it still means that for most of us, most of the time, a return to the office lies ahead,' notes Fehlbaum. However, with the right strategy, more companies could go at least partly remote. While startups can adopt this way of working from their inception, more established, larger players will need to carefully transition to a hybrid or majority remote working   regime. 'A careful transition is what was missing during the remote work phase induced by the pandemic, leaving some companies and many individuals behind,' explains Fehlbaum. 'A conscious decision on their future work mode will need to be taken and the company's communications, processes, training, leadership and workspaces adjusted accordingly.'

*hover on the blue stars for the definitions or refer to page 69

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DISTRIBUTED EXPLAINED

From WFH, to DW, WFA and RW, here's your guide to the buzzwords of distributed work and an associated list of must-reads.

Dictionary

Assumption of positive intent

This means choosing to assume that our colleagues are working to the best of their ability and are acting with the best interest of the company and their co-workers in mind. It encourages us to take a step back and look at things from a new angle when we are presented with a situation in which we might feel attacked or criticised. It also raises the possibility that what feels like a threat may actually be someone trying to help us grow and become more successful, with no hidden agenda.

Asynchronous

Communication that does not happen at the same time. Examples include email, message boards and voicemail. The term also refers to tasks performed when it suits you and your work schedule, rather than in real time. (By contrast, meetings are 'synchronous'.)

Clapping hands 👏

The clapping hands emoji is a pair of applauding hands. Many people use it literally to mean the appreciation of someone's success, talent, skill or achievements. It often features in congratulatory messages.

Co-located / IRL work

Professional situations in which the participants share a physical workspace, such as cubicles or offices on the same floor of a building. The simplest and most effective way to establish communication pathways is to have team members in close proximity.

Club Office

Vitra's new workplace concept, the Club Office is a three-tiered system that inverts the traditional focus of the physical office – from being a place of productivity, the office becomes a place of belonging and social identification. Combining public, semi-public and private areas, the Club Office acts like a magnet, drawing people into the office by providing a flexible, collaborative platform that can work in conjunction with the home office. It is the heartbeat of an organisation, offering a tangible representation of a company's unique identity and generating a sense of collaboration and innovation. The Club Office is an exciting space where people love to go, stepping outside of their home offices in favour of a space that encourages engagement and creativity, and which provides a sense of belonging. The first example of the Club Office was created to support Vitra's Research & Design team at our headquarters in Birsfelden.

Distributed work

Remote work is a practice for the individual worker, but distributed work is a mindset and approach for the organisation as a whole. Distributed work refers to companies with one or more employees based in different locations. Employees who work from home are just one part of the equation. By installing key technologies, distributed corporations enable employees located anywhere to access all the organisation's resources and software – such as applications, data and email – without working within the confines of a physical company-operated facility.

Fully co-located with one campus

Working on, travelling to and spending time together on the campus plays an important role in the culture of certain organisations. In these cases, the campus is more than an office: it's the home of the company, a physical manifestation of its identity and values. Such sites may include clubs, project-work areas and focused-working options, alongside production facilities, canteens, childcare centres, gardens, conference venues, welcome areas and facilities for health and wellness.

Fully co-located with a campus and hubs

A multi-site team has two or more co-located groups at separate locations, perhaps with some formal sub-team boundaries and responsibilities.

Fully remote

A company that allows every employee to WFA (work from anywhere) at all times. The operating model does not rely

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on physical spaces but rather on digital interactions and online communications. Employees may be spread across numerous locations and time zones, and can work from their homes, co-working spaces or any other venue they choose. That said, they might still work from a physical office full time. Fully distributed companies offer their employees allowances that they can use to set up a home office with a good screen, a height-adjustable table and an ergonomic task chair, as well as other tools to facilitate their work.

Home office

A space designated for work purposes in someone's home.

Hybrid work

A model that combines remote work and in-person office time. It means that remote working is part of your organisation's structure, but your workforce is mainly office-based.

IRL

An online acronym for 'in real life', separating real-world experience from anything that happens on digital platforms. The term has long been used in online chat rooms, but the past year has seen its usage expand into the mainstream, with IRL taking on a wistful quality after many saw their social interactions restricted to online only.

Majority remote with small, regional offices or shared workspace options

An organisation without company-operated spaces. These companies might partner with shared-workspace operators to offer an alternative for employees who work remotely and need a dedicated work environment outside of their home.

Majority co-located with offices

Companies like Vitra offer employees a physical workspace with a mix of collaborative, informal spaces for exchange, dedicated areas for project work and, potentially, focused work.

Minutes

Minutes, also known as minutes of meeting (abbreviation MoM), protocols or, informally, as notes, are the written record of a formal discussion. They typically describe what happened and may include a list of attendees, a statement of the issues considered by the participants, and related responses or decisions regarding the matters discussed.

Raised hand 👋

During a virtual meeting, a participant can use this option to get the attention of the speaker or host. It enables them to show they want to talk without disrupting the flow of the discussion. The function can also allow the host to take a poll of meeting participants and see if anyone in the meeting wants to talk, thereby encouraging participation and making meetings more inclusive.

Remote work

The growing trend of employees who don't commute into a traditional office each weekday morning but instead work part- or full-time from home, abroad or in a co-working space – in the name of flexibility, technological progress and productivity.

WFA

WFA means 'work from anywhere'. This 'anywhere' might be a café, a co-working space or a 'hub and spoke' offered by your employer – a central office complemented by local 'spokes'. It even includes a temporary version of 'co-location' (another buzz word) where remote staff – often in the tech and start-up arena – gather together regularly, sometimes staying in a large rented house, and collaborate on projects for a few days or more.

WFH

WFH or 'work from home' refers to an employee working from their place of residence, rather than being based in the office. Many companies have a WFH, or remote work, policy that allows their staff to work from home either full-time or when it's most convenient for them.

You're on mute

When you are so absorbed by what is being discussed and what you're going to contribute that you forget to activate your mic.

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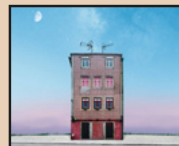Isolation and Lack of Career Progression.
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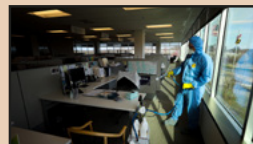Anxiety. Aarons-Mele, M. (2020)
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A Conversation with Sevil Peach (2020)
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'Working with one another, for one another!'
An Interview with Prof. Dr. Götz Rehn (2020)
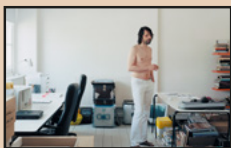—

'Notes on Working from Home.'
Jonathan Olivares (2020)
—

'How's work?'
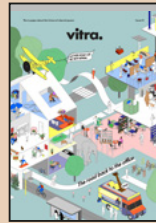Three questions for Sharon Johnston (2020)
—

'We have been forced to learn quickly'
A visit at the Dancing Office (2020)
—

'At Home at Work'
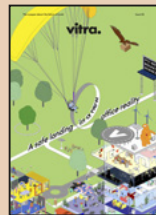Alice Rawsthorn on the Home Office (2020)

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'The road back to the office'
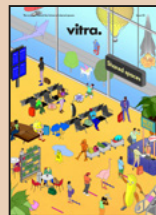The e-paper about the future of shared spaces.
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—

'A safe landing in a new office reality'
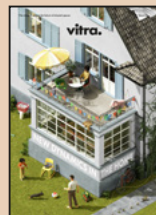The e-paper about the future of shared spaces.
Vitra E-Paper Issue 02, 2020
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'Shared spaces'
The e-paper about the future of shared spaces.
Vitra E-Paper Issue 03, 2020
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'New dynamics in the home'
The e-paper about the future of shared spaces.
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