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COVID-19

Changing (work)spaces

The redefinition of the office: post-pandemic

At Deloitte Digital, we help transform businesses by putting the user at the heart of everything. We wanted to share the findings of our recent qualitative research study, and provoke your thinking about how society will adapt to the new definition of the office.

OUR PROCESS

We spoke to people across age ranges, positions, and industries to find out how their behaviours and perspectives on work have changed since the start of COVID-19.

We immersed ourselves in their stories and struggles to gain a deeper understanding of the role of the office in their past, present, and future selves. Then we analyzed how these behaviour changes will affect the office space of the future.



In this report, we've identified four behavioural changes caused by the monumental impact of COVID-19.

These behavioural identifications provide a foundation of insight to identify opportunities for office space. This research is qualitative, which allowed us to go narrow and deep into a problem. A quantitative data set can tell us what things are, whereas qualitative research digs into the why to give the complete picture.

With the conditions brought on by COVID-19 and the drastic measures taken to contain its spread, we're seeing businesses quickly adapt to remote working conditions. Many companies have operated fairly smoothly in this new environment. Their employees have developed new habits and behaviours - and these will likely continue in a post-pandemic world.

The cultural shift allows employees to choose how and where they work.

These behaviours have a drastic implication for the office space: it will remain important, but will be used differently.



“The office is no longer a place I need to be to do my job. No one can question where I am working again.”

- Data Analyst, Retail

01 IN THE FUTURE

Strong work relationships will not depend on in-person interaction



BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Although we are limited to virtual connections, we are showing up more authentically than ever before

Experiencing something like COVID-19 bonds us in a way that is different than any work social ever could. The collective experience of a global pandemic has allowed us to come together in different ways than before and create deeper connections with colleagues by showing up more authentically and sharing the foundations of our lives such as our living spaces, our kids, and our pets.

“Because you are working in your home environment, you can be more yourself. You can see your coworker’s life and kids and how they dress casually.”

- Analyst, Financial sector

02 IN THE FUTURE

We will find personal and professional separation without relying on traditional office space



BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Despite space constraints, we are finding workarounds to strike the balance between personal and professional priorities

There is significantly more fluidity between home and work, and we are taking steps to handle this. Whether it's through a distinct home office area or simply stowing away a monitor, we're finding creative ways to achieve separation and balance – one that doesn't have to include an office building.

“After 6pm I try to not to log back on. I’m trying to be more deliberate because there are no physical barriers (like the office). Physical space used to really define whether I was working or not.”

- Manager, Consulting

03 IN THE FUTURE

We will need to encourage both virtual and traditional ways of working



BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Without informal office interactions, we are being more intentional in our communication and collaboration

Knowledge-sharing is now a scheduled Zoom meeting and asking for help is a formalized email – a stark shift from the natural interactions that stem from close physical proximity in the office. With the barriers to in-person contact, we are having to be more intentional in evaluating if a task requires collaboration. When physical restrictions loosen, the implementation of both physical and virtual communication styles will come with its own unique challenges.

“We’ve had to communicate more clearly; that means having more rigour in touching base and not relying on bumping into someone. The benefits are that you have to be more focused on seeking out collaboration and more rigorous in outlining needs and expectations.”

- Director, Public sector

04 IN THE FUTURE

We will prioritize spaces for development and training over traditional workspaces



BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Building trust remotely feels unnatural and authentic mentorship opportunities are happening less frequently, impacting conventional professional growth

Social dynamics and in-person norms allowed for natural mentorship and growth opportunities in the office - it feels unnatural to recreate this in a virtual environment. In-person team environments foster casual coaching chats, more invitations to important meetings, and welcome lunches for new employees, all of which contribute to strong employee growth. Conventional coaching and mentorship is limited as Zoom calls don't quite do them the same justice.

“We have found the benefit of having everyone in the same office is to provide seamless coaching moments. We can coach them on the spot on how they should be managing issues. I really see more benefit of having the team together, unless they’re more experienced.”

- President, Financial sector

Some ideas to explore

Work in the future	For the office (space)	For the employees
01 Strong work relationships will not depend on in-person interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internet of Things (IoT) trackers to understand where employees are working• Social technology, such as digital walls featuring rotating employee stories, embedded in common office area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mandatory video calls and laptop cameras• Enhanced virtual social chat pre-installed on employee devices• Status indicators that show remote or in-office working location
02 Separation of the personal and professional without the traditional office space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multi-purpose rooms that provide a centralized experience for personal tasks (grocery pickup, mail services, banking)• Childcare facilities• Shift-style flexible leasing for two (or more) companies in one office	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "At home work" evaluation and supplies• "Work at home" workstation with foldable barriers, to set up anywhere• Mandatory communication black-out periods• Increased flexible working hours• Home office furniture at a discount
03 Encouragement of both virtual and traditional ways of working	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaboration spaces that use virtual reality tools, smart boards, and other technology• Subscription to access the office network: training spaces, boardrooms, collaboration space, and small meeting rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New work etiquette, with the assumption that all work is blended• Coordination of teams in multiple time zones• Time-zone meeting optimization technology
04 Prioritization of spaces for development and training over traditional workspaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Campus-style hubs, with an emphasis on training space• Augmented and virtual reality capabilities built into learning rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cross of virtual and in person training• Prioritization and emphasis on virtual coffee chats, coaching sessions, and team-building• Recurring scheduled time to meet with mentors and team members

We hope we got you thinking

Our behavioural insights are just the start. They provide a basis to ask the right questions, ideate, and quickly prototype human-centred concepts to help bring them to life for your business.

Please visit deloitte.ca/changingworkspaces to learn more.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Our team

Alex Morris

Partner, Consulting
Dublin, a Deloitte business
alexmorris@deloitte.ca

Jake Prapavessis

Senior Manager,
Head of Market Gravity,
a Deloitte business
Jacob.Prapavessis@marketgravity.com

Emily Horrocks

Consultant,
Market Gravity,
a Deloitte business
emhorrocks@deloitte.ca

Amy Chiu

Consultant,
Dublin, a Deloitte business
amchiu@deloitte.ca

Rachel Butler

Business Analyst,
Market Gravity,
a Deloitte business
rabutler@deloitte.ca



www.deloitte.ca

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