

OFFICE VS HOMEWORRING

October 2020

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Introduction

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, more people than ever have worked from home. With many businesses forced to close their workplaces due to the pandemic, employees were tasked with working remotely.

Although offices are now reopening with social distancing measures in place, there has been a sharp decline in the number of people returning to a pre-COVID schedule. Despite the Government's calls for employees to return to their desks, a significant number are eager to keep working from home.

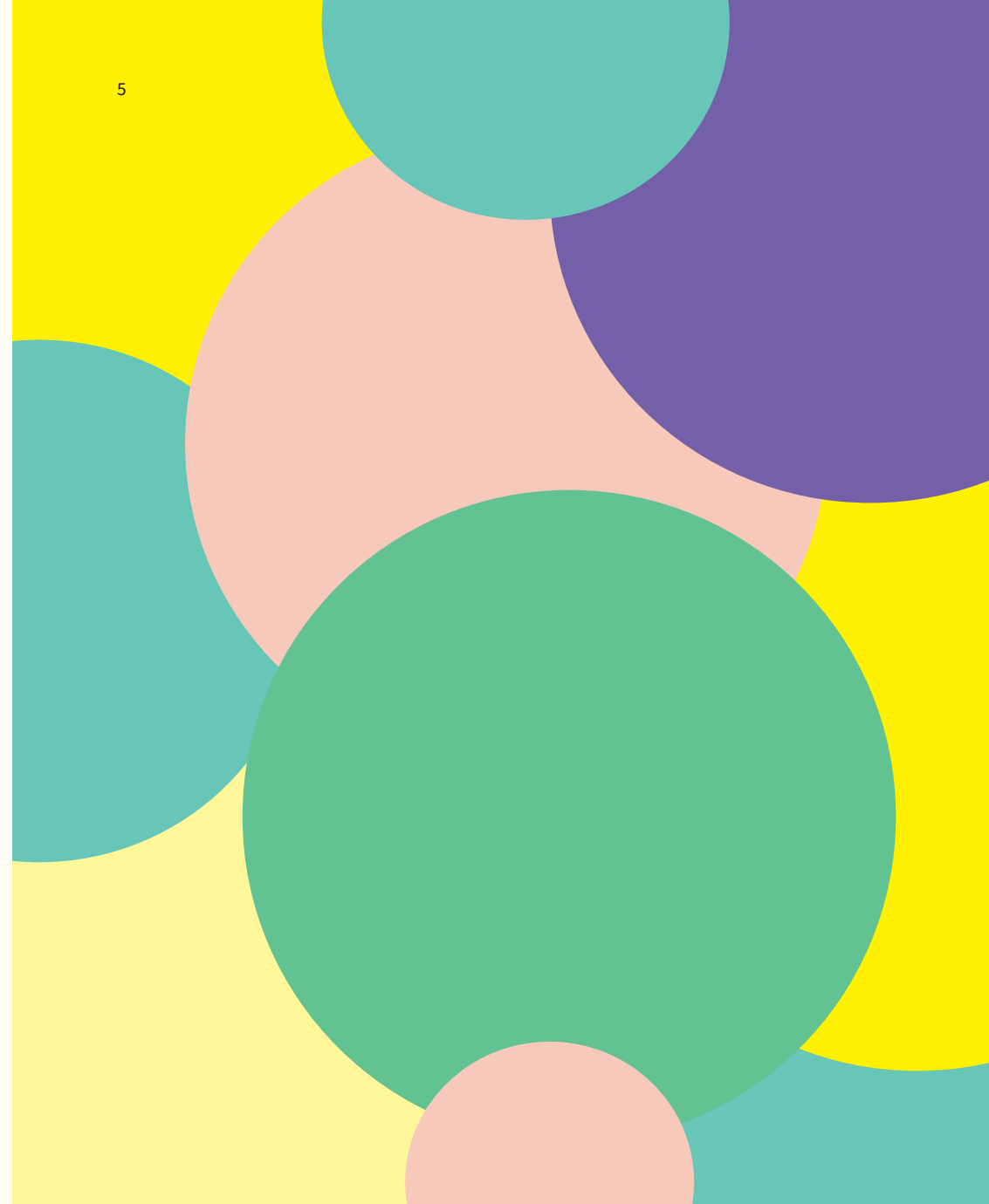
So, what's behind the work from home revolution?

Prior to 2020, just 1.7 million people reported working from home regularly, with only 8.7 million having ever worked remotely. In April 2020, almost 50% of the UK workforce was operating remotely.

While the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the shift in working behaviours, why are employees so reluctant to return to their offices? Furthermore, how are companies responding to the demands and needs of staff working remotely?

To identify the reasons behind the move towards homeworking and evaluate what the future of work looks like for the average Britain, it's important to look at the issue from two standpoints:

Employee & Employer.



Why Do Employees Want to Work from Home?

Following the implementation of a nationwide lockdown, 46.6% of the UK workforce worked from home, with 86% reporting that their reasons for doing so were due to coronavirus.

Although safety measures have now been put into place, there's no doubt that many people are concerned about the risk of COVID-19 transmission if they return to work. In fact, more than 5,000 people have contacted the UK's health and safety regulator regarding COVID-19 workplace safety concerns.

Out of a workforce of more than 32 million ; however, 5,000 referrals to the health and safety regulator is relatively low. While many more people will inevitably be concerned about workplace safety, it's highly likely that there's more to the office vs homeworking debate than coronavirus.

Now that a large percentage of the workforce have experienced working remotely, the advantages of working from home are clear to see. Although the shift from office-based working to homeworking may have come about due to the pandemic,

employees are reluctant to give up the benefits they've experienced, such as:

- Better work/life balance
- No need to commute
- Reduced need for childcare
- More productive working environment



Given that the daily commute is expensive, time-consuming and demotivating for many people, it's no surprise that people are eager to avoid having to spend hours sitting in traffic or using public transport every day. Employees based in London regularly spend thousands of pounds per year on transport fees, so the extra financial savings that working from home brings are entirely welcome.



In addition to this, a considerable number of employees have actively enjoyed working from home and maintain that they're more productive when working remotely.

What's more – this is an opinion that's backed by data. Studies conducted prior to the pandemic showed increased productivity amongst homeworkers, compared to their office-based counterparts.

With one research study reporting a 13% increase in productivity from homeworking, it seems that employees who favour a work from home environment can compete – and even better – their office-based colleagues when it comes to productivity.

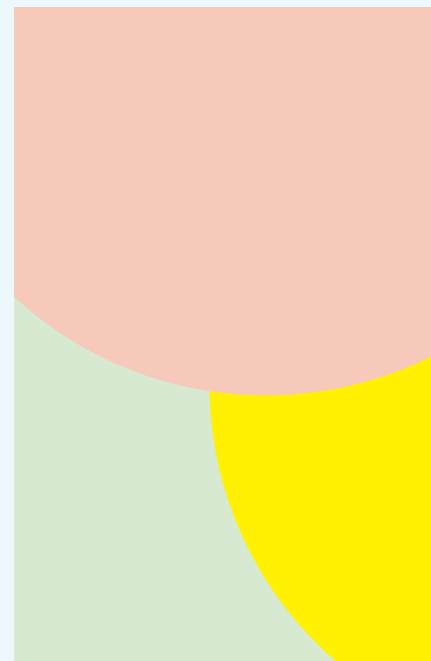
Factor in the better work/life balance and the reduced need for childcare, and it's easy to see why so many people are reluctant to return to their pre-2020 working lives. With more time to spend with family and friends and more money in the bank, homeworking offers a lot of advantages that life in the office simply can't compete with.

Do Companies Want Employees Back at Work?

Although the number of flexible workers and homeworkers has increased steadily over the past decade, the vast majority of office workers operated on-site prior to 2020.

Despite technological advancements it appears, that companies favoured in-office working arrangements.

This led to many people believing that businesses would be eager for employees to return to work as soon as possible following the



easing of lockdown restrictions. Perhaps surprisingly, this has not been the case. While employees have seen the benefits of homeworking, so too have business owners. For companies, operating remote teams offers significant benefits, including:

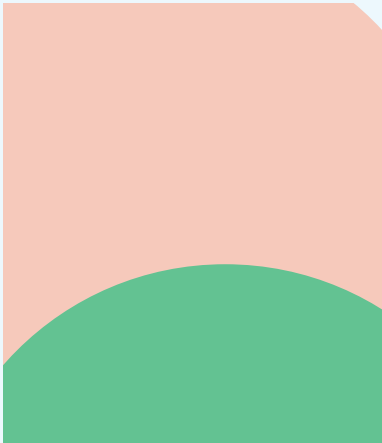
- Lower operating costs
- Wider range of applicants for job roles
- Incentivised employees
- Increased productivity

When companies don't need to buy or lease vast amounts of office space, their operating costs are drastically reduced. In fact, the cost of renting or purchasing commercial units is one of the biggest costs for most businesses.

When employees work from home, however, the need for extensive office space is significantly reduced. As a result, businesses can function with fewer overheads, thus boosting profitability.

Furthermore, the increased productivity associated with remote working can increase profitability even further. When companies can get more from their employees without using any extra resources, the additional revenue equates to inflated profits.

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The most successful companies typically hire the best talent. For businesses that have the resources, this may mean offering costly relocation packages to new hires or prospective candidates.

Additionally, companies may open new office locations around the

world in a bid to expand their services and attract the highest calibre of candidates.

Now that employees can work remotely, however, there are no geographical limitations in terms of who companies can hire or where candidates are based. With no need to relocate, employees can climb the career ladder free from constraints, and businesses can hire staff based solely on talent, experience and expertise.

Employees who are permitted to work from home are usually keen to retain what's seen as a 'privilege' or a 'perk'. As such, these workers are incentivised to work hard in order to show that they can operate effectively while working remotely. As a result, businesses benefit from the increased focus employees bring to the table.

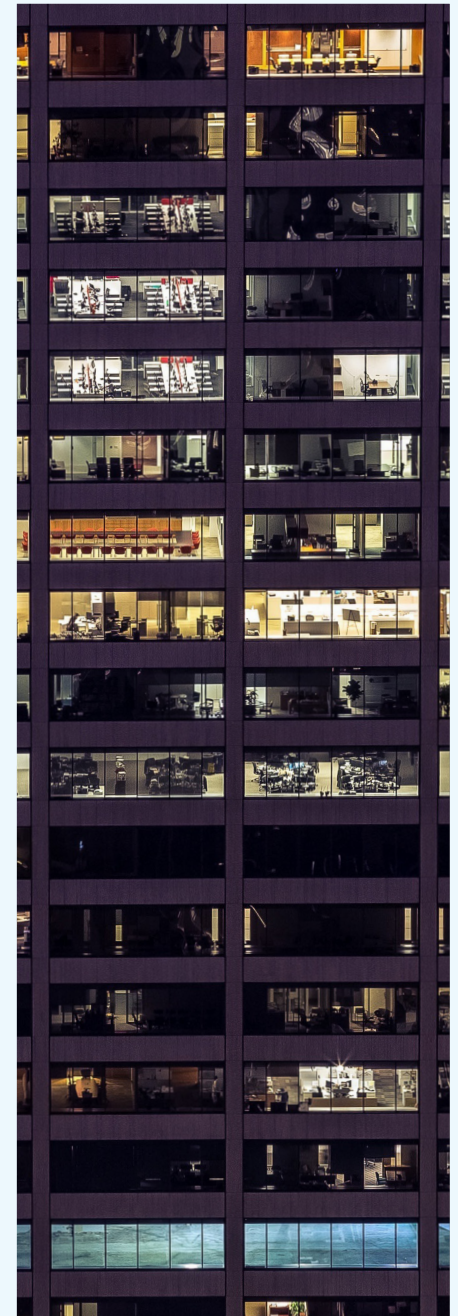
With lower costs, increased productivity, an unlimited pool of potential workers and a highly motivated workforce, remote working is as attractive to companies as it is to employees. While concerns regarding the disruption of company culture or the costs of implementing remote working arrangements have previously led companies to shy away from homeworking contracts, it appears that 2020 has transformed

the way business managers think too.

As businesses were forced to either suspend trading or adapt to remote working in light of the COVID-19 restrictions, CEOs, managers and owners have seen first-hand just how effective remote teams can be. When forced to find innovative solutions, businesses found that implementing remote working arrangements was far easier than expected. What's more – the use of technology has enabled companies to integrate fast, secure and seamless remote working platforms into their infrastructure.

While most firms will continue to have a skeleton staff on-site, the benefits of homeworking for businesses are likely to affect the way companies operate in the future.

With many businesses already confirming that they are transitioning away from traditional working models, it appears that companies are eager to reap the benefits of homeworking for as long as possible.



How to Implement Remote Working

When the nationwide lockdown restrictions were announced, businesses were forced to adapt quickly. For many, this meant introducing new platforms and programs overnight.

While some firms had an existing infrastructure in place, this typically had to be scaled up in record time to facilitate the sudden switch to homeworking on a massive scale.

As businesses begin to embrace homeworking on a permanent basis, however, many are looking for strategic ways to implement or enhance their remote working practices. Some companies may develop their remote working platforms more extensively, for example, whereas others may choose to introduce digital monitoring.

For most companies, the primary concern regarding homeworking is the technological infrastructure. Although the technology to facilitate remote working has been around for some time, many firms will need to upgrade their infrastructure or incorporate new software in order to operate seamlessly.

Fortunately, the technology already exists and is readily available, which means businesses needn't waste any time when

it comes to optimising a digital infrastructure. From enhanced cybersecurity to cloud servers, companies can rely on a suite of programs, a range of mobile devices and advice from experienced IT professionals to facilitate effective homeworking.

One area of homeworking that's often overlooked, however, is the environment that people are working in. While many people enjoy working from home, there's no guarantee that an employee's home is well-suited to the demands of their role.

Some may not have a spare room, they can designate as a home office, for example, whilst others may not have access to a desk or a laptop with an up to date operating system.

With both employees and employers eager to reap the benefits of remote working, it's essential that this aspect of homeworking is addressed. If employees do not have a stimulating and safe environment to work in, then companies may be forced to insist they return to the office. By creating a homeworking implementation strategy, however, businesses can continue to allow staff to work from home.

Why is a Home Office Important?

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Whether you're based in an office or at home, your working environment has a major impact on your health and productivity.

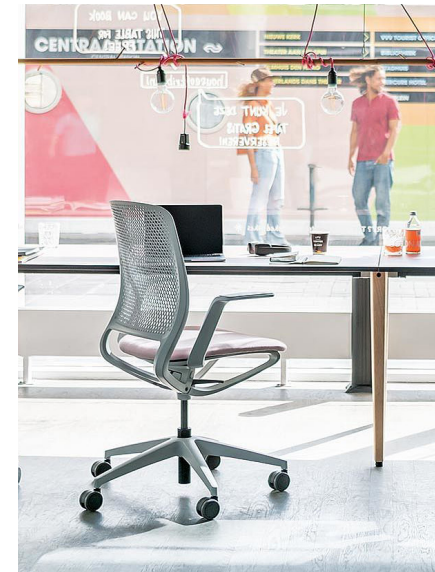
Sitting hunched over a coffee table or working at a breakfast bar for long periods of time is associated with a high risk of developing musculoskeletal problems. Indeed, a considerable number of homeworkers do report higher rates of neck or back pain than office-based staff.

Creating a home office enables employees to designate a workspace in their home. With a permanent place to work from home, staff can set up their equipment in such a way that provides them with the physical support they need. Furthermore, a dedicated

workspace allows employees to separate their home and work lives, which is essential for their well-being.

While companies cannot magically create extra space for employees who are working from home, they can play an active role in helping staff to establish a productive and safe working environment within their homes. What's more – employers are required to do this by law.

As an employer, you're going to be well aware of the importance of maintaining a healthy and safe working environment. However, not all employers realise that this extends to the working environment of homeworkers too. Although you won't necessarily be required to set up a full home office for every member of staff, you do have a duty to ensure that homeworkers can operate safely.



In addition to meeting your statutory obligations, making sure that employees have the equipment they need is good for business. When employees don't have access to appropriate office furniture, for example, their increased risk of ill health can have a detrimental impact on staff absence rates. Similarly, productivity levels can fall when staff don't have access to the equipment they need or are physically uncomfortable. By making sure that staff are well-equipped when working from home, you are effectively enabling them to maximise their productivity and, therefore, your company's profitability.

How to Optimise Remote Teams

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In ‘[The Impact of Physical Environments on Wellbeing](#)’, Public Health England confirmed that an employee’s surroundings affect their motivation, interaction and job satisfaction.

Similarly, research has shown that office furniture has a considerable impact on productivity.

To date, the majority of studies on workplace environments and wellbeing have focused on office-based staff and sites. As homeworking becomes more commonplace, however, the lessons learned regarding the importance of a healthy working environment are being adapted to remote settings.

While companies will inevitably need to focus on technological infrastructure and adaptive management styles when introducing homeworking strategies, the importance of creating healthy home working environments should not be overlooked. If businesses want their staff to remain healthy, happy, productive and loyal, then providing them with the equipment they need is essential.

For firms that want to optimise their remote teams, there is one critical factor that should be a top priority: the office chair.

The vast majority of people who work from home do so using a desktop computer or laptop.

This means that most homeworkers will use a desk and chair for extended periods of time. As we know, poorly designed or unmaintained office furniture can cause a multitude of problems, including physical and mental illness. What’s more – companies could be liable for any injuries or illnesses homeworkers experience due to a poor working environment.

If companies want to reap the financial and practical benefits of remote teams, it’s vital that they take their responsibility to homeworkers seriously. By asking employees to carry out risk assessments, for example, businesses can take action to ensure that staff have the equipment they need to work from home safely.

Finding the Right Office Chairs for Homeworkers



When it comes to finding the right office chair, there are lots of factors to consider. Individual preferences and health issues will have an impact on what level of physical support an employee needs to receive from their office chair, for example.

Traditionally, companies could establish which office chairs met their needs and make accommodations for individual employees with specific requirements. This was based on the fact that office desks or furniture tend to be designed to the same height. When companies choose an office furniture suite, for example, the majority of desks or workspaces will be created to the same specifications.

When staff are working from home, however, they will be operating from a variety of different environments. Some may have an office desk situated in a spare room, while others may use a bureau, coffee table or dining table as their workspace. Employees will, therefore, need to account for these discrepancies and provide a wider range of options when it comes to seating for homeworkers.

Although this is an additional issue companies will need to address, it is an easy one to overcome. By using a specialist furniture company to access a range of office chairs and other equipment, businesses can ensure their employees have the tools they need to work from home safely. As well as meeting your statutory duty, this is an easy, efficient and cost-effective way to maintain a productive and healthy workforce.

What Does the Future of Work Look Like?

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have a long-lasting impact on the way we work. With millions of people now accustomed to working from home and major firms supporting the transition to homeworking, we can expect to see flexible working arrangements becoming far more common in the future.

Many companies have already announced their intention to retain homeworking arrangements until at least 2021, while some have confirmed a permanent transition towards more homeworkers and fewer office-based staff.

While employees may have been willing to make do with hastily arranged home office environments at the start of lockdown, an increasing number of staff will want more practical support from their employers if they continue to work from home.

By taking a strategic approach to homeworking now, companies can address the needs of their staff and avoid dissatisfaction amongst their workforce. As technology continues to evolve, businesses continue to increase profitability, and the UK workforce continues to enjoy an enhanced work-life balance, it appears that homeworking will be an integral part of the future.

Facilitate Effective Homeworking with Portsdown

At Portsdown, we understand the importance of creating a motivating, functional workspace. Whether your teams are working on-site or from home, we can help to build stimulating, motivating and safe working environments. From office layouts to home offices, our experience and expertise ensure we're well-placed to deliver the information, products and services you require.

Working closely with managers and business owners, we assess your homeworking strategy and formulate a standard product list to fit your employee's needs and your company's budget. Following selection and approval, our dedicated staff will deliver, install and optimise the equipment so that it's comfortable, safe and fit for purpose.

However, we don't stop there. With a minimum of 5-year warranty on all office chairs, you can ensure that your homeworking strategy will deliver long-term gains. While our staff will ensure that office chairs are installed to suit each employee's individual home office setup, we also implement standardisation across the range. This means that the chair can be redistributed, recalibrated and reused if an employee leaves your team or works from a different location in the future.

With leasing available, our office furniture management services are suitable for companies of all sizes; From SMEs, Councils, & University to multinational corporations, our specialist approach to office furniture makes it easy to introduce and optimise homeworking for your business.

To find out more or to discuss your homeworking strategy in more detail, get in touch with a member of our team today.

Contact us now on 023 92 210881 or 01223 653092

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