

# Analysis: what is the best way to shape the workplace of the future?

**S** [scotsman.com/business/analysis-what-is-the-best-way-to-shape-the-workplace-of-the-future-3206759](https://scotsman.com/business/analysis-what-is-the-best-way-to-shape-the-workplace-of-the-future-3206759)

Business

By Emma Newlands

Tuesday, 20th April 2021, 7:00 am

Updated Tuesday, 20th April 2021, 10:15 am

And now, as employers and employees eye a potential return to the office amid further relaxation of lockdown rules and an increasingly vaccinated population, experts in workplace culture are urging as bespoke an approach as possible to foster a positive and productive environment.

A new trend, Fear Of The Office, is emerging among people who have been working from home, according to new research.

Financial services firm Canada Life found that this fear is more prevalent among those who have previously tested positive for Covid-19, with only 34 per cent planning on returning to sit among colleagues. This compares to 69 per cent of those who haven't, to their knowledge, had the virus.

**THE SCOTSMAN**

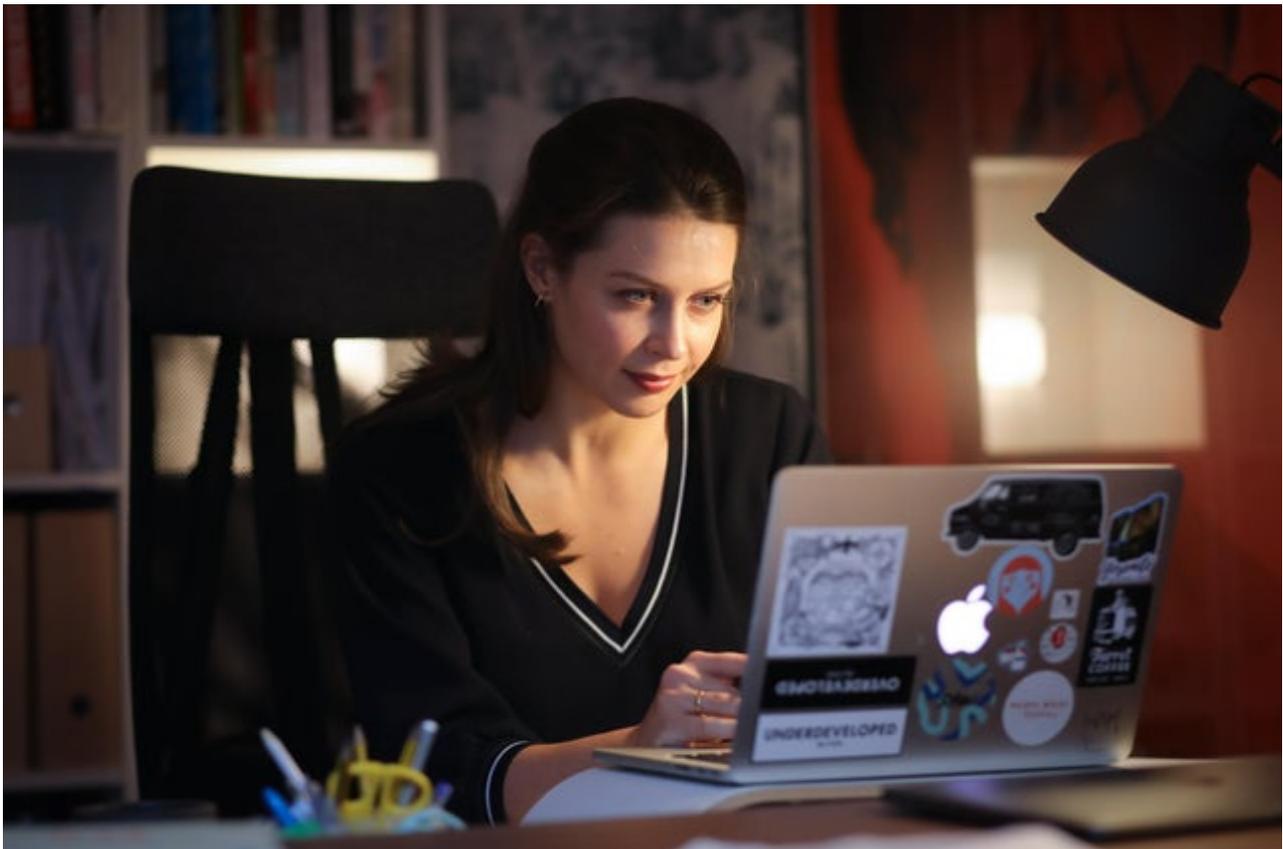


Employers are being encouraged to respect the concerns and wishes of their workforce.  
Picture: Getty Images/iStockphoto.

Dan Crook, protection sales director at Canada Life, urges employers to consider the “varied experiences and perspectives” of staff as they develop plans for the return to the workplace later this year.

"Employers are likely to have three cohorts of employees – one group that cannot wait to return to the office, another that would happily work from home forever, and a third that would like a hybrid model of both," he says.

That comes after a survey earlier this year found that half of Scottish organisations aimed to take steps to enable more home and hybrid working over the next six to 12 months.



Scarlett Hollerin, co-founder of Story Shop, who says the team favours a hybrid model.  
Picture: contributed.

One business favouring a dual approach is Glasgow-based marketing and PR agency Story Shop. Co-founder Scarlett Hollerin said the firm moved into its first office in the middle of the pandemic, but the site has stood empty since December.

In that time the firm has added two staff. “We can’t wait for the full team to get together somewhere other than Zoom,” she says – but adds that the business will never operate nine to five in an office, and trusts staff to work wherever they are.

"The feedback from our team is that they want a hybrid model, so our office will be a place to collaborate, build relationships and share ideas. We'll be extra cautious to make sure everyone feels safe, and people will only return to the office when they're absolutely ready."

Mr Crook advises a phased return to the office, with the approach "sensitive" to the needs of employees. "Plans should be flexible as they are likely to evolve over time," he believes – and his comments are echoed by Chris Biggs, partner at "consultancy and accounting disruptor" Theta Global Advisors.

The latter has found that 57 per cent of those surveyed do not want to go back to a normal way of working in an office environment with normal hours, while more than a third have seen their workplace's headcount decrease and their workload increase in the last 12 months.

Steps to make sure they are happy and able to cope "will be essential for our working cultures and productivity going forward", according to Mr Biggs. "To ensure people are at their happiest and most productive, employers must be responsive to their employees needs for where, when, and how they work.

"In our adaptation to working digitally, we have shown that we can work remotely... employers have had highlighted to them the importance of open communication with employees to maintain positive working cultures, facilitating happy employees and productivity needed to sustain a successful business".

Canada Life says that with 70 per cent of those who plan on returning to the office happy to adapt their working practices, employers have the opportunity to trial and develop new ways of working. The firm found that home workers would like their bosses to adopt measures such as mental wellness days (54 per cent) and flexible working hours (40 per cent).

## Reassure

---

As for those going back to the office, there are measures that can reassure staff that bosses are also looking out for their physical health, while some people believe firms will be increasingly keen to provide high-quality working environments.

Entrepreneur Louise Hamill is the founder of Hamill Digital Healthcare, which is behind contact tracing platform SAFE2GO, an app made for venues "of all shapes and sizes" that welcome visitors.

She says: "While we're moving towards normality, responsible employers realise they need to manage the return to the office in a safe and measured way. Especially as it's likely that work will remain somewhat flexible for the time being, implementing a contact tracing solution that allows employees and visitors to check in and check out securely removes some uncertainty. Along with other measures, contact tracing shows employees that their employer is serious about their safety."

As for her own team, she says it is “looking forward to a change of scene after working from home for so long”.

Mr Crook believes employers who “actively seek to support their employees’ wellbeing will likely enjoy the benefits of a loyal and enthusiastic workforce”, – and he adds that while there is “no blueprint” for a successful return, employers “should respect the concerns and wishes of their workforce while still focusing on best business outcomes”.

Also commenting is Falkirk-based management consultant Neil Bradbrook of Ahead Business Consulting, who says everyone has a different view on what they want to happen next. “This means there is yet more added complexity for employers and managers, but it is imperative to be sensitive to your employees’ concerns.”

He also cites Sir Richard Branson saying that if you look after your employees, they will look after your business. “Flexibility and a genuine caring approach towards your staff will become even more valued amongst workforces... It will be harder and yet another problem you would rather do without, but take the time to listen to your employees, and be flexible to address their needs – it will be worth it. Times of crises are also a time for leaders to shine – and show their true worth.”