

23138 Why employees want flexible workplaces

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So much has changed over the past three years that it's almost impossible to remember what work was like before COVID-19.

Early in the pandemic, everything was reactive. Having been flung into a dystopian vortex, employees had to get through their work as best they could, while wondering when things would return to normal. But today "normal" has a new meaning, and through innovation, modern companies have moved beyond pandemic responsiveness to new and better ways of working. Having had a taste of the better work-life balance that comes with flexible working, 53 per cent of global workers are now more likely to prioritise well-being over work, according to Microsoft's 2022 Work Trend Index.

Historically, some businesses have struggled to attract employees because of their geographic location. But remote work has eased that problem, according to the PwC Global Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey.

The survey found that hybrid workers are most satisfied with their work, with 62 per cent preferring a mix of in-person and remote work. It also confirmed that flexibility is crucial to attracting and retaining talent.

Employees who don't have to deal with the stress of a commute not only add time to their day but are in a better frame of mind when they start work, and have therefore been found to be more productive.

The key challenges for an organisation with a hybrid workforce are to ensure employees are engaged, avoid burnout and feel like they're part of the team no matter where they are. Tools to facilitate collaboration and communication are essential both internally and for interactions with customers. The way companies communicate with their customers has changed forever, and organisations that redesign conference rooms to embrace the new hybrid reality will enhance the experience of staff and customers alike.

Some organisations fear productivity will suffer when they embrace flexibility. How can they trust the people to do the work and achieve the desired outcomes without micromanaging what they do to get there? The companies that have embraced tools for collaborative learning and coaching are seeing gains in terms of new business, increased communication and access, and increased demand from existing customers.

A recent report from McKinsey highlights that the mindsets of European employees have changed since the pandemic began, and companies must continue to deliver on flexibility if they want to retain their most valuable talent. The report concludes that showing a commitment to employees that's both "widespread and targeted to individuals" is crucial for companies' health and future growth.

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