Returning to the Office Occupier Workshop Output Pack

5 May 2021

We are stronger when we move together

Henigan
consulting group

In partnership with **overbury**

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The sum of the parts is greater than the whole

01. Introduction

In May 2020 the HCG team run a series of occupier workshops to discuss and debate the key issues that all organisations were facing as a result of the global pandemic. At this time it was widely acknowledged amongst the participants that September seemed like a realistic date for a return to normality. Even the most pessimistic in the group would not have predicted that this would be September 2021 and what would happen in the year in between.

12 months on from those initial workshops and there is still uncertainty as to how people will work and the role the workplace will play going forward. Remote and hybrid models are being discussed but nothing has yet been tested, certainly in Europe. As a result we have run further workshops to discuss the more specific questions our clients are asking and brainstorm some of the issues that must be addressed in the coming months to enable our teams to return to the office. By partnering with Overbury we have been able to extend the network of occupiers invited to participate and the result is this summary of three workshops with 28 different organisations.

As we continue to learn together one workshop participant highlighted the challenge that we all face moving forward

"there is the view that we need to remain flexible and adaptable"

Implementing successful workplace change is an area where we have a strong track record and experience. Should you require further support beyond what is contained in this document then myself or one of the team would be more than happy to discuss this with you. Whether a quick conversation or the development and implementation of a full engagement plan we are committed to helping our clients transition to whatever their new normal becomes.

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01. Introduction

Participants

Representatives from 28 organisations participated in facilitated workshops to discuss key issues, share steps and measures they had or will be taking in the future. With thanks to the following organisations for their involvement:

- Arcadis
- AVEVA
- BACB
- Bacardi
- Bank of America
- British Library
- Citizens Advice
- Discover Inc
- EDF Trading
- EY
- Francis Crick Institute
- Frontier Economics
- Google
- Honeywell

- ITV
- Kantar
- Low Carbon Contracts Company
- Natwest Group
- NHS Property Services
- NHSX
- Ninety One
- Onfido
- Roche
- Royal Bank of Canada
- Stars Group
- Viacom CBS
- Willis Tower Watson
- XLN Telecon

Executive Summary

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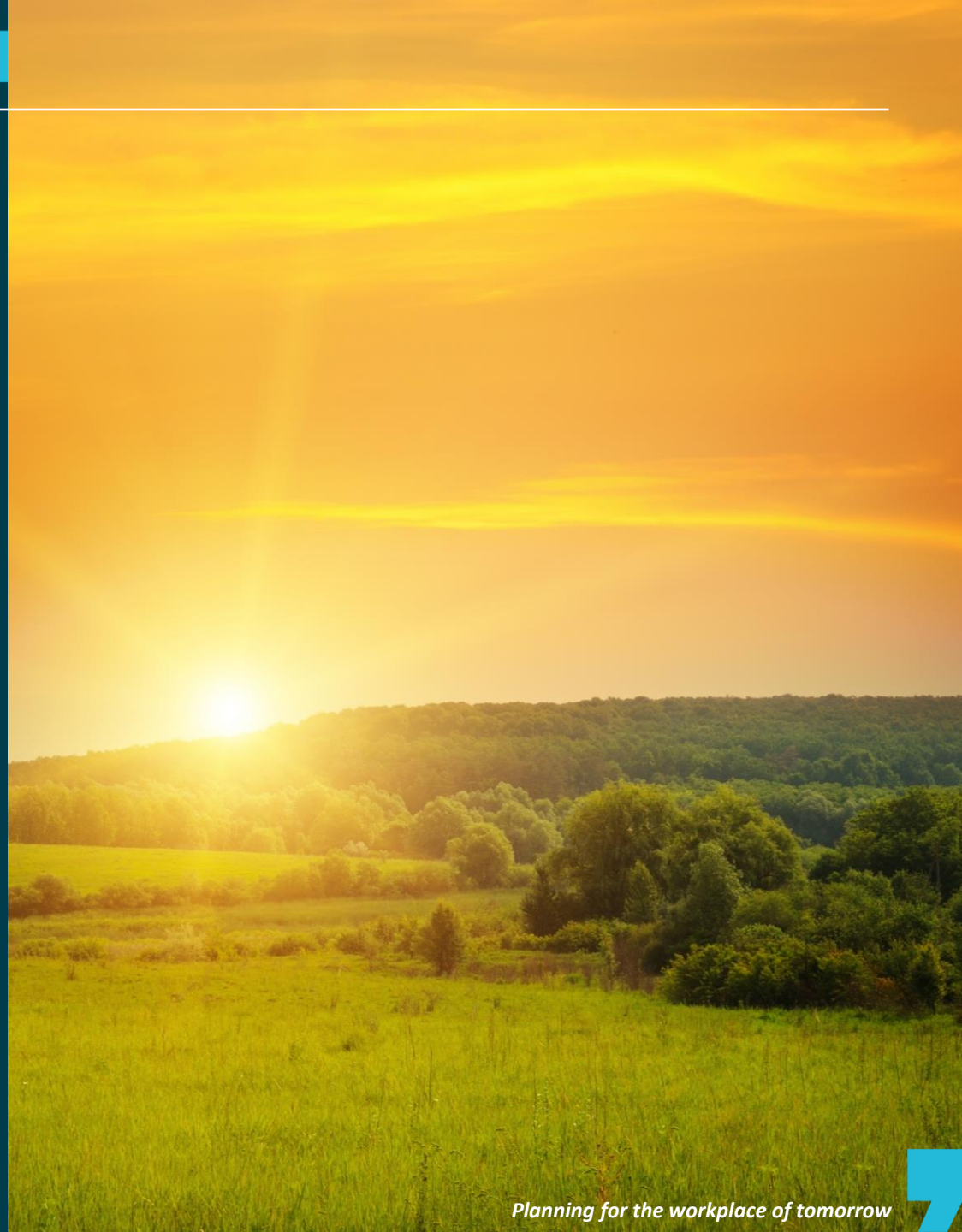
02. Executive Summary

This series of workshops have shown that there isn't a single methodology that will work for all. Each individual organisation is taking a subtly different approach based on their reach (national/ global), pre covid workplace strategy and importantly need/ desire to reduce cost. Regardless of approach it would seem that all organisations are engaging with their teams and colleagues on the future work model. This and other themes observed across multiple organisations are explained further below.

People Focus
Many organisations are considering cost implications and potential savings however the focus for most is making sure that staff can work effectively, that the workplace meets expectations and that staff health and wellbeing is being considered. Most are thinking about putting their people first and as part of this are carrying out engagement activities to inform future planning.

Pilot Mindset
The future way of working is still largely unknown and will need to be tested in a post pandemic world. One question raised in the workshops was "as we go back and enjoy the office again, will people's wish list of how often they want to be in the office change over time?" In response to these challenges many organisations are running/ planning pilot studies.

Pilot studies allow for implementing change to offices now, but give colleagues the comfort that the change is not set and is open for further change if required. They also give people some reassurance to see something physical is being progressed in terms of a 'solution'. Overall the message is that organisations are planning as much as they can but with caution for the ever-changing situation.

Single Employee Experience
One of the positives of the past 12 months has been the coming together of the HR, CRE/FM and IT teams to agree on future plans and protocols. It will continue to be important for these functions to remain on the same page and for this collaboration to become business as usual going forward. Most organisations have already started to provide equipment and/or a budget for IT equipment and furniture to support the remote working policies and contract changes that are being implemented. These initiatives should continue to be communicated through a single organisation voice.

Workplace Strategy
With many organisations predicting a reduction in staff numbers in the office, this has naturally led to a decisions to reduce the number of individual desks and a shift towards activity based working. With desks no longer at a 1:1 sharing ratio for some this involves a cultural shift. With an increase in hybrid meetings anticipated by all participants additional settings will be required to support these activities at an individual and team level and where practical and possible we are seeing the reduction in desks being a catalyst for the introduction of alternative settings as well as cost reduction. However it should be noted that 16% of respondents stated that their organisations will maintain a 1:1 desk sharing ratio, emphasising the diversity of responses to the new workplace. Unsurprisingly it was widely reported that there is less employee resistance to desk sharing when long term remote working is factored into the decision process.

One question raised was "if restrictions lifting/ vaccine confidence leads to a surge in office attendance in June, how confident is everyone that the interim plans will meet the needs of employees?" With a frequently shifting picture, it will be interesting to see if what staff want now from their workplace will change and adapt over the next 12 months.

02. Executive Summary

Workplace Culture & Behaviours

Meetings with a mix of people attending both in person and virtually are predicted to be common. This presents both opportunities and challenges to provide an equal experience for attendees from both locations. It was universally agreed that this will be the biggest challenge going forward, particularly where organisations have a limited budget to change the workplace and/or introduce new workplace settings. Developing and agreeing protocols and behaviours for where and how colleagues engage in calls and video conferencing will be key.

The question of whether the 'fear of missing out' will become a factor in having people returning to the office was also raised and is something that organisations should monitor going forward.

Booking Systems

Whilst over 60% of respondents stated that their organisation was considering or already has a desk booking system there is a big question mark over their long term use. One view was that they were already sharing desks without a booking system pre covid, so "why do we need one now? Challenges such as preventing ghost bookings and high costs are making some organisations hesitant to invest in new technology. However there are obvious benefits for using a system including managing peak points where space is reduced, providing employee certainty of finding a suitable setting to work at and ensuring teams can coordinate diaries and work together when in the office. This final point is of particular importance given the level of remote working that will take place. On balance it would seem that new booking systems should be piloted and tested prior to full investment.

Preparing for Day 1

03

Our return to the office must consider the new ways of working

03. Preparing for Day 1

As the country slowly starts to return to some normality most organisations have decided upon or are in the process of developing a strategy for getting staff back into the office. It was clear from our conversations that this is an ongoing process and will remain under review.

Workplace planning

The poll showed that half of the workshop participants have agreed on a plan and have already started the implementation. Organisations have been working to build a framework and structure with the aim of gradually bringing people back to the office as both Government guidelines and staff comfort levels allow.

Many organisations are considering cost implications and potential savings however the focus for most is making sure that staff can work effectively, that the workplace meets expectations and that staff health and wellbeing is being considered. Most are thinking about putting their people first and as part of this are carrying out engagement activities to inform future planning. Several have carried out staff surveys, collecting data to better understand staff expectations. It was reported that the survey results have shown that a hybrid model is preferred by most.

Pilot studies

From the poll, we can see that a third of organisations are in the process of implementing an interim plan. For some this involves carrying out a pilot study. Pilot studies allow for implementing change to offices now, but they give people the comfort that the change is not set and is open for further change if required. There was the view that it also gives people some reassurance to see something physical is being progressed in terms of a 'solution'. This is particularly relevant for organisations who are seeing some frustration from teams around an absence of a fully formed plan. For some, one of the challenges to overcome is getting people into the office to be able to carry out the pilot study.

United approach

One of the positives of the past 12 months has been the coming together of the HR, CRE/FM and IT teams to agree on future plans and protocols. It will continue to be important for these functions to remain on the same page.

The employee experience has now transformed from being just the workplace to the whole work experience including working from home. Creating a positive work experience is even more important than before in helping to attract and retain staff. HR teams in all organisations are now having to consider amending contracts, flexible working policies and allowances for a kit including IT equipment.

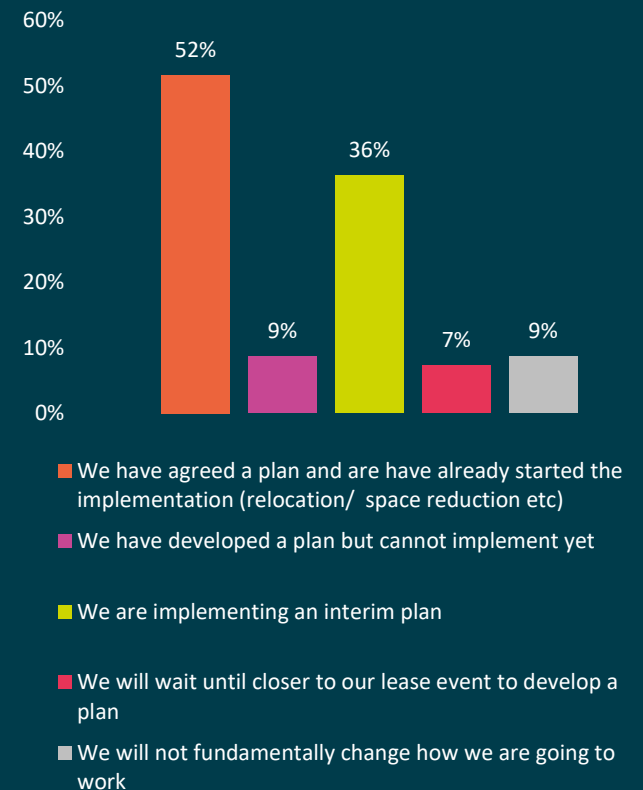**Where is your organisation in its post covid workplace planning?**

- We have agreed a plan and are have already started the implementation (relocation/ space reduction etc)
- We have developed a plan but cannot implement yet
- We are implementing an interim plan
- We will wait until closer to our lease event to develop a plan
- We will not fundamentally change how we are going to work

Figure 2: Results of workshop poll: workplace planning

03. Preparing for Day 1

Space utilisation

Some organisations had already implemented desk sharing prior to the pandemic. With the prediction of a reduction in staff numbers in the office, this has naturally led to a decision for the majority to reduce the number of individual desks. With desks no longer at a 1:1 sharing ratio for some this involves a cultural shift. Organisations are working to best understand if the office they have provides adequate space to support the new way of working, particularly ensuring that there is sufficient space for informal and collaboration areas.

Several organisations have already started the process of zoning floor plans for different activities. There is a general awareness and agreement for the need for more individual booths to allow for virtual meetings. One question raised was "if restrictions lifting/ vaccine confidence leads to a surge in office attendance in June, how confident is everyone that the interim plans will meet the needs of employees?" With a frequently shifting picture, it will be interesting to see if what staff want now from their workplace will change and adapt over the next 12 months.

Equality of experience

Meetings with a mix of people attending both in person and virtually are predicted to be common. This hybrid style of a meeting presents both opportunities and challenges to provide an equal experience for attendees from both locations.

One method some organisations are trying means that even if a group of people are together in the office they each dial into the call individually aiming to keep the experience equal for those who are joining remotely. Some believe that when people join the meeting individually there is better interaction, everyone has a better opportunity to speak and there isn't room for participants to hide behind others.

One member of the group raised the question of whether the 'fear of missing out' will become a factor in having people returning to the office. This might not just be for the social side but for people who are dialling into meetings when colleagues are in the office, this could push people to return and attend in person. To help provide an equal meeting experience it will be important that expectations are clear and to establish protocols.

"If restrictions lifting/ vaccine confidence leads to a surge in office attendance in June, how confident is everyone that the interim plans will meet the needs of employees?"

03. Preparing for Day 1

Regional considerations

Many organisations have offices in multiple locations and are facing the challenge of trying to find some global consistency. Lease events are different for each locations and there are considerations from a HR point of view in regards to contracts and legislations in each country.

Another point raised was the differences between regional offices whereby many staff can drive to work and therefore feel safer compared to London (or other metro locations) offices where staff are required to use public transport. To help with this some organisations have offered flexible start and finish times.

We know that there's unlikely to be a one size fits all solution. Cultural differences globally may mean remote/hybrid working works differently in different countries.

Change management

As well as the workplace design many agreed that we also need to focus on staff protocols, behaviours and etiquettes. Many offices now have a variety of spaces and settings but communication is needed around the best way to use each of these.

One key challenge raised was calendar management and the issue of now having to plan and manage diaries to be in an appropriate place for video calls and then to move to a different space for collaboration work.

For some organisations the past 12 months has fast-tracked an agile approach and has also accelerated the use of technologies. This means adapting to new ways of working and embracing new approaches and tools.

Continuous review and learning

One question raised in the workshops was "as we go back and enjoy the office again, will people's wish list of how often they want to be in the office change over time?" It appears that some organisations are hesitant to make big changes to their office and would prefer to see how a hybrid model will work overtime. What people say now could change again so there is the view that we need to remain flexible and adaptable. Overall the message from our attendees was that they are planning as much as they can but with caution for the ever-changing situation.
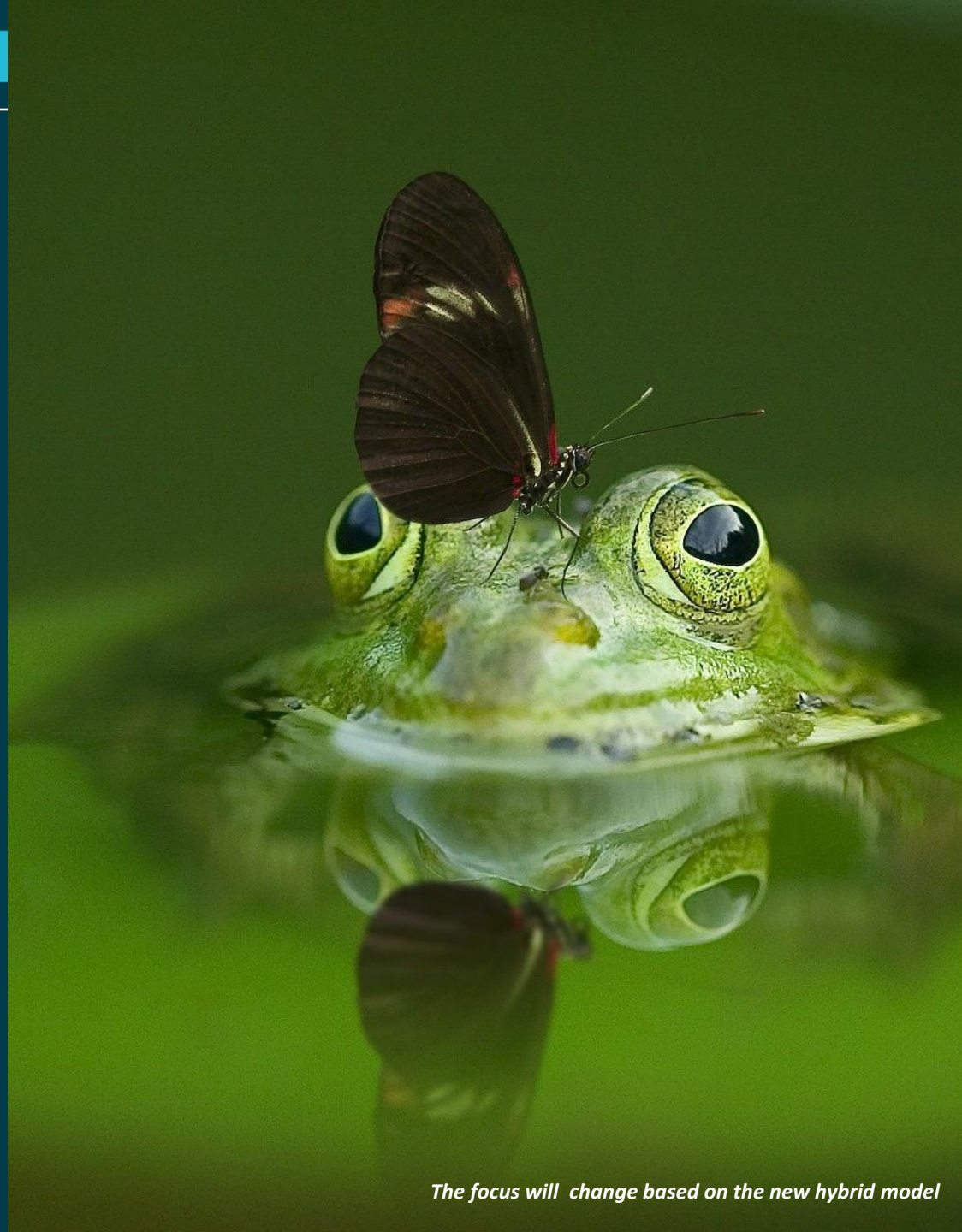
"As people go back and enjoy the office again, will the wish list of how often they want to be in the office change over time?"

"there is the view that we need to remain flexible and adaptable"

A New Strategy

04

The focus will change based on the new hybrid model

04. A New Strategy?

A combination of cost savings and employee expectations is driving many organisations to include an element of remote working as part of their long term strategy. Making sure organisations retain their talent is a driver to create the best possible workplace experience. Organisations are working towards a balance of employee choice, for staff to feel supported and enabled but also ensuring business needs are met.

Workplace settings
We are seeing an overall shift towards activity-based working for many. To support this way of working the right mix of settings is required. Our workshop poll identified that half of the participants were considering a reduction in their office space whilst others weren't considering a space reduction but re-allocation of some desk space to collaborative settings.

Many are adopting more agile ways of working which has helped encourage organisations to create the best environments they can. Many have been through a process of engaging with the business to find out future requirements before deciding on any works to the space. After consulting with the staff they can then adapt the office space to meet these new and changing requirements.

It was reported that there are offices with more desks than people which has enabled staff to be spaced out in response to covid.

However, most people realise that if they want to work remotely some of the time they can't have a fixed desk. For some desk sharing isn't always acceptable at the current time, a good cleaning regime will help to provide staff with some confidence in sharing a desk with others.

By reallocating desk space other settings can be provided including single-person booths, smaller meeting spaces and team spaces. One workshop participant reported that they had already made changes to the workplace creating neighbourhoods ready for when staff return. Each neighbourhood will act as its own pilot study. Whereas others are still working to understand the best desk ratio and if any space reductions can be made. There was a consistent view that more collaboration spaces will be valuable.

Work environment
There is the argument that with remote working, an appropriate set up will be required at both homes and the office.

Some organisations have already started to provide equipment including screens, desks and task chairs. One approach has been to allow a budget for staff to expense kit, another method discussed was to provide a list of equipment staff can request. One organisation shared that they are now looking into folding desks and chairs for people with a lack of space at home to be able to help cater for everyone.
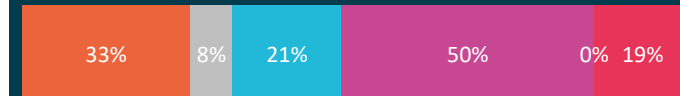
What elements are your organisation considering?

| 53% | 36% | 41% | 48% | 9% | 20% |
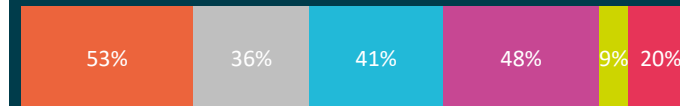
What elements have your organisation agreed?

| 37% | 25% | 44% | 37% | 0% | 28% |
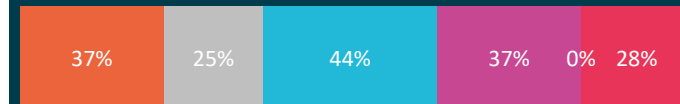
What elements did your organisation already have in place?

| 33% | 8% | 21% | 50% | 0% | 19% |

- ■ Reduction in office space
- ■ Core days for particular teams/ work patterns
- ■ Deferring your decisions and commit to new plans once you have seen how work patterns settle
- ■ No space reduction but re-allocation of some desk space to collaborative settings
- ■ Full time mandatory home/ remote working
- ■ Partial mandatory home/ remote working

Figure 3: Results of workshop poll: workplace planning

Booking or Checking In

05

Having a space in the office is a big issue for many employees

05. Booking or Checking In

One of the big questions for every organisation is "how should we manage days in the office?" Some are already introducing a booking system, some are considering carrying out a pilot using an app and others would prefer not to implement one at all. The workshop poll showed that 57% of organisations want the ability to book an individual desk in an agreed neighbourhood/team zone. 43% would like the ability to book a space for a team as well. The feedback from the group was that staff have requested flexibility and a booking tool could support this. Interestingly 16% said they will retain a 1:1 ratio.

Opportunities

A booking system would provide the ability to see which spaces are available prior to travelling to the office, guarantee a desk. One view was that it's not about which desk you will sit at but knowing who else is coming into the office at the same time. This would be useful to be able to manage diaries and plan face to face meetings.

We want to encourage teams to be in the office together for those across the desk conversations, collaboration and team-building activities. Having the technology to be able to book a space to ensure a team can sit together will help with this.

There is also a benefit in being able to book a space for a project team. These would be spaces for groups to book out for kick-off meetings, collaboration work and brainstorming activities. One suggestion was for a booking system to be used for desks and formal and informal collaboration spaces.

With this, there would also be a need to ensure some spaces are non-bookable for drop-ins and last-minute meetings.

Occupancy data

Another key opportunity for using a booking system in the office is to collect data insights into how space is being used. The data would tell us how many people are in the building and which spaces they are choosing to use the most. The booking application could ask people to tick a box that provides the reason for coming into the office e.g. for a meeting or quiet work.

The data collected would help to inform future strategies and allow us to be able to continue learning and understanding changes over time.

Challenges

Many would prefer not to use a booking system. One view was that they were already sharing desks without a booking system pre covid, so "why do we need one now?

One of the challenges of using a booking system is preventing ghost bookings. A suggested solution was to use sensors to detect if people show up. Another challenge is the need to keep some flexibility, this is so that if a meeting comes up last minute or if plans change this can be catered for.

Some organisations are hesitant to invest in new technologies. There is the view that over time the situation will normalise and there won't be a need to use a booking system.
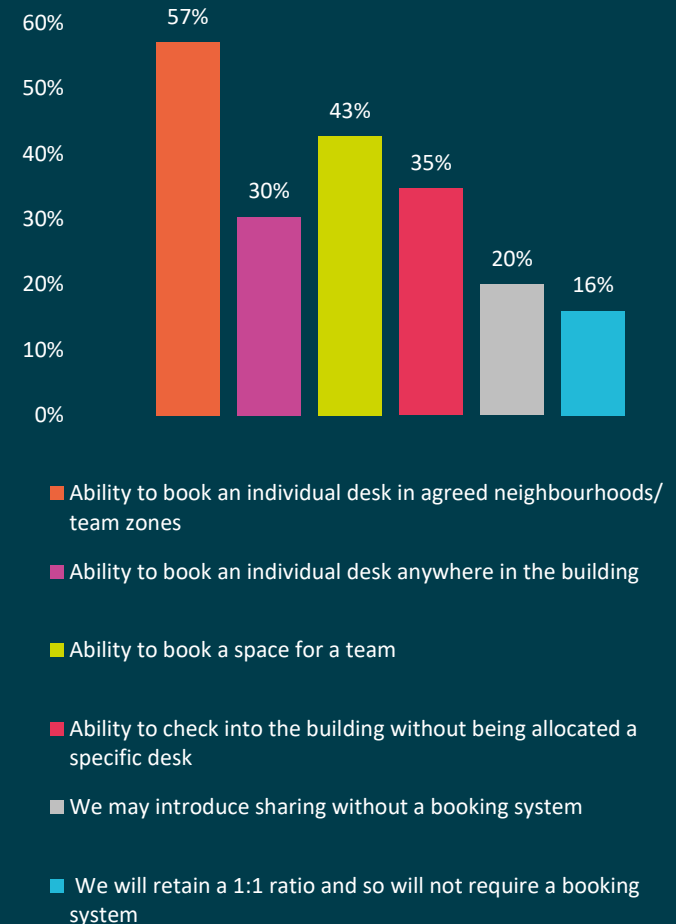
Which elements are important to you?

- Ability to book an individual desk in agreed neighbourhoods/ team zones
- Ability to book an individual desk anywhere in the building
- Ability to book a space for a team
- Ability to check into the building without being allocated a specific desk
- We may introduce sharing without a booking system
- We will retain a 1:1 ratio and so will not require a booking system

Figure 4: Results of workshop poll: booking or checking in

Thank you

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