The world of work is in a constant state of flux. But change has usually been slow over the centuries, taking years or decades rather than months or weeks. Every now and again, however, something really dramatic happens that changes things for ever. The Industrial Revolution. The railway. The motor car. The desktop computer. The internet.

Today, we are witnessing another of these seminal moments with the hybrid working phenomenon – where people can work either at home or in a local flexible workspace, with an occasional visit to the head office. We mustn’t underestimate the significance of what we are witnessing. In years to come, the ‘hybrid revolution’ will be recognised as every bit as important as anything that has gone before.

The original catalyst for this shift is the digital revolution, which started in the 1970s with the launch of the first personal computers. Today, digital technology puts into every white-collar worker’s hands all the tools they need to do their job. But it has only been in the last four or five years with advancements in technology that the shift towards hybrid working has gathered pace.

The office today is no longer a defined physical place. Rather, it is a digital construct. Often, data saved in the Cloud isn’t even in the same country as the staff accessing it.

So why should workers go to the effort and expense of dragging themselves into work to spend the day working on a device they have brought with them, and will take back home at the end of the day? While the Covid-19 pandemic is set to only be a temporary phenomenon, it’s clear that its effects on how millions of people work will be with us for good. And I say that if the massive acceleration we’re seeing in the uptake of hybrid working is the pandemic’s ultimate legacy, then at least part of its impact can be said to be positive.

First, millions no longer need to make a daily commute, slashing carbon emissions and helping us collectively drive our way to net zero. Then there is that parallel increase in the numbers of people working at or close to their homes in flexible workspaces, seeing more of their families and friends and doing more to support local economies and participate in their communities.

Companies are also benefiting from significant falls in their real estate costs, along with tangible productivity gains and an increased ability to attract the best talent no matter where they are located. Hybrid working is no longer a nice to have: more than 70% of candidates are now insisting that companies have a flexible work policy.

Firms have also come to realise that they no longer need a sea of desks in a single, expensive city-centre location. Instead they are reconfiguring their office footprint, bringing offices closer to their people and adopting the hub-and-spoke model.

Work in the future will be happening in the heart of local communities everywhere – cities and suburbs, towns and villages – and IWG’s focus is on providing local workplaces that people can access close to home, no matter where they live.

This is just the beginning of something truly era-defining that will have a tremendously positive impact on future generations, freeing so many up to lead less stressed and more enriched lives.

Offices are here to stay, but it is a new breed, the hybrid office, that will prevail.

Mark Dixon, Founder and CEO, IWG plc

HYBRID WORKING: AN ERA-DEFINING REVOLUTION

The Future of Work: a trends forecast for 2022
1. The ten trends shaping the future of work

2. About US$11,000 every year

3. From and live in completely different situations every day. By not

4. Organisations, as well as providing socio-economic uplift to people

5. A 'super commuter'.

6. Have a better work-life balance, while companies can recruit talent

7. Moving out of cities to more rural and coastal areas where they can

8. Workforce dispersion is happening within borders, too, for two main

9. Allows for people to work remotely both from home and local flexible

10. People to come together and collaborate, but the hybrid model also
The Future is Hybrid

Business Leaders’ Advice for the Year Ahead

Meet Your People’s Needs

“Hybrid work represents the biggest shift to how we work in our generation and it’s clear there is no single standard or blueprint for it. Every organisation’s approach will need to be different to meet the unique needs of their people. According to our research, the vast majority of employees say they need to have flexibility to work hybrid, yet at the same time also say they need more face to face collaboration and personal interaction.”

Satya Nadella, CEO, Microsoft

Give Them the Right Tools to do the Job

“In terms of tech, the big hybrid work experiment officially begins now. Digital infrastructure will continue to be the foundation for hybrid working going forward and there is an onus on organisations to provide the technological capabilities necessary to support their people. It is vital that organisations offer a range of collaboration tools and that there is a clear understanding of what they can do to enable people to work from anywhere, with the right security and trust.”

Chintan Patel, Chief Technologist, Cisco UK&I

Allow Them Workspace Flexibility

“Covid has helped us redefine how people work and who should come to an office, especially in countries such as India, where people can be stuck in traffic for three or four hours a day. We want to ensure employees have a place to work that is close to where they live. In the past, we would just go out and get a long-lease office with 50 or 100 seats, but flexibility is very important in this current environment and access to IWG flexspace gives us that.”

Arvind Kumar, Global Vice President, NTT Global Sourcing

Keep Them Happy

“At Avaya, we talk about ‘hybrid happiness’. Employees are happy when they can choose where to work, and their happiness leads to productivity, which is beneficial for the company. With our new hybrid model, employees can choose if they want to work side by side with the customers, meet the partners in one of our meeting rooms, spend a day with colleagues in the office or focus on a specific subject at home. The pandemic has shown that hybrid collaboration and home offices are here to stay.”

Ourania Odermatt, Managing Director, Avaya Switzerland and Austria

Our top six tips for the year ahead

1. Recognise the crucial importance of technology in the new world of work, and ensure you have systems in place to allow employees to work effectively from anywhere they are.
2. Take time to fully investigate the many potential sustainability benefits for your business associated with hybrid working.
3. Take advantage of the new ‘work from anywhere’ paradigm to widen your recruitment net in terms of both geography and diversity.
4. Invest in employee wellbeing, and make work/life balance a priority and a competitive advantage.
5. Explore suburban flexspace opportunities, with a view to reducing overheads and expensive leases.
6. Think of offices and coworking spaces as places to amplify your business culture, not just a place to work.

“One of the lasting legacies of the pandemic will be the ability to work in different ways, in different places – and more companies will have distributed workforces empowering their teams to work closer to or from home.”

Mark Dixon, Founder and CEO, IWG plc

To help your business navigate the new world of work, speak to IWG today