

# PwC's flexible working strategy 'a step in the right direction'

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April 9, 2021

09 April 2021 Consultancy.uk 3 min. read

*Last week, PwC announced its official plans for their 22,000 staff in the UK to work from home between 40% and 60% of the time under their new flexible working structures. While it is a step in the right direction, Chris Biggs – a partner at Theta Global Advisors – writes that the industry still needs to go further in its plans.*

As one of the Big Four accounting firms, PwC's announcement will disrupt the entire consulting industry and further with this change in their working culture going beyond Covid-19 restrictions and very much for the better.

However, while this is a great step in the right direction from PwC, companies must go further to account for the different experiences of employees based on different priorities, circumstances, and living situations, and keep their employees happy and at their most productive going forward.



At Theta Global Advisors [an accounting and consultancy firm], we have conducted research on employee experiences over lockdown and how flexibility in work patterns is not only wanted but needed for employee productivity. 57% of workers report that they want to be able to choose where they work in order to be most productive, illustrating that structured working from home for part of the week for all is too generic an approach to 'flexible working'.

Moreover, 28% of parents said a lack of flexibility paired with childcare responsibilities and home-schooling over Covid-19 set their careers back by over a year, with 26% reporting this also significantly impacting on their mental health.

## **Differentiated flexibility**

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As such, companies, including PwC need to take that extra step and allow for true flexibility for their employees to ensure people are at their happiest and most productive, dictating instead on a case-by-case basis. While PwC's adopting new policies will account for substantial differentiations in employee experiences of working during Covid-19, 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.

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.

While some employees will relish PwC's blended approach, others will want to be in the office 100% of the time, and others will want the complete opposite. Companies therefore need to account for these differentiations individually. PwC, joining the ranks of HSBC, BA, BP, and more are making a major positive impact on working environments and things are looking like they will never return to what they were in 2019, changing very much for the better.

Office space is reducing by up to 40% and continued flexible working long term is excellent for employee health and productivity, but for the best impact on employee's lives and their productivity, we need to see this flexibility extend further still.

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.