



The future of the office and the future of work

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In the previous article, we reflected on the changes and challenges for the way we will work. There is no going back to the old ways of working for many people and many organisations. We are in a state of flux, which presents the forward thinking with the ability to re-think how and where work occurs. This should not be just a re-arranging of the deckchairs, but a fundamental re-set of how we enable people in the 2020s to be both effective and efficient, and fulfilled in the work that they do.

The old paradigms about what an office is for

Cheap place to house workers; where you can see them, maintain control.

Flexible working was piecemeal, part-time and largely occasional. It offered employees

with an alternative, often second work location. Now many see non-office based as a preference, their primary work location.

The success of remote working has many employers thinking strategically, it offers an alternate broader source of talent. Workforce flexibility and diversity considerations now have a broader canvass. It offers a competitive edge.

There is now a real need to create a new way of working

If we accept that remote working will be a permanent and important part of our working landscape going forward, we need to control how that landscape is built and evolves.

Understanding the full range of working options and then determining how they fit and their interdependence is critical.

Many organisations will believe that the current success of the rapid shift to remote working augurs well for the future. A lot of that success is driven by panic and adrenaline. Our existing relationships and technology have helped to manage through that. This will erode over time unless organisations respond to shore up and institutionalise a new way of working. Organisations need to build an operating framework that enables managers to have control and visibility of true performance. This is to allow them to take timely and appropriate action. It must reflect the new operating environment and the manner in which it will flex and evolve. It will enable them to be both present with and relevant to their teams. It cannot be a 'lift and drop' of the current model.

This framework will need:

- > Clear focus on outcomes. What are we trying to achieve here?
- > Strong and accurate standards to guide process execution.
- > An ability to see what work is available and who is working on it (make work visible).

- > A rigorous approach to ensuring that process integrity is maintained. Learn the lessons from how this was managed when work was off-shored.
- > A more nuanced way of interacting with the team. Cannot be only video calls. Go back to first principles of what outcome each element of an operating framework is designed to deliver. Create a more articulated or varied approach to ensure we don't create an unsustainable model or one that is not delivering to our needs.
- > To be able to ensure rapid action.
- > To create transparency of true performance.
- > An ability to meld the group together as a team. This may be work related (how you huddle, plan) or more nuanced. It could involve teams coming together to align on ways of working, making decisions, building 'match readiness'.



Strong people leaders will come to the fore. The complexity of managing a remote, or mix of remote and office based staff, places a much greater importance on people centric rather than technical skills and competencies. The 'framework' will require the identification and development of leaders with these capabilities at all levels. Managers lacking adequate management behaviours will fail fast, their teams' engagement and outputs will rapidly spiral down.

What is the role of the office in the future?

It may no longer be primarily about doing work. In many environments where teams work remotely, for example mine sites, airline crews, maintenance functions on complex sites, sales teams, there is always some form of mustering the team. On a mine, crews will start shift in some form of muster room or area. Performance is reviewed, safety

is discussed, work assigned, updates on organisational issues provided. All things that boil down to the culture of the organisation. Mines could have their teams just head straight to their work site, the maintenance workshop, the dig site. But legislation and common sense cause them to invest time every day in bringing the team together to talk to what the team and the individuals have done and will seek to achieve. This is not about 'nice to do' stuff; it is about enabling people to work safely and productively and to understand their role as part of team and what that team is achieving and expected to achieve.

The same applies with airline crews; they muster to assign and reinforce roles, get updates on changes, focus on safety and ability to meet the rigorous requirements of working in an airline. Sales teams come together to talk performance (they tend to be competitive!), align on product functions, train. Sales teams are often brought together to build a sense of team, a way of working.

One thing that drives this, that is often unspoken, is to ensure no one goes rogue. It's not just what you want your people to do, but also what you don't want them to do.

The office will continue to exist, for a wide range of organisational and individual needs. Organisations should start to re-frame or rebuild their operating model and frameworks to provide clarity on how they will work.

When you reflect on your previously typical day, how much was spent 'on tools' and how much on other activities? Most transactional roles in offices can have 25-30% shrinkage factored into a working day. That is, only 70-75% of a working day is spent doing work. The rest of the time is in meetings, training, informal interactions. Now imagine this; four days spent working from home, with the only time off tools to involve team planning and follow up. One day each week is spent in the office working as a team on all of the other drivers that are important. Training, communications, aligning on ways of working, problem solving. It could be a hot house of learning and engagement. Space where you are not on tools but free to think about work, the customer, how to be better as an organisation, a team, an individual. Not everyone wants to sign up and drink the Koolaid, but now is a time to re-think how this can work.

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