

WORKING FROM HOME: The uncertain future of office life

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The Civil Service this weekend announced official plans for their more than 430,000 staff in the UK to work from home or in a hybrid capacity across 10 cities as the Government plan to 'level up' the country and move more roles outside of London under their new flexibility scheme.

This contract signed with IWG to facilitate these plans for **flexible, hybrid working** for civil servants comes as further tangible evidence for a permanent shift in British working culture and the City landscape. The Civil Service have followed suit of various private sector, corporate giants such as PwC, BP, and HSBC, who have closed down offices and shifted employees to work from home, or a mixture of the two under new schemes. As a significant employer in the public sector, the Civil Service's announcement is set to have major ripple effects on the City landscape and working cultures in both the public and private sectors.

The Civil Service and aforementioned corporate giants have followed the lead of SME thought leaders regarding flexible working and the benefits these bring to staff, culture, and business. These expectations being set of staff to work from home at least part time even after restrictions end, and cutting office space by up to 40% is a great step to address the differing experiences staff have seen and aiding in tackling differing levels of opportunity based on differing responsibilities.

While some major corporations such as Goldman Sachs continue to denounce the idea of Flexi-working in the long term, dialogues and action have affirmatively changed with the Civil Service's announcement. These new working norms open a variety of opportunities for employers to improve the health and productivity of their workforces and employ higher quality talent going forward with fewer geographic restrictions which will for many, help towards levelling uneven playing fields.

Theta Global Advisors, an accounting and consultancy disruptor has conducted research on employee experiences and how flexible practices are not only wanted, but expected and needed for employee productivity with 57% of workers reporting they want to choose where they work in order to be most productive.

Key stats:

- 57% of workers want to choose where to work to be the most productive
- 28% of parents say that having to take care of their child during the Covid period has set them back more than a year in their career
- Over a quarter (26%) of parents say that their mental health was significantly impacted by having to home-school while working
- Over a third (34%) of UK workers have seen their workplace's headcount decrease and their workload increase in the last 12 months

(nationally representative research carried out across a body of 2100 respondents, in full compliance with British Polling Council guidelines)

Chris Biggs, Partner at Theta Global Advisors - an accounting and consultancy disruptor - comments on the Civil Service's adoption of hybrid working:

“To ensure people are at their happiest and most productive, flexibility is needed in both where and when they work. Freedom from the office must also mean freedom to go to the office to account for different experiences, priorities, and conditions.

The Civil Service's contract with IWG to allow themselves to adopt new policies will account for substantial differentiations in their employees' experience of working during Covid-19. However, the Civil Service will need to allow for individualised flexibility and hybrid working to truly account for different experiences and resources. While some employees will relish a blended approach, others will want to be in the office 100% of the time, while others will want the complete opposite, and employers need to account for this on a case-by-case basis. The Civil Service will be making monumentally positive impacts for opportunity, working conditions, and economic recovery with their announcement, and working environments are looking like they will never return to what they were in 2019, changing very much for the better but for the best impact on employee's lives and their productivity we need to go that little bit further.

In our adaptation to Flexi-working, we have shown that we can work remotely, but this has also highlighted the positives for many of going to the office and the vital function the office plays in our economy and society. Some people will require access to an office for personal space, effective equipment, or internet, but others may not have these issues, and might have familial commitments or simply enjoy working from home more.

As such, what we need is for businesses, organisations, and companies to follow the examples we're seeing of more and more employers shifting to flexible working in the long term and catering to everyone in their Flexi-working policies - They must outline structured flexibility approaches to allow people to adapt as they need or want going forward"

*What do you think about heading back to the office? Would you like to see a more flexible working arrangement continue post-pandemic? You can let us know on your **local tv channel's Facebook page...***