

Future of work

Opportunities through disruption: boosting productivity in times of change

What can businesses learn from the responses of four major employers to the different needs of today's dynamic workforce?



Developed with support and input from:

 Hitachi Capital (UK) PLC


England


RNIB


SAINT-GOBAIN


BLUE
DOOR
INSIGHTS

Introduction: The employer opportunity

In March 2021, O₂ released Creating a dynamic workforce – a major study that demonstrated how the needs and expectations of employees have dramatically changed since the global pandemic. But what do the findings mean for employers?

Our report reveals the ways that people now want to work and what this could mean for individual productivity. It focuses on employee findings, introduces the definition of today's 'dynamic workforce' and identifies seven new workplace personas – each with different needs. These preferences are reframing how employers should look to boost productivity. They also need considering to avoid the risk of passing up opportunities to attract and retain talent.

In this follow-up report, we wanted to give employers insights into how to respond to the needs of a dynamic workforce. We interviewed four O₂ customers that are major employers across a variety of industry verticals, covering public, private and charity sectors.

What can we learn from their responses? Despite different approaches, our employers point to the need to find a balance between the needs of individuals and the needs of the organisation. Like helping people be productive through empathy, information and the right tools to do their jobs – while looking ahead to what's in store for the business when we're all back to some kind of 'business as usual'. The responses in this report provide useful guidance for UK organisations looking to boost productivity at a time of economic uncertainty and changing attitudes to work-life balance among employees.

Creating a dynamic workforce covered five key topics for employers to consider:

- 1 Reframing productivity**
Responding to a changing world
- 2 Where we are and where we're going**
Employee issues during the pandemic and shifting ways of working
- 3 The new, dynamic workforce**
The seven different workforce personas and their needs
- 4 People and productivity**
Where, how and when people want to work and what they now expect from work
- 5 Getting it right vs. getting it wrong**
The potential pitfalls or productivity gains from employer responses

We'd like to thank our customers, Hitachi Capital, NHS England, the RNIB and Saint-Gobain for their contributions to this paper.



1

Reframing productivity: Has the corporate mindset shifted at all?

Despite the economic downturn attributed to the pandemic, there are signs of optimism and opportunities for growth.¹

To take advantage, the original report highlights how employers must switch from 'survival mode' towards sustainable operations. A new era of workplace and workforce flexibility looks like the way forward.

So how have some employers responded?

Hitachi Capital

"The last 12 months made us all realise that working from home does work. IT, HR and Ops have been speaking much more than ever before."

NHS England

"The pandemic accelerated our three-year plan to three months. And we've seen a much stronger link between IT and organisational strategy."

Saint-Gobain

"We've had an exec call every morning to keep reactions fast. Our focus has been on what we can do to keep our customers' businesses going and keep our colleagues safe and well."

RNIB

"We recognise that the needs of the people we serve have changed. These changing behaviours impact our organisational activities and we have ramped up our digital resources."

¹ The Guardian - Signs of optimism and opportunities for growth

2

Where we are and where we're going: Is there scope for you to improve productivity?

The pandemic forced most organisations to spend money and resources meeting government guidelines for keeping people safe while maintaining some form of business continuity.

Employees invested time and effort in adapting too. They also realised that different ways of working may suit them better in the future. And the research highlights how happier employees, working the way they want, can lead to higher levels of productivity. So, how have employers adapted to the new needs of this dynamic workforce?



R N I B

"Our key focus throughout the pandemic was staff wellbeing. From the beginning, we were doing anything we could to protect our people's financial, physical and emotional wellbeing.

"We supported wellbeing through a dedicated team and provided resources. Like an advice line and support for home schooling or exercise sessions."

We introduced 'Wellbeing Nibbles' to keep people connected with the organisation as well as initiatives for contact time between individual staff.

"We moved the entire telephone advice team to remote working and set them up online within five working days. The sessions they provided covered topics of particular concern, like resilience, mindfulness and anxiety. We used staff surveys and also created safe spaces for people to discuss issues.

"On a corporate level, we merged some business functions for flexibility and also to get necessary items over the line. We had done business continuity planning previously but had no plans for a pandemic. So we quickly established a major incident response team and this has allowed us to maintain a very focused approach."



"The highest score we received recently on our employee engagement survey was 96% for how well the company had managed the pandemic."

Taking things forward, our Business Continuity Community still meets twice a week. They provide recommendations to our Executive Committee from the ground up.

"We also asked our people about their needs and working from home.

From a technical perspective, our infrastructure was not originally architected to support everyone from home. However the pandemic coincided with a planned network upgrade and we addressed VPN and legacy bandwidth limitations very quickly, before colleagues were sent home. We switched everyone from desktops to laptops. This meant that all colleagues were productive, enabled the company to support government advice to work from home, and also sets us up for hybrid working in the future, with no further investment.

We were actually going through a Windows 10 upgrade but the big change was moving from SME-grade to enterprise-grade infrastructure. That has helped us adapt to changing government advice."

3

The new, dynamic workforce: What do people's current preferences mean for your workplace?

Responses to the employee survey identified what the workplace means to different people.

Based on these needs, there were three major categories of employee: Office Cravers, Mixers and Home Dwellers. More insightful was that the survey also revealed subsets of these categories as there were, in fact, seven different workplace personas:



Office Cravers

Career Starters | Command & Controllers



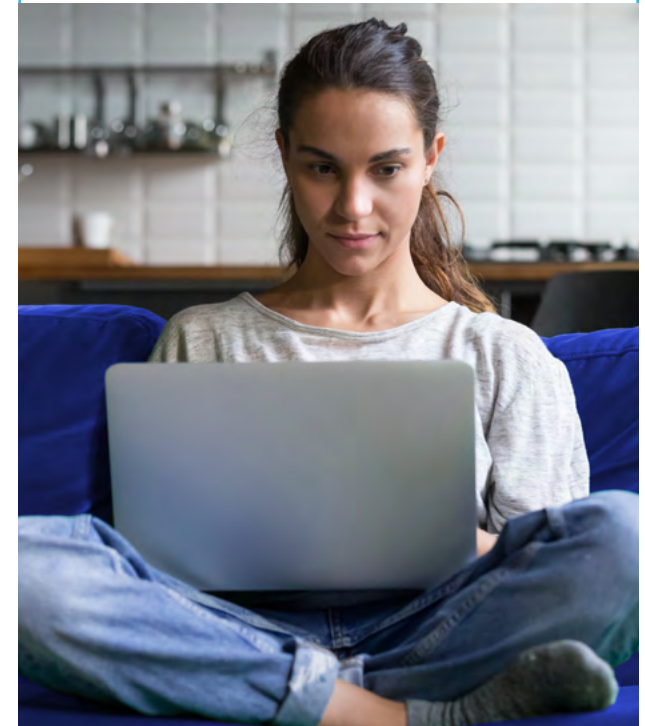
Mixers

Nomads | Socialisers | Planners



Home Dwellers

Hobbyists | Homebodies



How have employers approached this workforce diversity?

NHS England

"We see the hybrid middle zone [Mixers] actually as different activities and priorities. For example, hybrid workers may want to stay at home to send emails but come in to the office for meetings. We've started the conversation about these personas and recognise that people may migrate between them throughout their career or even on a day-by-day basis. So we're using personas to help us plan at an organisational, rather than personal, level."

Hitachi Capital

"Some people like the segmentation that the office provides between work and home life. Those with children appreciate the flexibility of working from home. But there are times when the boundary between work and home life gets blurred. It's nice not to have to commute. But that time can get taken up with work instead. For anyone who lives a long way from the office, working from home has saved a lot of time. But for the Office Cravers group, it might just be that expectations need to be reset. Was it the office they remember or the social side of things?"

RNIB

"I think for the first time we've properly listened to our staff and had a much deeper interaction with them. We've put a lot more into training and development. The shift to working from home has allowed us to spend more quality time on things. Rather than rushing from one geographical location to another."

Saint-Gobain

"Some are drawn to the Planner persona, while others lean more towards working in the office than at home. But that office could be a branch rather than HQ. It really depends on your role. For example, as a leader, you often need to be close to your team. You need to get that face-to-face time and body language feedback. For those who have joined since the start of the pandemic, it has been hard. Being in an office is better for learning the culture and operational side of the organisation."

4

People and productivity: How can you balance what's right for people and for business?

Balancing individual and organisational need remains crucial to a productive organisation. To help people work from anywhere, the technology must be in place to enable them to do so.

Where they work and the time of day they're allowed to work to complete their tasks also have an impact on organisational arrangements and individual productivity.

What have our employers seen in terms of how, where and when people want to work? Are there any new demands from their staff? Why does listening to people's preferences make a difference to both the individual and the organisation as a whole?



Hitachi Capital (UK) PLC

"Our focus shifted to being all about employee safety and their mental health while continuing to provide a service to our customers.

"What is more complex is the type of flexibility that people want. For example, the company might still determine office days versus work-from-home days. But we're actively exploring systems to help operationalise this. Like how do you know you'll have a desk or a parking space and that the colleagues you need will be there too?

"We've provided lots of kit – like monitors and chairs – to people working from home. We're also thinking about what life will be like in the future. One big area of focus has been how to create collaboration opportunities, especially face to face.

"It's easy to establish discrete mini 'social bubbles' at an individual team level, but harder to extend that sense of belonging to the wider community. This is the challenge for maintaining a company culture without being face to face."

We think that flexibility will be fundamental moving forward. We've already had feedback through recruitment on this. Especially about working hours and location.

"We've always had a focus on mentoring and these programmes have continued. We're also looking at new types of training on different skills and industrialising training. Like using IT or self-service tools. This is all about futureproofing the organisation and protecting employees by upskilling them. Traditionally, we did a lot of classroom training. Technology broadens that training so people can prepare for a job that doesn't exist today.

"We've also put in place a new system for in-the-moment feedback – both for employees and customers. We can link it to lifecycle events like promotion. The highest scorer on this at present is the new starter experience. We've had lots of verbal feedback on managers taking the time to ensure new starters have a good experience."



"We're giving employees a choice about their base and this just needs collaboration between departments to make sure there's a balance.

"We've looked at how we can support better wifi in people's homes. We've also shifted to cloud-based collaboration using Microsoft Teams and Miro among other tools. We've tried to ensure devices are easy to use and appropriate. Everyone has core technology items and these are supplemented with peripheral items for wellbeing.

"We also make reasonable adjustments in specific cases, like for health reasons. All of our laptops have built-in remote access so people can get into corporate systems as if they were in the office. We see this as our corporate responsibility.

A mouse, keyboard and screen aren't really peripherals. They're part of the core IT offer. And we're keen to make sure that is a Day One offer for all new starters so no one needs to gradually acquire this stuff.

"Our long-term aim is to support Bring Your Own Device (for example, through eSIMs) or people customising devices. Self-service IT is a key next step and cloud-first IT management will help us control devices and keep everyone secure. Our previous reliance on perimeter security limited greater collaboration across the NHS. So we're moving to application and device security.

"We've achieved better collaboration on Microsoft Teams than when offices were on the same floor. Some meetings will still need to be face to face. But we now have more collaborative ways of working driven by technology changes. And we can do the majority of our meetings remotely – including training, workshops and brainstorming.

"We're also moving away from the 9-5 to more flexible, outcome-based work. Some offices need core hours but people still have greater flexibility and can rely on greater automation.

"The future of work for us is about each member of staff working to their best ability. This includes looking after their health and wellbeing and knowing people will be better treated because they have similar working conditions to others. While some staff do lack a dedicated workspace at home, they know they can still come into the office.

"Belonging and ownership had traditionally been about these physical locations. One of the ways we see that you can bring some of that back is through CSR-type activities, like pride in what we're doing for the environment. Overall, we were surprised at how well people have adapted."

R N I B

Feedback proves that people feel more connected and engaged with the organisation despite remote working. They have made a proactive and more intentional effort, while resources and new ideas have kept teams engaged.

"We've also focused on the fairness of IT provision. With home working, we've talked about using 4G and 5G connectivity to offer more flexibility. As an organisation, we've also felt more equal on Microsoft Teams. Especially for visually impaired colleagues. It has equalised the meeting process in terms of 'reading the room' and also equalised regions."



We surveyed employees to understand how they would like to work. Employees who said they need to be in all the time will be given a set desk. Employees who want a hybrid setup also have guidance on when they can come in. All of this was published last year so that everyone knows the plan.

"Some office leases have not been renewed. We've restructured a building that was retained to better suit hybrid working. It has a handful of meeting rooms, pod spaces for collaboration and no more offices for the exec team."

5

Getting it right vs. getting it wrong: What should you do to build on the positives?

Where people work. How people work. When people work. What people get from work. All of these factors positively or negatively affect productivity.

Almost half of the survey respondents (48%) said that they would be as, if not more, productive if they could work in their preferred way. Yet the worrying finding is that over a quarter (26%) of people said that they had applied for a new job because their employer could not accommodate a requested lifestyle change. Another one in five people (21%) said that they want to look elsewhere but the economic situation has stopped them doing so. Better wages are the number one factor for seeking a change. But what employers do (or don't do) in terms of perks, training and communication comes a close second.

So how has this influenced the employers?

Saint-Gobain

"There's always the risk that when things change, the competition makes the cutting-edge decisions. So we have used our success in managing the pandemic for our employees to support our employer brand."

NHS England

"We brought our Estates, CSR and HR departments together to drive a new strategy. And we're focused on reducing emissions with fewer work trips, commutes and offices."

RNIB

"We've made positive workplace changes to accommodate different staff needs and requests. Our employees have become more integral to creating these new arrangements."

Hitachi Capital

"There should be rocks in your foundation that always stay the same. During adversity, some people panic and want to change everything. We've kept a very firm focus on our values because that is what builds our culture and flows into our strategy and vision."



What's next?

We get that every business is different. But some of the examples of boosting productivity from Hitachi Capital, NHS England, Saint-Gobain and the RNIB can be applied to any organisation – big or small.

In many cases, it's as simple as listening to the diverse needs of your people. Then responding with ways to help them do their jobs that fit with how, when and where they can be most productive. And aligning this with the organisational culture and how the business can be most effective in the future.

At an organisational level, getting IT, HR and Ops together to formalise ways to respond will support a solid basis for the future. From partnering on providing the right productivity tools to offering flexible contracts and using new ways to measure productivity. This kind of continual collaboration can help you ride out economic uncertainty and set you up for longer-term success.

Thank you to the following organisations for participating:

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To help IT, HR and Ops create a flexible workplace to meet the needs of a dynamic workforce, we've provided a checklist of questions.

Take a look at the three key areas of consideration and how you can kick-start conversations about the future for your organisation.

Find out more about our employee research and what it means for the future of work: [Creating a dynamic workforce](#).

Talk to us about your digital workforce journey. Please [get in touch](#) or call us on **0800 955 5590**

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