



**ONE TEAM
MAKING
IT WORK**

The New Office

**A View from the Mid-Market Tech
Sector**



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1. Introduction

At the end of March 2020, we all started to realise the full threat of the global Covid 19 pandemic. Travel stopped, some essentials went into short supply, and we could not leave the house or visit family.

The impact to business was profound. Offices closed and non-essential factories shut down. Fortunately, most office-based organisations scrambled and were able to remain operational. Now, as the restrictions are slowly being lifted, the question of the future of the office has become a hot topic amongst CEO's.



In this paper, we will look at some of the trends we have seen at eacs as well as the IT industry as a whole, and what this means for the future of the way we work and the office buildings we occupy on a daily basis.

2. What have we learnt about the office?

Before we start to re-imagine the office it is worth considering some things we have learnt over the last three months:

1. **Efficiency** of staff working from home has generally increased. With little or no travel, staff can spend more time actually working on tasks. A McKinsey study highlighted 41% staff were more productive and 28% said there had been no material change¹.
2. **Home offices** work well when there is the space, but there are challenges. Those that live in small apartments or are looking after children have found it difficult to work from home, and some of the first back into the office have been those that have missed the ability to work without interruptions.
3. **Reluctant returners** is a new term we have seen as some staff are still shielding family members or just don't have the confidence of coming back, or actually don't want to come back! This is witnessed across all age and ethnic groups.
4. **Company Culture** is connected tightly to the offices we have, the messages of values and behaviours are usually very prominent, and new staff can quickly pick up the way an organisation works from conversations at the coffee machine or in the corridor. We can no longer rely on that.
5. **Technology** has been essential through the lock down and there is universal praise for tools like Microsoft Teams and Zoom. But there is more to leveraging the right technology than that with areas like whiteboarding, data access, innovation, and demonstrations that are not always suited to basic remote working.



¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/reimagining-the-office-and-work-life-after-covid-19>

3. Looking forward

So, the first thing to say is that the office of the future will very much depend on the organisation and what it wants. Talking to CEO's and reading the announcements it is clear some organisations are fully embracing working from home. But there are others very worried about the mental health of their staff especially when isolated at home and do not have the comfort of their work 'family'.



Most though, including eacs, will be adopting a hybrid approach with the use of work from home and the office space together. In part this is due to being tied to property leases that are difficult to break, so the focus is on the best use of space today. However much the office is used, there are clearly some things that are going to have to be different:

1. **Desk usage** will be at a much lower density in order to ensure safe distancing, and those in the office is restricted to people that need to be there. An example for eacs is recent service desk analysts that need to learn new technologies or client configurations by observing more senior staff. It is also expected that staff will rotate through a period of working in the office then back to working at home. This reduces the risk for a particular team but allows the training and development to continue.



2. **Safe space** is going to be key, foremost to ensure the safety of staff and any visitors but to also provide confidence to people returning. Specific actions are sanitisation stations, regular cleaning and thermal scanning to check the temperature of people coming into the office. Depending on the size of the office, one-way systems and hygiene actions such as installing 'sneeze guards' maybe needed. Other changes will be stopping the 'round of tea and coffee' and instead make it for yourself only.

3. **Collaboration spaces** are a way of changing how space is used. Re-purpose the unused desk areas into innovation that allow people to physically come together but at a safe distance. Use these areas exclusively for team building, whiteboarding and innovation. This is not a new concept – agile development teams have been using this approach for many years to encourage people to work together rather than individually at desks (or at home).

4. **Technology** plays an increasingly important role in the office of the future. The collaboration tools will continue to improve but there is much more that can be done. Having a strategy to leverage the cloud for access to key applications and data will be essential. This does not necessarily mean new and expensive IT. For example, Microsoft's Power Platform is a suite of tools built as part of Office 365 to easily capture data, manage processes or workflow and create company insight through the way business data is displayed.



4. Summary

Very few office-based organisations will be going back to the way they worked before Covid 19. The level of change will vary, but now that staff have been exposed to working from home, those with a rigid office-based policy will find it increasingly difficult to attract the right talent. Many companies have come to realise they have probably jumped ahead two or three years when it comes to flexible working.

That in turn will mean a much broader recruitment policy that does not look for individuals within commuting distance of the office but a larger geographical skill base to recruit from.

New tools will emerge, like augmented reality glasses that **eacs** have been using for remote installations. So will ways of working with and connecting to clients that relies much less on traditional meetings in coffee shops and traveling to site.

There is not a single answer but instead a range depending on what a company wishes to achieve. But in terms of the office and work at home the positive opportunities regarding efficiency, cost and productivity significantly outweigh the downsides.

Kevin Timms
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Further information can be found on our website at www.eacs.com. To speak to one of our experts, either call **eacs 0800 8047 256**, or alternatively email information@eacs.com.



