Vitality

RSA

Healthy Hybrid

A BLUEPRINT FOR BUSINESS

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Foreword – Neville Koopowitz, CEO, Vitality UK

I welcome the publication of Healthy Hybrid - A Blueprint for Business, produced in partnership with the RSA (The royal society for arts, manufactures and commerce). This report is published as businesses are grappling with how to shift to what is being described as an entirely new, hybrid, way of working.

Against this context, a firm commitment to the mental and physical wellbeing of employees has never been more critical for businesses large and small. The last year has unveiled some stark truths on the role a healthy lifestyle plays in helping us remain resilient to illness. Among our 1.3m Vitality members, those who participated in regular exercise last year had a 28% reduced risk of admission to hospital from Covid-19. Evidence that we cannot and should not ignore.

Vitality is privileged to partner with workplaces of different sizes and from different sectors all over the country. We support and motivate employees to prioritise every aspect of their health and wellbeing by unlocking the power of behaviour change. It's a journey we're on ourselves as a business. In addition to working with the RSA, we are working with Judge Business School at the University of Cambridge, the research body RAND Europe and using Microsoft Workplace Analytics to track our own phased return to the office. This report also builds on all that we've learned through running Britain's Healthiest Workplace – the UK's largest workplace wellbeing survey. Launched nine years ago, it is designed to help businesses understand their employees' health and how it links to their performance at work. Ahead of launching the survey again later this year, we want to support businesses as they prepare for this next significant shift in working patterns.

This analysis by the RSA, leading thinkers on the future of work, combined with data from the Vitality Programme, shows leadership teams continue to rise to the challenge. The vast majority have invested significantly in supporting their people through this last year. Employees recognise the strides that have been made but express an uncertainty over what is to come. Employers understand that this period of prolonged disruption triggered by the pandemic has brought challenge but acknowledge the considerable opportunity for change. They want to get it right but are unsure how to reset and identify new, better, more sustainable work habits and routines.

> " Now is the time for businesses to reset their approach to health and wellbeing and prepare for a hybrid future that places a premium on the good health of all

How ever this next chapter unfolds, what is clear is that businesses will be expected to consider health promotion in the workplace alongside cure in the form of private access to different treatment pathways. Now is the time for businesses to reset their approach to health and wellbeing and prepare for a hybrid future that places a premium on the good health of all. Prevention has sat at the heart of the Vitality Programme from the start. We believe it's the future of health and life insurance – what we call our 'shared value' philosophy. Get prevention right

and people benefit, business benefits and society benefits as it reduces pressure on state run services.

Our work with the RSA shows that achieving a 'Healthy Hybrid' is a desire held universally. A new way of working that echoes the principles of shared value by working for people, for businesses, for society and for the economy. People want the best of both. The best of the office and the best of life outside the office. The best of both that allows them to prioritise their current and future health needs. Indeed, it's the blend of both that will retain talent and deliver the productivity gains needed to keep the UK moving forward in every sense.

We hope this blueprint offers a way to help businesses process this desire for different and move forward.

Neville Koopowitz,
Chief Executive,
Vitality UK

Foreword – Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the RSA

A short introduction to this timely and authoritative report jointly produced by Vitality and the RSA.

Throughout the pandemic the RSA has been exploring the relationship between responses to the crisis and long-term change. Through our engagement with organisations in many sectors, we have developed tools to move beyond the abstract desire to "build back better" and explore more precisely what new behaviours we have adopted and which we should seek to sustain.

This blueprint underlines that for many people, employees and employers, the experience of working from home has prompted a similar inquiry. The findings are encouraging: the extent to which workers want to move to hybrid patterns is remarkable, while the willingness of many large employers to respond positively to this aspiration is heartening. Equally, the emphasis throughout lockdown on individual employee wellbeing and collective staff engagement seems also to have shifted expectations in a progressive direction.

Of course, there will be challenges ahead and we must closely observe the way this new hybrid world of work embeds and evolves. But in the main we should be optimistic. The blueprint shows unequivocally that people want better work; work that makes them healthier, happier and allows the pursuit of a larger life. This confirms what I always hoped when writing my 2017 report 'Good Work' for the then Prime Minister Theresa May, which is that once we fully accept the idea that all work should be good there are major implications for the values and expectations that underpin not just employment relations, but our entire society.

The idea of a 'Healthy Hybrid' is a testament to that hope and a fine embodiment of the shared value model that organisations like Vitality have long promoted. As I wrote in 'Good Work': In other words, good work helps make healthy workers; and healthy workers helps create good, productive work. Which, in the long-run, benefits us all.

> **"**
> While having employment is itself vital to people's health and wellbeing, the quality of people's work is also a major factor in helping people to stay healthy and happy, something which benefits them and serves the wider public interest

We must not squander the adaption and learning of Covid-19. Our collective commitment should be that the good that comes out of the pandemic can one day be seen to outweigh the terrible tragedy it has caused. This blueprint makes an important contribution to that mission.

Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the RSA

Executive summary

Healthy Hybrid

A BLUEPRINT FOR BUSINESS

The experience of working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic has changed work as we know it forever. Britain's homeworkers may have been shielded from some of the frontline impacts of the virus, but the impact upon their health and wellbeing has still been high. Yet, despite this, the vast majority of homeworkers are determined to spend more time working from home in the future – only 16 percent of homeworkers surveyed in this research would prefer to work mainly in a physical location. The reason for this is simple: they increasingly want work that can better support their wellbeing, flexibility, life-work balance and their ability to lead a fit and healthy lifestyle.

The challenge for employers now is to work out how to meet those ambitions in a way that creates shared value for all. As they draw up their post-lockdown plans, leadership teams should explore the potential for a genuine 'best of both' model: a 'Healthy Hybrid' that can deliver inclusive productivity gains for their business alongside a healthier, happier workforce. This blueprint sets out ten recommendations to achieve this.

"Now is the time for businesses to reset their approach to health and wellbeing and set themselves up for a 'Healthy Hybrid' future. Our report shows that wellbeing and productivity – health and economic competitiveness – are two sides of the same coin. Corporate Britain needs both in order to recover and flourish."

Neville Koopowitz,
Chief Executive, Vitality UK

Executive summary continued

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Key findings

The pandemic experience has fundamentally changed homeworkers' expectations – businesses must embrace a 'demand for different':

- More than eight in 10 would prefer to work at home for either part of the week or in full (just under half 48 percent hybrid; 36 percent at home permanently).

- The same number again say they are looking for a better work life balance (80 percent), whilst seven in 10 want work to allow for a fit and healthy lifestyle (71 percent).

- However, there is a hybrid working expectation gap: only 16% of homeworkers would prefer to be in a physical work location full time, yet one in three anticipate this will be their employer's expectation when lockdown rules allow.

Lockdowns have worsened physical health creating an 'ergonomic timebomb':

- Homeworking has reinforced sedentary lifestyles risking increased back and shoulder injuries and pain. This has been coupled with a reduction in physical activity of 28%.

- Research included in the report from Nuffield Health found that seven in 10 remote workers said they were experiencing more aches and pains in the back, neck, shoulders, legs and joints, more eye strain, and more headaches; this is despite employees valuing the opportunity to incorporate physical activity while working from home.

- Research from Vitality's Britain's Healthiest Workplace survey showed more than half of the UK workforce suffered from two or more musculoskeletal conditions, such as lower back pain (45%), neck pain (34%) and shoulder pain (34%) pre pandemic in 2019.

Mental health is a 'long lockdown' challenge and employers must manage anxiety linked about returning to the physical workplace:

- 85 percent of homeworkers in our survey say taking employee health and wellbeing seriously will be important when thinking about their future career prospects.

- In the short term, returning to physical workplaces needs careful management – our study shows that 44 percent of remote workers have found it "much" or "somewhat" easier to manage their mental health and wellbeing while working remotely.

- However, 50 percent of all homeworkers and 58 percent of female homeworkers feel anxious about returning to the physical workplace.

Productivity may have improved but questions remain about its sustainability and inclusiveness, with women and young people among groups that have struggled:

- More than half of all homeworkers (55 percent) said working from home meant they found it easier to get more work done. However, on average homeworkers have been working three hours extra per week.

- Vitality data shows that 40 percent of people are replacing the time that is gained from their commute - one hour on average - with extra time working.

Executive summary continued

- RSA analysis of Understanding Society (USoc) Covid-19 series shows four in 10 mothers working from home report lower productivity (42.8 percent) versus a third of fathers (33.8 percent).

- A third of women (31.3 percent) report worse concentration than usual compared to one in five men (22.3 percent).

- Young people have also been adversely affected. Research by the Mental Health Foundation shows that 56 percent of people said they were more stressed and anxious about work than before the pandemic, but this rose to 72 percent and 64 percent for the 18-24 and 24-35 age groups, respectively.

How to implement Healthy Hybrid – 10 recommendations for business

First, establishing a 'Healthy Hybrid' culture requires inclusive engagement from the top-down.

1. Establish new mandates on health and wellbeing that are integrated into Company Risk Registers and prioritised at board level.

2. Practise, reinforce, and normalise Healthy Hybrid behaviours.

3. Create 'Healthy Hybrid' feedback loops between employees and leaders.

Second, 'Healthy Hybrid' behaviour change can be driven through practical interventions.

4. Promote inclusive productivity gains by assessing performance based on outcomes not hours.

5. Introduce mandatory breaks and 'right to disconnect' policies to protect hybrid workers from burnout and level up inequalities.

6. Ensure new health and wellbeing policies are inclusive across all work environments and focus on workers not workplaces.

7. Schedule 30 minutes a day for all employees to protect musculoskeletal health.

Third, sustaining 'Healthy Hybrid' values requires consistent reporting and accountability.

8. Ensure effective and consistent wellbeing measurement sustains 'Healthy Hybrid' behaviours and culture.

9. Clarify who is accountable for new health and wellbeing mandates, and reflect this in management training.

10. Track and publish data on hybrid workers' pay and progression to prevent digital disadvantage.

Methodology

The blueprint draws on the following mixed-method approach:

- A comprehensive literature review of the evidence base on how the pandemic experience, lockdown and working from home have shaped outcomes for Britain's homeworkers, including data from the Vitality programme.

- Analysis of insights taken from research amongst 1000 people working from home during the third lockdown (January-March 2021). [2]

- New RSA analysis of the Understanding Society (USoc) Covid-19 data series, a longitudinal survey with over 6000 respondents.

- A series of twelve semi-structured qualitative interviews, either with senior leaders of major UK firms or experts in the future of work.

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The demand for different

No individual, business or community has escaped the reach of the Covid-19 pandemic. Of course, the virus and its economic effects have hit some people harder than others, but we have all at some level - often quietly, at home, separated from our families and friends – contributed to an unprecedented moment of shared sacrifice.

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The demand for different

Yet such tragic events can sometimes change the trajectory of history for the better. Individuals can emerge with new outlooks, values, and patterns of behaviour. Transformative leaders can embrace these 'demands for different', open minded to the opportunities.

And, when these two forces combine, the possibilities for genuine societal change can, almost overnight, begin to look starkly different.

Something like this appears to be happening to work in Britain, at least for those who have worked from home through the crisis. Britain's Covid home workforce want much more flexibility over where they work.[1] Over eight in 10 would prefer to work at home for either part or all of the week, just under half (48 percent) hybrid, 36 percent at home permanently, whilst only 16 percent would like to return to working in a physical location all of the time. Whilst many employers have indicated they are open to increasing access to hybrid or home working options, a survey by the Chartered Institute of Professional Development found that only 63 percent of employers intend to introduce or expand hybrid working.[2]

However, our survey shows there remains a significant gap between homeworkers' hopes and their expectations with regard to their employers' plans (see graph 1).

For example, our survey suggests that almost one in three (29 percent) expect to have to work mainly at a physical location, despite this only being the first preference of 16 percent. This thirteen percentage point gap currently equates to around 1.9m employees.[3]

Ideal working arrangement vs expected working arrangement "when the UK returns to a more normal pattern of work from 21st June"

Proportion of respondents

	Mainly working from home	Mainly working at a physical work location	A mix of working from home and from a physical work location	Not sure
In an ideal world, how would you mainly like to work from 21 June?	36%	16%	48%	1%
Taking into account your employers' plans, how do expect you will mainly work from 21 June?	21%	29%	43%	7%

Graph 1

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The demand for different continued

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Moreover, there is growing evidence that the pandemic experience has fundamentally changed homeworkers' expectations about work, generating new needs, hopes and ambitions. The hybrid work people want is not just a simple shift in workplace location, but a shift in possibilities towards a new 'Healthy Hybrid'

Our survey results show that Britain's homeworkers increasingly want work that supports their wellbeing, flexibility, work life balance, mental health and ability to lead a fit and healthy lifestyle (see graph 2).

If we are going back to the office, we are going back as different people; people who want, to quote the Brazilian philosopher Roberto Unger, work that allows us "to live a larger life".[4]

The question for employers now is how to meet those ambitions in a way that creates shared value for all.

When thinking about your career, do you feel that the following have become more or less important to you as a result of the pandemic?

	The ability to work flexibly	Having access to employee benefits, health and wellbeing programmes	That I have a better life and work balance	That there is adequate mental health support at work	That my work allows me to lead a fit and healthy lifestyle
Don't know	3%	4%	7%	4%	2%
Total less important	17%	30%	18%	29%	26%
Total more important	79%	63%	80%	65%	71%

Proportion of respondents

■ Total more important   ■ Neither more nor less important   ■ Total less important   ■ Don't know

Graph 2

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The demand for different continued

As they draw up their post-lockdown plans, managers and leaders should explore the potential for a genuine 'best of both' model: a 'Healthy Hybrid' that can deliver inclusive productivity gains for their business alongside a healthier, happier workforce.

Trying to create inclusive productivity gains means aiming for a 'best of both' in two distinct senses. Firstly, and most importantly, it means aiming for productivity that is consistent with healthy behaviour and high wellbeing. Second, it means trying to understand the productivity potential of different work settings and aligning schedules and workflows accordingly.

That is the essence of Vitality's shared value model – helping people to focus on their health and wellbeing creates value for individuals, for businesses and for society. Even in pure monetary terms, the shared value savings from better individual wellbeing could be significant.

Data from Britain's Healthiest Workplace, the UK's largest workplace wellbeing survey last published by Vitality in 2019, shows that the UK economy loses almost £92bn a year as a result of ill-health related absence and presenteeism in the workplace, with employers losing on average 38 working days per employee.[5] Presenteeism is where an employee comes into work, but their productivity is low because of ill-health.[6]

Healthy Hybrid: A Blueprint for Business, starts from the premise that a truly 'Healthy Hybrid' is possible. It will not be easy, but the evidence from the last year suggests strongly that Britain's homeworkers' demand for a different way of working can be met in a way that also delivers inclusive productivity gains. Drawing on the evidence from our survey, a series of interviews with experts and senior business leaders, alongside RSA analysis of the pandemic's impact upon work, we set out ten practical steps employers can take to meet this objective in a way that generates true shared value.

Lessons from Lockdown

The experience of lockdown will leave a lasting legacy. Britain's homeworkers may have been shielded from some of the more immediate and obvious impacts of the virus, but the toll upon their health, physical and mental, has still been high.
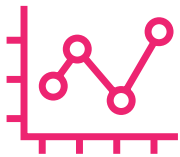
Lessons from Lockdown

This chapter draws out the lessons for managers and employers looking to create inclusive productivity gains alongside a healthy, happy workforce. We draw on RSA analysis of the evidence and data collected during the pandemic across four key areas:
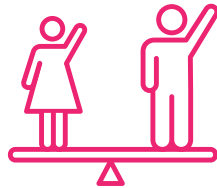
Physical activity and sedentary behaviour

Mental health and wellbeing

Productivity

Workplace inequalities

According to Vitality data

7000

Steps a day fell by 24 percent during the recent lockdown

Physical activity and sedentary behaviour

Lockdown has reinforced sedentary lifestyles and created an "ergonomic timebomb". But, at the same time have valued the flexibility to pursue active lifestyles - this must remain part of a 'Healthy Hybrid'.
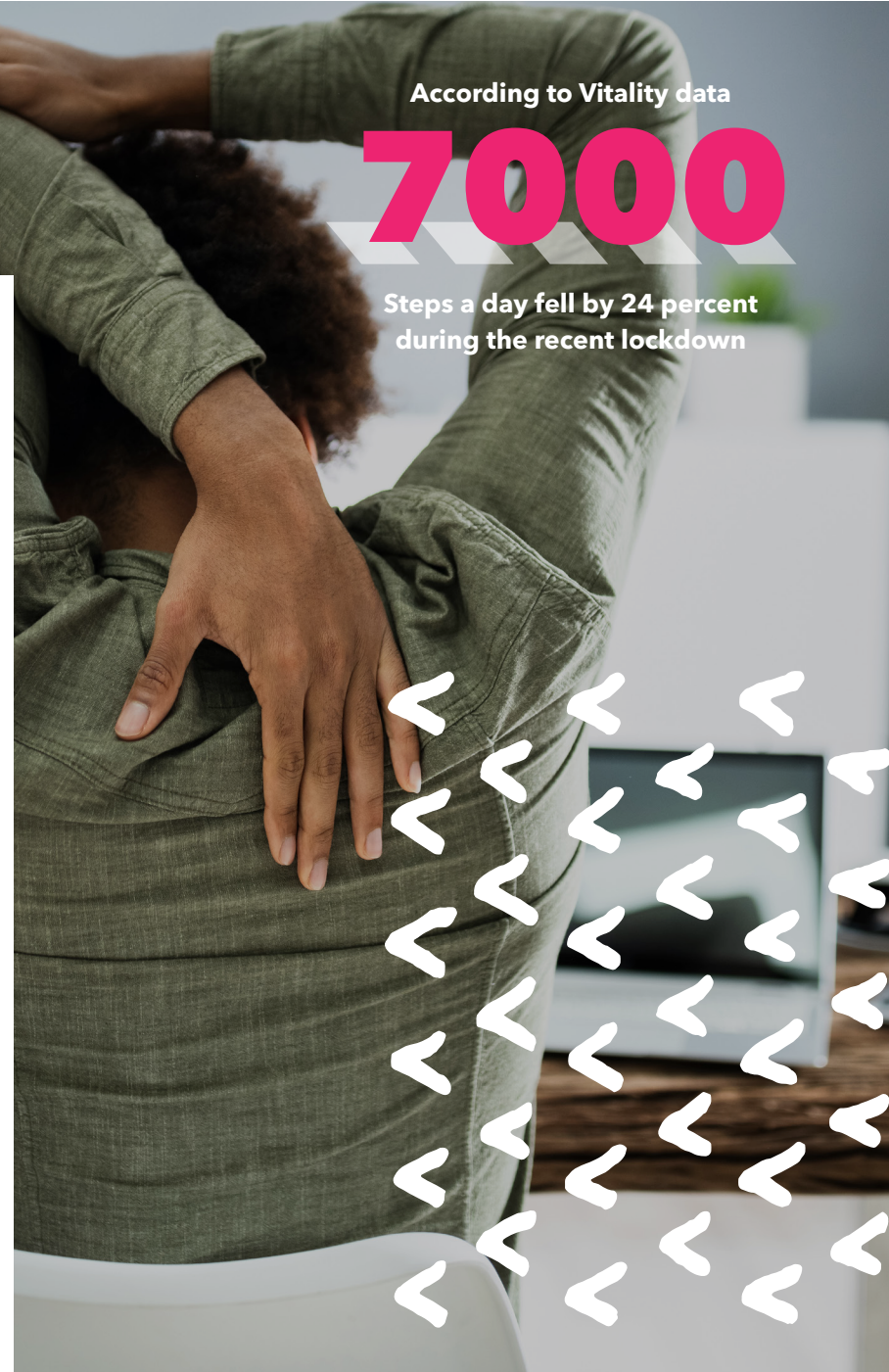
Unfortunately, when it comes to physical activity, regular lockdowns may have aggravated long-standing problems within the UK workforce. Evidence from Sport England's Active Lives survey found there was an unprecedented drop in physical activity during the first lockdown last year. Indeed, between mid-March and mid-May, the proportion of the population classed as active dropped by 7.1 percentage points, meaning there were 3.4 million fewer active adults.[7] This fall is backed up by data gathered by Vitality. In the most recent lockdown, the number of Vitality members that achieved a target of 7000 steps a day fell by 24 percent compared with January 2020.

This is bad news because regular exercise and physical activity is unequivocally good for health and productivity. The UK's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Witty, currently recommends adults engage in physical activity for at least 150 minutes every week.[8] High levels of physical activity have been shown to positively impact productivity and good work outcomes, reducing both absence rates and presenteeism.[9]

Physical activity and sedentary behaviour continued

Worse still, working from home in cramped or unsuitable conditions has raised fears of an 'ergonomic timebomb' for musculoskeletal injuries and pain. According to a survey conducted by Nuffield Health during the first lockdown, 45 percent of remote workers said they were spending more time at their workstation than they would normally at their usual place of work. Meanwhile, 70 percent of remote workers said they were experiencing more aches and pains in their back, neck, shoulders, legs and joints, more eye strain and more headaches than usual when working from home. For 13 percent this is even leading to higher levels of self medication on painkillers.[10]

Poor posture was already a significant threat to health and inclusive productivity even before the pandemic.

Research from Vitality's Britain's Healthiest Workplace survey showed more than half of the UK workforce suffered from two or more musculoskeletal conditions, such as lower back pain (45 percent), neck pain (34 percent) and shoulder pain (34 percent) in 2019. The research finds that "each of these were found to have a crippling effect on productivity, workplace absence, physical health and mental health." [11]

45%

Spending more time at their workstation

70%

Of remote workers said they were experiencing more aches and pains

13%

Leading to higher levels of self-medication

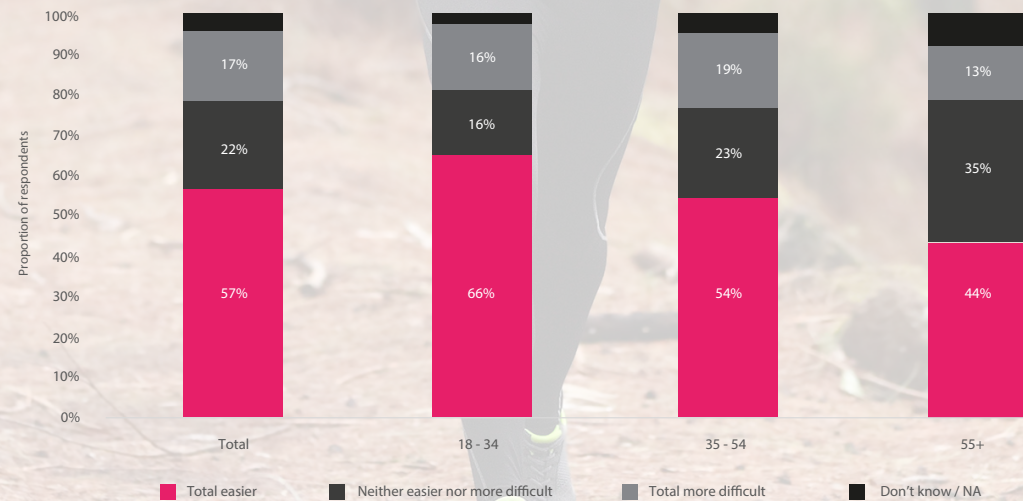## Physical activity and sedentary behaviour continued

Clearly, this data is worrying and on issues such as ergonomic pain, managers and leaders might justifiably consider the effect of home or hybrid working to be less than benign. But that has to be balanced with the clear evidence that for many people, working from home has empowered them with the flexibility to pursue a healthier and more active lifestyle.

Indeed, our survey shows that many adults believe the switch to working from home has made it easier for them to maintain physical fitness levels (51 percent) and do regular exercise (57 percent).

Furthermore, young people found working from home particularly beneficial in this respect, despite young people also showing a significant shift in lower activity levels (see graph four). This again reiterates the hypothesis that the legacy of lockdown could have been worse were it not for the wellbeing-enhancing flexibility of working from home.

The opportunity for managers and leaders now is to harness that flexibility, in pursuit of a genuinely healthy approach to hybrid working. To tackle the ergonomic timebomb, this will require new policies that create safer working environments. But, at a very basic level, managers also need to allow their employees the chance to manage their working time flexibly, both in terms of promoting the idea that exercise and physical activity can be pursued at any time during 'ordinary' working hours, and by protecting space in diaries and time management processes so that people can pursue healthy lifestyles.

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Has working remotely made "doing regular exercise easier or more difficult for you? by age

Proportion of respondents

	Total	18 - 34	35 - 54	55+
Don't know / NA				
Total more difficult	17%	16%	19%	13%
Neither easier nor more difficult	22%	16%	23%	35%
Total easier	57%	66%	54%	44%

■ Total easier   ■ Neither easier nor more difficult   ■ Total more difficult   ■ Don't know / NA

Graph 4

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Case Study

Waitrose & Partners

"We all remember the beginning of the pandemic when overnight supermarkets found themselves on a mission to 'feed the nation' and work out how to rapidly scale online delivery capacity," recalled Martin George, Customer Director of Waitrose and Partners. At that time, when uncertainty reigned and the supermarket chain was facing unprecedented demand, the whole company started working "unprecedented hours under unprecedented stress". The health and wellbeing situation for Partners on the frontline was particularly serious, with panic buying and, in the very earliest days, PPE and masks not yet being worn in shops.

One unexpected positive outcome of this situation, however, was a shift in culture across the Partnership. According to George, "in the early days we were so overwhelmed with the amount of work, our only option was to trust and empower our Partners, irrespective of their experience or seniority." The experiment was an overwhelming success: "I cannot think of one single situation in which that trust and empowerment didn't lead to a positive outcome. […] that taught me you have more capacity in your team than you can ever imagine. That is a very exciting revelation that will stay with me forever."
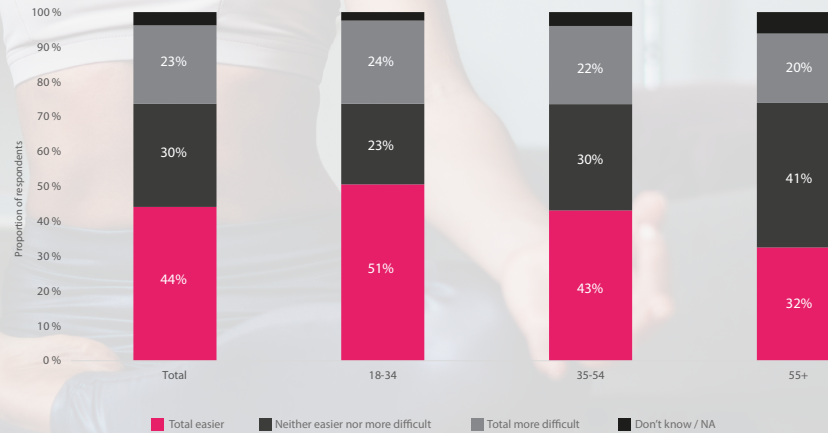
This initial shift has led to a more empathetic and flexible approach to employee management across the Partnership. Leaders are encouraged to embrace outcome-based productivity and be less worried about presenteeism. George suggested this might herald a deeper shift in business leader attitudes towards work more broadly – "the old world, where the way to get ahead was to be the first to be in the office and the last to leave, has gone."

Waitrose is now planning to shift its office-based staff towards a hybrid model, which will be co-created with its Partners. As George put it, "you don't want someone like me just dictating the culture, it needs to be a team effort and all in service of making the Partnership a better place to work and to shop."

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Maintaining good mental health has been one of the biggest challenges of the pandemic and an area where managers will most need to monitor for a "long lockdown" effect. In the short-term, returning to physical workplaces needs careful management – 50% of all homeworkers and 58% of female homeworkers feel anxious about the return.

Maintaining good levels of mental health has undoubtedly been one of the biggest challenges of the pandemic. Every major mental health and wellbeing indicator tracked by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) – feeling satisfied with your life, feeling your life is worthwhile, feeling happy and feeling anxious -is currently at a significantly lower level than it was before the pandemic.[12]

Without question this will be one of the biggest, if not the biggest, 'long lockdown' challenges for managers and leaders to navigate beyond the acute phase of the pandemic.

There is ample evidence that employers are already taking this seriously. According to a recent survey, 96 percent of SME leaders identified mental health as a top priority. Furthermore, 39 percent stated that the wellbeing and health of their employees is likely to have the biggest impact on their decision making over the next year.[13]

Our survey also found strong evidence that Britain's homeworkers are grateful for the support already put in place, with 77 percent believing their employer has done enough to support their wellbeing. Equally, many homeworkers have found working from home helpful for managing mental health, wellbeing and stress levels. Our polling shows that four in 10 (44 percent) remote workers have found it "much" or "somewhat" easier to manage their mental health and wellbeing as a result of remote working. As with physical health, this figure is highest for younger adults and lowest for older adults (see graph 5).

Has remote working made "Managing my mental health and wellbeing" easier or more difficult for you? By age

	Total	18-34	35-54	55+
Total more difficult	23%	24%	22%	20%
Neither easier nor more difficult	30%	23%	30%	41%
Total easier	44%	51%	43%	32%

Legend: Total easier · Neither easier nor more difficult · Total more difficult · Don't know / NA

Proportion of respondents
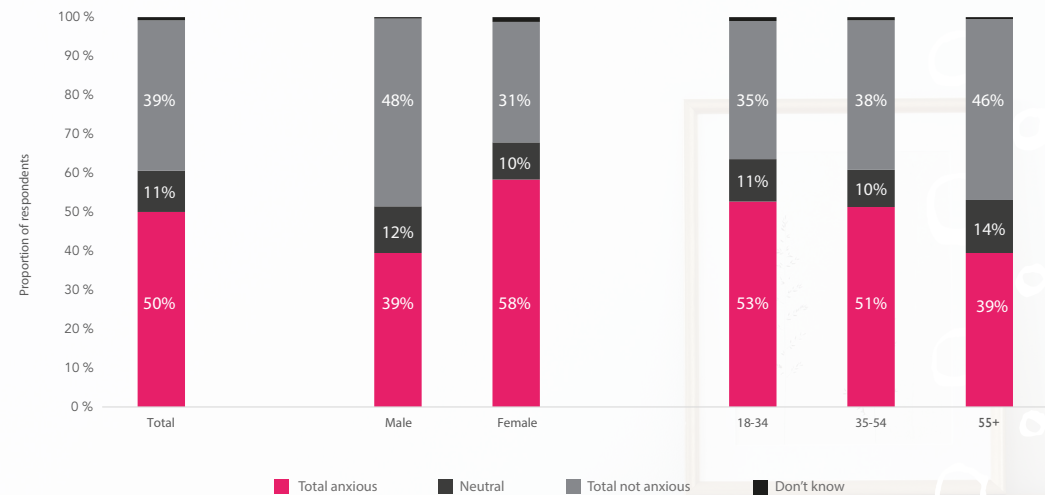
Graph 5

Mental Health and Wellbeing continued

Again, the data on mental health outcomes has to be viewed in the pandemic context. The implication of our findings is that whilst many people may have seen their mental health and wellbeing deteriorate, they still value the efforts made by employers and the flexibility associated with homeworking in allowing them to mitigate the wellbeing challenge posed by lockdown.

Moreover, in the immediate short-term, managers and leaders must be particularly careful to manage anxieties in their workforce surrounding the return to work. According to our survey, half of homeworkers feel anxious about returning to a physical work location, including offices. This headline statistic also hides some clear divisions between groups. Women are much more likely than men to report feeling "very" and "somewhat" anxious about returning to the office (see graph 6).

Some of this anxiety will likely be associated with concerns or fear of Covid-19 itself. Yet managers should be aware that anxieties about returning to the physical workplace are not exclusively about the virus.

Many homeworkers are also concerned about losing the gains they associated with working from home, such as, "having a worse life/work balance" (49 percent), "having less time to focus on physical activity and exercise" (27 percent) and suffering "a negative impact on my personal finances due to extra expenditure" (25 percent).

How anxious or not anxious do you feel about returning to a physical work location (e.g. an office)?

Proportion of respondents

	Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+
Total not anxious	39%	48%	31%	35%	38%	46%
Neutral	11%	12%	10%	11%	10%	14%
Total anxious	50%	39%	58%	53%	51%	39%

■ Total anxious   ■ Neutral   ■ Total not anxious   ■ Don't know

Graph 6

49%

Homeworkers are also concerned about having a worse work/life balance

27%

Of people said they have less time to focus on physical activity and exercise

25%

Are suffering "a negative impact on my personal finances due to extra expenditure"
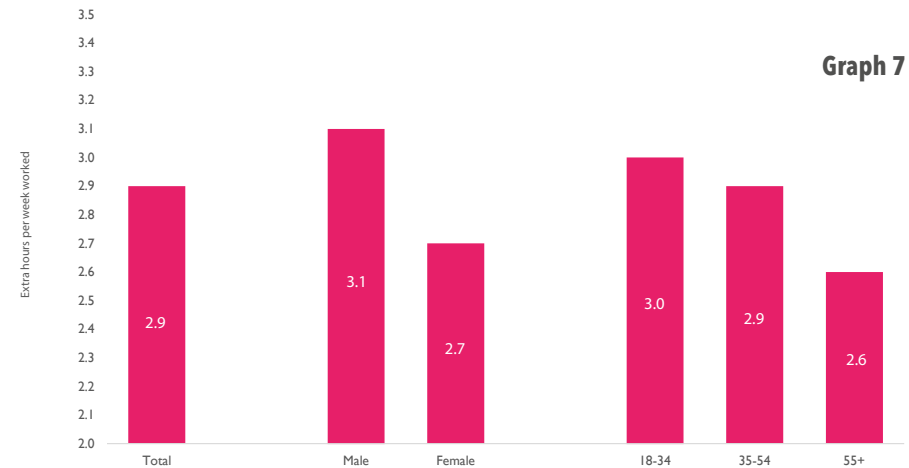
Productivity

Productivity has not dropped off a cliff and some surveys suggest it may have risen, with **homeworkers unequivocally working harder**. **However, uncertainty remains about how real or sustainable these gains are, with fears that some homeworkers are following an unhealthy approach that could lead to burnout**. Aligning flexibility with a more inclusive model of productivity is one of the key opportunities for a 'Healthy Hybrid'.

Productivity is a complicated measure – it is not merely how much work we do, but how much we do in a particular period of time. It is possible therefore, as some economists and business leaders have suggested, to be working harder in terms of time, but working less effectively, sustainably - due to wellbeing or burnout concerns - and thus in the long-run, less productively.[14]

In terms of time, it is absolutely clear that Britain's homeworkers have been working harder during lockdown, clocking in more hours. In our survey, 55 percent of homeworkers said working from home meant they had found it easier to get more work done. When asked to estimate the number of extra hours worked per week during lockdown, the average came out at just under 3 hours – 3.1 for men, 2.7 for women (see graph 7). The CIPD evidence review on remote working highlights findings from a survey from Skillcast which shows that 70 percent of homeworkers believed they were at least as productive as in the office.[15]

But have we been working more productively? And even if so, have we been doing so in a way we could sustain for a long period of time? Many commentators disagree. Vaibhav Gujral from McKinsey & Company argues that after an initial, early-pandemic "productivity honeymoon" we will miss the innovation, creativity and "heartbeat" from serendipitous encounters.[16] Others, such as Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, have suggested that existing teams burn through "social capital" accrued in the office that can be difficult to fully replenish when working at home.[17] There are also serious worries that homeworking can lead to "presenteeist productivity", where workers are working harder in order to signal to their managers that they are not just relaxing in their bedroom. While they might be working harder, they are not necessarily being more productive. Research by the Mental Health Foundation found that 86 percent of surveyed office workers felt the need to prove to their bosses that they are working hard and deserve to keep their jobs.[18]

Average estimated weekly extra hours worked per week

Graph 7

	Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+
Extra hours per week worked	2.9	3.1	2.7	3.0	2.9	2.6

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Productivity continued

Data captured by technology and health companies tends to corroborate or imply this "always-on" burnout model of productivity is taking hold with some homeworkers. When Microsoft measured collaboration patterns across their 350-person Modern Workplace Transformation team, the data showed people were "on" for an average of four more hours a week.[19]

Equally, Vitality data shows that 40 percent of people are replacing the one hour on average gained from their commute with extra time working.

On the other hand, research conducted prior to the pandemic tended to suggest that remote working was typically beneficial in terms of productivity. A famous randomised control trial conducted by Nicholas Bloom, professor of Economics at Stanford, on 1000 employees of Ctrip, a Chinese travel company, showed homeworking generated significant benefits both in productivity performance and employee retention.[20]

The key for managers and leaders is trying to only raise inclusive productivity i.e. productivity that is conducive to wellbeing and thus sustainable in the long-term. One widespread and widely popular shift during the pandemic for many organisations has been a shift away from assessing work quality by hours or tasks and towards delivering outcomes or objectives – 69 percent of respondents to an Adecco survey of 8000 office-based employees, managers and executives across the developed world supported this shift being recognised formally in contracts.[21]

Equally, the employees in the Ctrip randomised control trial had pretty optimal conditions for home working: they could only work from home if they had an effective home office space; childcare was provided for all; and, perhaps most interestingly given the current debate, the homeworkers still went into the office one day a week for face-to-face meetings, motivation and innovation-driving activities. The hope is that as we move out of the acute phase of the pandemic, home and hybrid work can resemble something more akin to this model. In other words, the real productivity gains from a 'Healthy Hybrid' model might come from the easing of lockdown restrictions allowing for a way of working that is more inclusive and supportive to wellbeing. If all else held equal, this would be a significant shared value boon to employees, employers, the economy and ultimately society.

A Blueprint for Business

HEALTHY HYBRID

Vitality

Case Study

Caffè Nero

The experience for Caffè Nero was similar to that of other major companies in the hospitality sector, with two different workforce challenges to manage. Teams that previously worked in offices had to adapt to remote working, whereas teams that could no longer work at all, due to lockdown restrictions, faced a very different and pressing set of needs.

The organisation managed these challenges by conducting massive listening exercises with its employees. According to Chief Executive Officer, Will Stratton-Morris, Caffè Nero was greatly helped by having a strong pre-existing culture, built by founder Gerry Ford in the past two decades, with a high level of people engagement. As he put it, "when I joined I was amazed at the number of cultural events and activities. It was like being one big family. It is because of this family culture and all that investment in people that we were able to ride the wave and emerge in relatively good shape."

However, these resources might not be inexhaustible. Stratton-Morris noted: "It is like servicing a car, you can make the car work if there is a lot of fuel and a lot of servicing. We were lucky because we were coming out of a long period of investment [in people]. but you have to keep nurturing that and that's when you need to be in the same space as you go on." For that reason, Stratton-Morris predicts hybrid will emerge as the dominant working pattern – "five days a week is unlikely, but people will need to go back at least for some days". He sees this balance as essential for productivity too, questioning whether the productivity gains Caffè Nero has seen during the pandemic are 'sustainable' without regular face-to-face investment in each other.

Workplace inequalities

The more painful effects of lockdown are not evenly distributed amongst homeworkers: female caregivers, young people and BAME groups have all suffered disproportionately. New RSA analysis finds that 31 percent of women homeworkers have struggled to maintain concentration v 22 percent of men, rising to 41percent v 29 percent for parents of under 12s.

Workplace inequalities

Whilst many aspects of the pandemic experience are universal, its most painful effects are not evenly distributed. Indeed, arguably the ability to work from home is a source of privilege in and of itself: more healthy than the environment faced by key workers; more economically secure, for the most part, than that experienced by people in face-to-face industries like hospitality, leisure and retail. Nevertheless, within the home working cohort, some groups have faced more acute challenges during lockdown, and managers and leaders may need to pay particular attention towards them in order to create an equitable and inclusive workplace. This includes when drawing up health and wellbeing support strategies which, according to a report by the Royal College of Physicians, are not always tailored to the diverse needs of different demographic groups, including different age groups, ethnicity, gender and salary grades.[22]

The evidence from lockdown suggests that three particular groups merit special attention: female caregivers; younger employees and BAME groups.

Female caregivers

One of the most profound challenges of the pandemic has been the struggle to balance work with caregiving during a time when many care homes felt unsafe and education institutions, such as schools, colleges, and nurseries, were closed. Unsurprisingly this has created inequalities in the workplace – research from the University of Birmingham shows that all parents have suffered a hit to their productivity.[23] However, perhaps also unsurprisingly, this experience has been highly gendered, with women suffering a far bigger hit than men. 56 percent of mothers indicated that increased housework and childcare was a negative outcome of working from home during the Covid-19 lockdown, while this was not as common for fathers, with only 34 percent reporting the same.[24] Meanwhile, according to the ONS, women spent 55 percent more time than men on unpaid childcare during the first lockdown. The situation became more dramatic as lockdown restrictions continued: in September and October 2020, women spent 99 percent more time on unpaid childcare than men.[25] More broadly, research by Women in Sport found that 32 percent of women couldn't prioritise excercise during lockdown as they had too much to do for others, with 25 percent worried that getting back into the habit would be hard after lockdown.[26]

RSA USoc Covid-19 Analysis: Home-working, productivity and the pandemic in data

The RSA conducted a new analysis of the Understanding Society (USoc) Covid-19 survey, analysing the responses of over 6000 respondents in order to assess inequalities of experience between different groups of homeworkers. We found a disproportionate impact on women and parents, especially mothers to young children:

- 27.4 percent of women report having worse concentration than usual, compared to 18.4 percent of men. This rises to 31.3 percent of women vs. 22.3 percent of men when looking only at those working from home. It rises further to 41.2 percent for women and 29.6 percent for men when looking at homeworkers with children under 12.

- Women also report frequent and sizeable losses in productivity. There is 2.7 percentage-point gap between men and women saying they get less done now compared to before the pandemic (and only 2.4 percentage points for men and women working from home). This rises to a 9.1 percentage-point gap for home-working parents with children under 12, with 42.8 percent of mothers losing productivity versus 33.8 percent of fathers. The reason for loss of productivity cited most frequently by women is having to provide childcare (24.2 percent). The most frequently cited reason among men is lack of motivation (20.3 percent).

- Women are not only more likely to report productivity losses; their losses are also larger. Among women who report productivity loss, 28.6 percent report that their work now takes them at least twice as long as prior to the pandemic.

Workplace inequalities continued

Younger Employees

Younger people have found it particularly difficult to stay focused at work and have struggled with stress, burnout and anxiety. Research by the Mental Health Foundation (MHF) and LinkedIn show that 56 percent of people said they were more stressed and anxious about work than before the pandemic, but this rose to 72 percent and 64 percent for the 18-24 and 24-35 age groups, respectively.[27] There is also a widespread fear that young workers - particularly new starters - are struggling to develop the tacit networks and soft skills needed to progress at work, due to a lack of existing social capital. A survey by the US software firm Smartsheet found that 82 percent of Gen Z workers felt "less connected" whilst working remotely, whilst roughly half reported having communication issues at work and trouble getting the resources necessary to thrive.[28] Younger workers are particularly unlikely to have an effective home office set up. In the MHF/LinkedIn survey, 44 percent of young respondents did not have a dedicated space to work, compared to 23 percent for all age groups.[29]
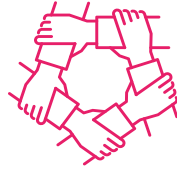
BAME Groups

Research from the Fawcett Society and Women's Budget Group has also shown that people from a BAME background working from home are more likely than their white peers to report working harder than they did before the pandemic (41% of women and 39.8 percent of men v 29.2 percent and 28.5 percent of white men and women).

Productivity-wise, this may not be indicative of a positive model as the same research also finds that BAME women (45.4 percent) are much more likely than either white women (34.6 percent) or men (29.6 percent) to describe themselves as "struggling to cope" with different demands on their time.[30] Research from the Citizens Advice Bureau has also found that BAME groups have struggled in particular with their broadband bill and digital infrastructure during the first lockdown.[31] Meanwhile, Sports England research identified BAME groups as amongst the most affected in terms of the drop-off in physical activity.[32]

56%

Of people said they were more stressed and anxious about work than before the pandemic, but this rose to 72 percent and 64 percent for the 18-24 and 24-35 age groups, respectively.

82%

Of Gen Z workers felt "less connected" whilst working remotely, whilst roughly half reported having communication issues at work and trouble getting the resources necessary to thrive.

Balancing 'best of both'

The previous chapter highlighted that, whilst many homeworkers have found working from home helpful for managing their wellbeing during lockdown, there are some fears that inclusive productivity gains will be hard to sustain.

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HEALTHY HYBRID

Vitality

Balancing the 'best of both'

As the pandemic has progressed and our attitudes towards work have shifted, many homeworkers – employees and employers alike – have wondered whether hybrid working may represent the 'best of both': a goldilocks zone between the wellbeing-enhancing benefits of working from home and a healthier model of productivity grounded in face-to-face collaboration.

This chapter examines the pandemic evidence base and responses to our survey on what Britain's homeworkers expect this 'best of both' to look like, focusing on two areas in particular. First, what homeworkers want from their managers when looking forward towards a 'best of both' model. Second, what exactly homeworkers value about conducting their work tasks, respectively, at home or in the physical workplace.

We find that employers should be optimistic that a productivity-enhancing 'best of both' can be achieved, but it will require managers to adapt to their employees' demand for a 'Healthy Hybrid' based on trust, flexibility and empathetic management.
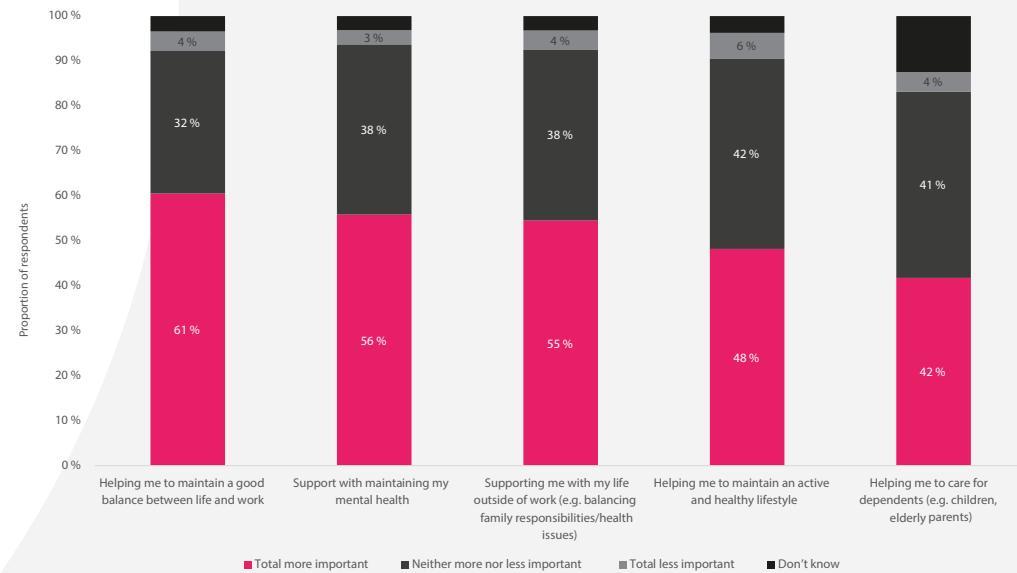
The business case for trust

Employees' relationship with their managers has deepened in the pandemic, with managers playing a more direct role supporting their wellbeing. However, this will need to continue: homeworkers have a clear preference for flexibility over time and organisations who trust their employees in this way could gain an edge when it comes to recruitment and retention.

Effective management will be central for organisations looking to implement 'Healthy Hybrid' strategies. In fact, so crucial is management to raising productivity within an organisation that academics such as Professor John Van Reenen, from the London School of Economics, believe it to be one of the main factors, which explain the UK's comparatively weak productivity growth when compared with countries like Germany and the US.[33] However, according to some commentators, management - both in terms of managers' practice and employees' expectations – is itself one of the big sources of a change coming out of lockdown and the homeworking experience.

When thinking about your personal relationship with your manager or boss during this lockdown (since Christmas), do you think that this relationship has become more or less important on the following issues?

	Helping me to maintain a good balance between life and work	Support with maintaining my mental health	Supporting me with my life outside of work (e.g. balancing family responsibilities/health issues)	Helping me to maintain an active and healthy lifestyle	Helping me to care for dependents (e.g. children, elderly parents)
Total more important	61 %	56 %	55 %	48 %	42 %
Neither more nor less important	32 %	38 %	38 %	42 %	41 %
Total less important	4 %	3 %	4 %	6 %	4 %

■ Total more important   ■ Neither more nor less important   ■ Total less important   ■ Don't know
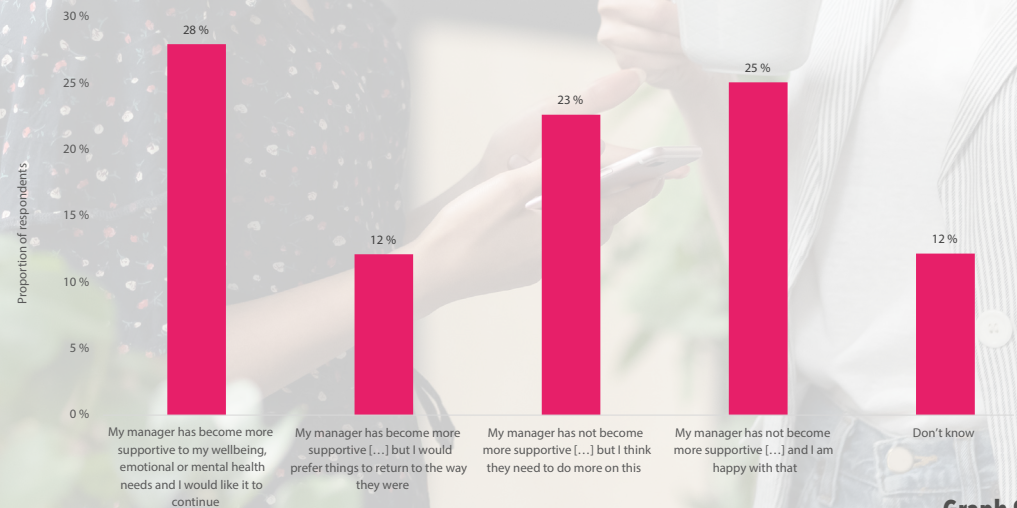
Graph 8

27

The business case
for trust continued

In many organisations, the message for managers and leaders looking to nurture a 'best of both' approach to wellbeing beyond the pandemic is straightforward: keep calm and carry on. As well as clear support for hybrid or home working patterns on wellbeing grounds, our survey found a growing recognition that **the personal relationship between homeworkers and managers has not only improved but is also supporting health and wellbeing outcomes directly.**

For example, just under half of respondents (48 percent) suggested their personal relationship with their manager had become more important in helping them to lead an active and healthy lifestyle, whilst 56 percent felt it more important to help maintain their mental health (see graph eight). Moreover, many respondents to our survey also showed a clear desire for this deeper relationship to continue beyond the pandemic. When forced to choose from four descriptions of managerial support for mental health and emotional wellbeing during the pandemic, a majority of respondents either wanted more support or welcomed additional support already received (see graph nine).

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Reflecting on your experience of remote work during the whole of the Covid-19 pandemic so far, which of the following statements best describes your experience and what you would like going forward?

Proportion of respondents

30 %	
25 %	28 %
20 %	25 %
15 %	23 %
10 %	
5 %	12 %
0 %	12 %

My manager has become more supportive to my wellbeing, emotional or mental health needs and I would like it to continue — 28 %

My manager has become more supportive […] but I would prefer things to return to the way they were — 12 %

My manager has not become more supportive […] but I think they need to do more on this — 23 %

My manager has not become more supportive […] and I am happy with that — 25 %

Don't know — 12 %

Graph 9

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Case Study

Virgin Active

Like many others leisure businesses, Virgin Active has faced a nightmarish year which, according to Ashley Aylmer, Managing Director, has at times felt like a "fight for survival". However, a decision was taken early to utilise this time to focus on making long-term strategic decisions and implement an employee-first approach.

This has been particularly important as early on in the pandemic people entered into what Aylmer describes as a "wartime spirit" – approaching a profound crisis by working significantly harder to help the company and their fellow employees. This led the company to appoint a Head of Wellbeing for the whole organisation, who produced a weekly support kit for all employees in the organisation, featuring anything from cooking tips to exercises to boost wellbeing and mental health. The success of this approach also translated into Virgin Active's external strategy, which pivoted to focus more explicitly on how exercise can really help people's mental as well as physical wellbeing.

Increased connection and communication between managers and employees has also been a key part of Virgin Active's approach to the pandemic. Aylmer feels that working from home has given people more insights into employees' personal lives and thus led to a more connected organisation. However, he also acknowledged that a lot of employees have felt lonelier during the pandemic, particularly employees who live alone. However, perhaps the biggest change is that employee expectations, in terms of wellbeing and flexibility, are now much higher as a result of the pandemic. Aylmer sees this as essential to retention and recruitment in the long-term: "a business without a clear wellbeing strategy will struggle, it's a key strategy in attracting and retaining talent."

The business case for trust continued

These findings may reflect a longer-term change in management culture that is accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, the World Economic Forum has argued that as organisations have necessarily moved to more decentralised team structures, the values and behaviours managers have had to deploy in order to keep wellbeing and productivity levels high have changed substantially.[34] Empathetic models of leadership are more important than ever, clear communication ever more vital - certainly, outside of the physical workplace, it is harder for informal discussions between colleagues to mitigate against poor communication. Meanwhile, managers that tend towards hierarchical approaches, or bad practices like micro-management, have found their ability to control undermined.

Some commentators have speculated that this values shift is a natural consequence of sharing more of our personal lives with each other via video-calls.[35]
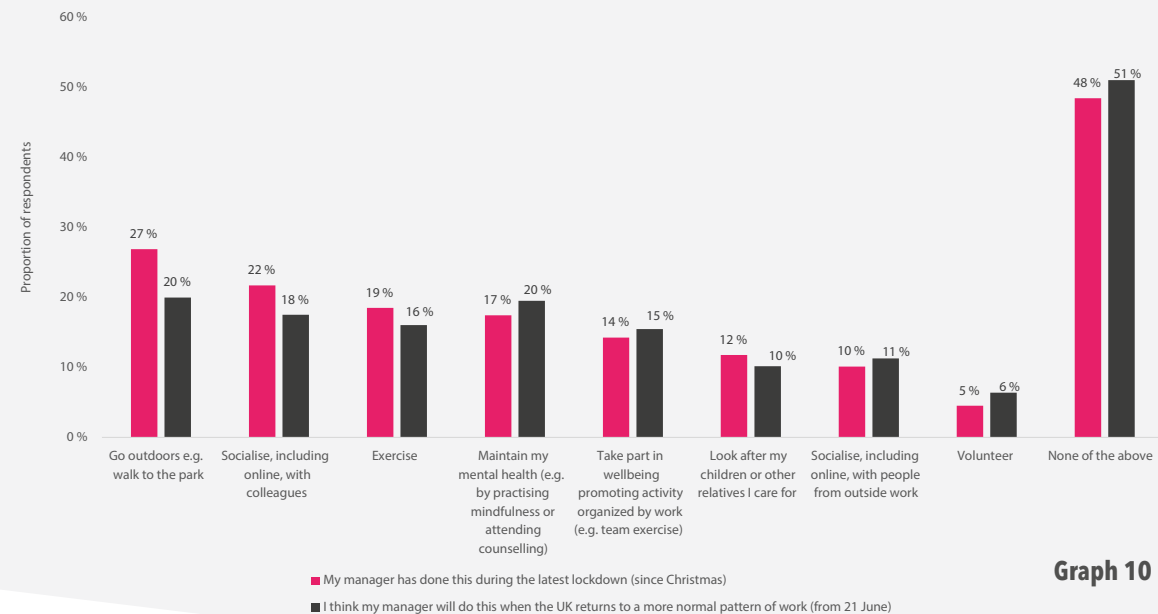
Either way, the demand for a shift towards more empathetic and trusting management styles is clear.

The large-scale Adecco Group survey (see chapter two on productivity) found that 74 percent of employees want their managers to demonstrate a leadership style focused on empathy, emotional intelligence, and support.[36] Other evidence suggests enhanced flexibility is at the heart of the changing relationship between employees and leaders. A global survey of 12000 workers commissioned by Boston Consulting Group found a significant shift in employee expectations for the future of work, with a keen appetite for flexible ways of working and increased openness to this from managers.[37]

However, whilst our survey found that some employees had been encouraged to take time out of their normal working day to undertake a variety of wellbeing or work-life balance boosting activities, close to a majority (48 percent) had not received any guidance from their manager during the latest lockdown.

This rises to 51 percent when considering whether such guidance might continue beyond the end of lockdown (see graph 10).

Has your manager supported you to take time out of your normal working day to do any of the following?

My manager has done this during the latest lockdown (since Christmas)
I think my manager will do this when the UK returns to a more normal pattern of work (from 21 June)
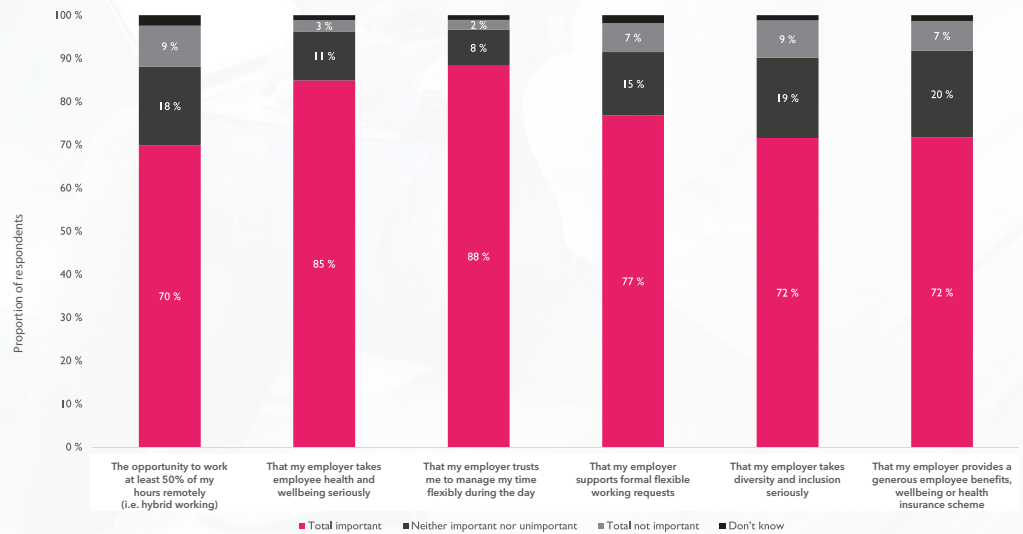
Graph 10

The business case
for trust continued

This finding does not necessarily mean that managers have not supported homeworkers in other ways – our survey also strongly supports the idea that managers' support has been increasingly vital for homeworkers. However, the finding perhaps does underline that though the mere fact of homeworking during lockdown has obviously increased flexibility, there remains a potentially large gap between employee desires and manager practice when it comes to extending that flexibility to time as well as physical location. Indeed, a recent survey by Harvard Business Review found that many employers have doubts about the motivation of people working from home: 41 percent of respondents were sceptical about whether remote workers could stay motivated in the long term.[38] It would be wrong to hypothesise from one survey, but if this held true it would represent a clear barrier to maximising the opportunity of 'Healthy Hybrid' working.

Respondents to our survey rated flexibility over time to be the most important factor for their future career prospects, when compared with a range of flexibility and wellbeing options – 88 percent said that they wanted employers to trust them to manage their time during the day (see graph 11).

Thus, the desire for trust over time might have a harder-edged business case in its favour too: it could become a battleground for recruitment and retention, with employers who fail to maximise flexibility and its potential to create a 'Healthy Hybrid' model losing out in the search for talent.

How important would the following factors be when thinking about your future career prospects?

	The opportunity to work at least 50% of my hours remotely (i.e. hybrid working)	That my employer takes employee health and wellbeing seriously	That my employer trusts me to manage my time flexibly during the day	That my employer supports formal flexible working requests	That my employer takes diversity and inclusion seriously	That my employer provides a generous employee benefits, wellbeing or health insurance scheme
Don't know	9 %	3 %	2 %	7 %	9 %	7 %
Total not important	18 %	11 %	8 %	15 %	19 %	20 %
Total important	70 %	85 %	88 %	77 %	72 %	72 %

Proportion of respondents

■ Total important   ■ Neither important nor unimportant   ■ Total not important   ■ Don't know

Graph 11

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Vitality

Case Study

Microsoft UK

Though well positioned from a technological and cultural point of view, the shift to working from home at scale in March 2020 brought immediate challenges for Microsoft. According to Nick Hedderman, Director of Microsoft UK's Modern Work and Security Business Group, whilst it was clear the organisation might be more productive remotely, the company was concerned about the wellbeing of its employees, leading to several swift changes in working practices.

Across all Microsoft locations globally, a policy of enhanced flexibility was introduced to support people with caring or home-schooling responsibilities, which gives employees around the world greater choice in how, where and when they work. Additional wellbeing leave days were also granted and regular communications from Microsoft's leadership team kept the company updated.

In the UK, Microsoft introduced 'Thrive', their own "wellbeing university", where various experts presented on strategies surrounding diet, exercise, sleep and healthy lifestyles. Microsoft also enhanced the virtual hiring and onboarding experience for new recruits by increasing the number of mentors and networking opportunities across the organisation and creating more structure to their first few months. This, according to Hedderman, was particularly important for graduate or apprentice hires who have to integrate without either access to the "repository of organisational knowledge" embodied by the office, or prior experience of a formal work environment.

Microsoft pushed hard on giving employees flexibility over their time and encouraged asynchronous working. Hedderman highlighted that its success, from both a productivity and wellbeing perspective, hinges upon "a culture of clear contracting" about healthy behaviours between managers and employees at the team level, with safeguards in place to prevent the danger that high flexibility translates into an 'always on' culture. However, Hedderman believes enhanced hybrid working policies will become "fundamental" to attracting and retaining the best workforce talent after the pandemic. As he put it, "if your company is not offering that, if you go back to a 9 to 5 in the same place, great people will start to question whether they have a good employer that supports them".

Where do homeworkers work best?

Britain's homeworkers find the majority of work tasks easier when working from home, including most organisational tasks and even more creative activities. The exception is collaboration, especially with close colleagues. Managers and leaders reviewing their physical workplace design should strike a careful balance between promoting connectivity and calm to unlock a true 'best of both' approach.

Whilst it is clear that Britain's homeworkers value working from home from a health and wellbeing perspective, understanding the productivity potential of different work settings will be crucial to unlocking any true 'best of both' benefits from 'Healthy Hybrid' working. What tasks work best at home; what tasks are better done in the office? And is there a way of organising hybrid workflows so that homeworkers can become more productive in both settings?

Table one shows the results of 24 different work tasks or activities ranked in order of how much easier our respondents found them whilst working from home. The vast majority – 16 – were found to be much easier, including "managing my time effectively" (+44 ppts) and organisational tasks such as "staying on top of my emails" (+39 ppts). Yet more creative activities such as "carrying out tasks where I have to be more creative or think differently (+23 ppts) and "carrying out tasks where I have to be more innovative or develop new ideas (+17ppts) also came out strongly as being easier when working from home.

On the other hand, working from home was seen to make seven tasks or activities less easy (or more difficult) for a majority of homeworkers. Some of these might seem obvious, such as "taking up training and development opportunities" (-4ppts easier) or "networking" (-3ppts). However, perhaps the most consistent theme seems to be collaboration or teamworking in larger groups, particularly with close colleagues.

"Carrying out tasks where I collaborate with other people" was viewed as the most difficult when working from home, with a net easier rating of -17 percentage points.

Where do homeworkers work best? Continued

Table One

	Has working remotely made the following easier or more difficult for you?	Net easier (ppts)	Total easier	Neither easier nor more difficult	Total more difficult	Don't know / NA
1	Carrying out tasks where I work mainly on my own	+56	64 %	26 %	8 %	2 %
2	Manage my time effectively	+44	57 %	27 %	14 %	2 %
3	Being more productive (i.e. getting more done)	+41	55 %	28 %	15 %	2 %
4	Staying on top of my emails	+39	51 %	35 %	12 %	2 %
5	Organising my diary and appointments effectively	+37	48 %	36 %	11 %	5 %
6	Staying on top of my instant messenger communications (e.g. like Slack or Teams)	+36	46 %	36 %	10 %	9 %
7	Working on small projects	+27	41 %	38 %	14 %	7 %
8	Carrying out tasks where I have to be creative or think differently	+23	39 %	39 %	16 %	6 %
9	Participating effectively in small meetings	+22	40 %	35 %	19 %	6 %
10	Carrying out tasks where I have to be innovative or develop new ideas	+17	34 %	40 %	18 %	8 %
11	Understanding what my manager wants from me	+9	30 %	45 %	21 %	3 %
12	Communicating what I want from my manager	+8	31 %	43 %	23 %	4 %
13	Making decisions that affect me and my colleagues	+7	26 %	50 %	18 %	6 %
14	Having conversations with my line manager about my development, pay or career progression	+7	30 %	39 %	23 %	8 %
15	Influencing decisions that affect me and my colleagues	+5	26 %	46 %	21 %	7 %
16	Working on large projects	+1	27 %	36 %	26 %	11 %
17	Progressing my career in terms of status or pay	0	22 %	44 %	22 %	12 %
18	Building better relationships with other professionals and networking	-3	28 %	34 %	31 %	7 %
19	Taking up training and development opportunities	-4	26 %	34 %	29 %	10 %

Where do homeworkers work best? Continued

	Has working remotely made the following easier or more difficult for you?	Net easier (ppts)	Total easier	Neither easier nor more difficult	Total more difficult	Don't know / NA
20	Working on tasks with colleagues who I seldom work with	-4	26 %	37 %	30 %	8 %
21	Participating effectively in large meetings	-5	28 %	30 %	33 %	9 %
22	Managing my team[39]	-9	24 %	34 %	33 %	9 %
23	Working on tasks with colleagues who I usually work with	-12	24 %	35 %	36 %	5 %
24	Carrying out tasks where I work collaboratively with other people	-17	24 %	31 %	41 %	5 %

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HEALTHY HYBRID

Vitality

Where do homeworkers work best? Continued

Some people may be surprised that a clear majority of homeworkers feel working from home is better for tasks that require creativity and innovation. Certainly, many commentators, not to mention most business leaders we interviewed, viewed 'serendipitous' face-to-face interactions in physical workplaces as central to the creative or ideas-generating process, at least at a company-wide level.

One theory as to why this might diverge from homeworkers' views in our survey, advanced in the wider literature, is simply the sheer amount of distraction power contained in modern office environments – from chatty colleagues, poorly designed environments that over-promote stimulation and the widespread use of technology platforms in our work, despite many of them having been built to demand constant attention. The combined force of this has led theorists like Cal Newport, an associate professor of computer science at Georgetown University, to discuss the death of "deep" work, which he defines as "all the professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit".[40] This is contrasted, unfavourably in Newport's opinion, with "shallow" work, which involves completing small and easily actioned tasks at a high volume – think sending lots of emails, or replying to social media messages. It would be wrong to reason from just our survey, but **might it be possible that the design of modern physical workplaces and the trend to 'open plan' office space has overpromoted**

stimulation and collaboration in a way that actually harms creativity for some people?

Certainly, it is something for managers and leaders to reflect upon, if they are reviewing the use of their physical workplaces as part of a transition to 'Healthy Hybrid' working.

On the other hand, our survey did find clear evidence to support the equally commonly expressed hypothesis that group work via online platforms might be a poor substitute for face to face collaboration, particularly when working with close colleagues.

This finding is supported by other surveys during the pandemic. Analysis by Boston Consulting Group suggests that whilst 75 percent of employees felt able to maintain their productivity in the first few months of the pandemic, this fell to 51 percent when considering collaborative tasks. "Social connectivity" – being able to connect with colleagues - was found to have a particularly outsized effect on productive collaboration.[41] Along with our survey, this tends to suggest that managers and leaders should set aside 'core hours' or 'all-in' days at the physical workplace for collaborative teamwork, when considering how best to organise their 'Healthy Hybrid' strategies.

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HEALTHY HYBRID

Case Study

Vitality

Peloton

The arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic last year precipitated a rapid and radical transformation of Peloton's business model, which, according to Managing Director, International, Kevin Cornils, has unquestionably led to lasting innovation. With showrooms closed, Peloton quickly retrained employees affected by this into online equivalent roles, providing high-touch customer service, even as face-to-face contact was prohibited. Content production also pivoted, with instructors temporarily teaching classes from their own homes as opposed to the studio. "If you told our production team: within six weeks you are going to be completely changing the way you produce content," Cornils said, "they would have said it would have taken months."

As well as retraining, this shift required in-depth listening to different groups within the company's overall headcount. As Cornils describes it, the company is not "one-size-fits-all" – there was a wide variety of experience in terms of how different roles were directly affected by lockdown restrictions. "Lots of listening" was key to get the shift to virtual right. For example, in order to improve team collaboration and to quickly adapt, the organisation introduced new touchpoints, including weekly virtual "cuppa" sessions hosted by Cornils.

Peloton's leadership team also spent a lot of time "working on norms" to ensure flexibility did not threaten wellbeing. Cornils made it clear this must come from the top. For example, leaders now have a new footer in their emails, reminding people it is ok to respond at a time that their flexible hours allow. More broadly, Cornils believes the pandemic has required a more "involved" type of leadership. Remote working teams need to feel connected and part of the company, which means leaders need to be "more real, more understanding and more authentic".

10 ways
to Healthy Hybrid

A Blueprint for Business

HEALTHY HYBRID

The evidence shared in the previous chapters suggests a 'Healthy Hybrid' model is not only possible but optimal

Offering a route forward for employers looking to achieve the 'best of both'. Inclusive productivity gains with a firm commitment to the health and wellbeing of all, irrespective of work environments. Pivotal is the insight that wellbeing and productivity – health and economic competitiveness – are two sides of the same coin: you need both in order to flourish.

However, as with so much in the past year, the road ahead is uncertain. Even when stimulated by a seismic event and where values appear to be shifting, delivering sustainable behaviour change within workplace settings will remain challenging.

RSA + Vitality

Developed jointly by Vitality alongside the RSA Future of Work programme, this final chapter sets out ten recommendations designed for employers to enable a Healthy Hybrid culture; driving positive behaviour change through practical interventions and sustaining this values shift through effective reporting and accountability.

Vitality

Establishing a 'Healthy Hybrid' culture requires inclusive engagement to be driven from the top-down

A 'Healthy Hybrid' workplace culture must come from the top-down, with new wellbeing mandates and good behaviour practised by senior leaders themselves. But nurturing 'psychological safety' will be crucial to make sure this culture is also reinforced from the bottom-up.

A Blueprint for Business

HEALTHY HYBRID

Vitality

How to implement Healthy Hybrid – 10 recommendations for business

Inclusive engagement

01 Health and wellbeing to be included in Company Risk Registers and prioritised at board level.

02 Senior leaders must practise, reinforce, and normalise Healthy Hybrid behaviours.

03 Create 'Healthy Hybrid' feedback loops between employees and leaders.

Practical interventions

04 Promote inclusive productivity gains by assessing outcomes not hours.

05 Mandatory 'right to disconnect' policies to protect workers from burnout.

06 Inclusive policies across all work environments focusing on workers not workplace.

07 Movement breaks for 30 minutes a day to protect musculoskeletal health.

Reporting and accountability

08 Effective and consistent wellbeing measurement is needed for 'Healthy Hybrid' cultures.

09 Make clear who is accountable for wellbeing mandates, and train accordingly.

10 Track and publish hybrid worker pay and progression data preventing digital disadvantage.

01/Expectation

Close the expectation gap with new mandates on employee health and wellbeing that are integrated into Company Risk Registers and prioritised at board level

Many employers have gone to great lengths to support homeworkers' wellbeing through lockdown. However, there remains a clear gap between employees' 'demand for different' and their expectations for the future, both in terms of physical location and whether they will be supported by their managers to use their time flexibly.

Closing this expectation gap is critical for 'Healthy Hybrid' strategies that deliver shared value for people, business and society. **Action must come from the top-down**, with senior leaders setting new organisation-wide mandates for health and wellbeing. Moreover, these mandates must be embedded in the way organisations report and hold leaders to account, with poor workforce health and wellbeing seen at the same level as any other economic threat to the organisation's productivity and competitiveness. **Reporting on health and wellbeing outcomes should therefore be integrated into the frameworks executive boards use to hold CEOs to account for their performance**. The threat of low wellbeing should be added to Company Risk Registers to facilitate this.

> "Action must come from the top-down

> "Reporting on health and wellbeing outcomes should therefore be integrated into the frameworks executive boards use to hold CEOs to account for their performance

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02/Leaders

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HEALTHY HYBRID

Vitality

Senior leaders must practise, reinforce, and normalise Healthy Hybrid behaviours

As the leadership expert Margie Warrel argues, "there is no more powerful way to demonstrate the priority you put on mental health and wellbeing than how you take care of yourself".[42]

Without a strong commitment from senior leaders to embody and constantly reinforce the 'Healthy Hybrid' values shift, it will be hard to establish lasting behaviour change. Behavioural evidence is clear that people are more likely to change their behaviour if they believe it is in line with the majority "social norm".[43] For example, when working at home was more marginal, healthy habits around flexible working - such as clear communication about when responses to emails sent outside 'normal' working hours are needed - was less widespread. Now, a greater understanding of how flexible workers must interact with those working more traditional hours can allow social norms to be established, with better behaviour more likely to be sustained. As focal points for norms and behaviour, senior leaders in particular must lead from the front by practising what they preach when it comes to wellbeing and normalising 'Healthy Hybrid' behaviour.

> **"**Behavioural evidence is clear that people are more likely to change their behaviour if they believe it is in line with the majority "social norm"

> **"**Senior leaders in particular must lead from the front by practising what they preach when it comes to wellbeing and normalising 'Healthy Hybrid' behaviour

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03/Feedback

Create 'Healthy Hybrid' feedback loops between employees and leaders

Most senior leaders we interviewed suggested that clear communication and shared safe spaces to discuss emerging issues have been a key part of their crisis management strategy, for both wellbeing and productivity purposes. This idea - that colleagues can openly and respectfully share their feelings without the fear of negative consequences - is called "psychological safety" and is the key ingredient in the individual bonds that ultimately lead to a healthy workplace culture. Research by Google's Aristotle project has found trust and shared psychological safety to be the most consistent feature of high performing teams.[44]

As we move further away from the acute crisis, organisations should not throw these gains away. Informal shared spaces set up to manage wellbeing and productivity through the pandemic should continue and, where relevant, new formal employee representation forums should be set up to protect against backsliding. **Employee voice and representation can help provide employees with a shared space of their own to express concerns about management and unhealthy hybrid behaviour**. But in an organisation that is committed to psychological safety they can also provide a quick and constructive feedback loop between employees and senior leaders, that can help to lock in healthy behaviours.

> Employee voice and representation can help provide employees with a shared space of their own to express concerns about management and unhealthy hybrid behaviour

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HEALTHY HYBRID

Driving 'Healthy Hybrid' behaviour change through practical interventions

Enhanced flexibility can drive inclusive productivity, but only if protections are put in place that allow behaviour change to be healthy and sustained. But a 'best of both' approach is about more than flexibility: leaders should also look to improve employee assistance and work environments across all locations, with movement and physical activity needing a dedicated focus.

Vitality

04/Productivity

Promote inclusive productivity gains by assessing performance based on outcomes not hours

Homeworkers' desire for enhanced flexibility over time as well as location is clear. It's important for wellbeing on its own terms, but it is also potentially important for diversity and inclusion too, given it is likely to be particularly valued by groups with caregiving responsibilities.

It will take time for organisations to get this right however, as even organisations that have successfully moved in this direction during the pandemic may find it harder to calibrate behaviours and etiquette in a fully hybrid scenario.

On the other hand, many employees might see flexibility over time as part of a wider shift towards productivity being tracked on results or outcomes, not hours.

This has been a popular shift during the pandemic for some homeworkers and is widely supported – 69 percent of respondents to an Adecco survey of 8000 office based employees, managers and executives across the developed world supported this policy.[45] For workers that might struggle to meet presenteeist expectations – such as caregivers – or people who may initially be more anxious about returning to the physical workplace due to Covid-19 – for example, older or BAME homeworkers – it could be particularly helpful.

Therefore, while **there will be no one size fits all approach, it seems like a clear and quick win for senior leaders to draw up policies in collaboration with their teams, with clear guidelines that apply to all members of the team and therefore establish social norms.**

05/Breaks

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HEALTHY HYBRID

Vitality

Mandatory breaks and 'right to disconnect' policies are needed to protect hybrid workers from burnout and level up inequalities

Moves towards flexibility over time must be accompanied by greater protections against an unhealthy approach to work and productivity that can leave hybrid and homeworkers at a greater risk of burnout. This is particularly important given the evidence that particular groups, notably BAME women, might both be working harder and more likely to be "struggling to cope" with different demands on their time.[46]

Positive behavioural changes can make a big difference. Research increasingly suggests that taking breaks – even for five minutes – between meetings is absolutely crucial to allow us to reset our focus.[47] A minimum five-minute break between all meetings should be mandatory for all employees, but particularly those working in home or hybrid settings. Managers could also integrate well-evidenced behavioural 'nudges' such as messages that encourage mindfulness or simple breathing exercises during these short breaks.

Bigger changes may also be needed and in some jurisdictions are already being considered by legislative policymakers. One such change is the idea of formal "right to disconnect" policies that would grant employees a guarantee of protected time to disengage from emails and 'always on' work cultures. Governments, for example in France and Ireland, have begun to enshrine these rights in statutory employment law, a policy move that polling by Opinium for Prospect Union suggested would command a majority (66 percent) of support amongst Britain's homeworkers.[48] Senior leaders should explore whether they take similar steps for their organisations. Maximising the inclusive productivity and wellbeing benefits from enhanced flexibility could depend upon it.

> " A minimum five-minute break between all meetings should be mandatory for all employees

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06/Policies

New health and wellbeing policies must be inclusive across all work environments and focus on workers, not workplaces

As senior leaders review their health and wellbeing policies and establish new mandates, it is inevitable that they will need to refresh existing employee health and wellbeing programmes. This will be important for business reasons – as the most obvious yardstick for how seriously an organisation takes wellbeing - it will likely become a source of recruitment and retention competition. However, the deeper shift in values towards work during lockdown has also affected expectations of employee benefits. According to the Financial Times, "stay-here" perks associated with long hours in the office – such as "ping-pong tables, on-site massages and creches" are out; tailored support centred around "health, financial stability and flexibility" – such as wellness apps, health insurance, debt support and enhanced statutory entitlements like shared parental leave – are in.[49]

Either way, the key to a 'Healthy Hybrid' approach is to make sure employee benefit packages are inclusive across the variety of different locations where employees may conduct work – the office or face-to-face workplace, home, co-working spaces, the local coffee shop and community.

As such, **senior leaders should rethink entitlements – focusing on workers not workplaces**. However, adopting this approach is key to delivering on the 'best of both' promise of hybrid working in the sense of aligning workflows with the benefits of different work locations. This is not just about providing workers with flexibility to choose their location. To be truly inclusive – some workers will not

be able to work at home or in the office as they please – it is also about mitigating the downsides of different workplaces.

In terms of returning to the physical workplace, the key priority is surely to reimagine the environment so that it is more conducive to 'deep' work (see chapter three). With fewer distractions and dedicated quiet zones, it may even mean that the physical workplace – as many business leaders we interviewed suggested – can unlock the creative potential of "serendipity" and "social capital" that for many homeworkers currently appears to be less important.

Given many physical workplaces may, at least some days a week, have more space at their disposal, this seems like a good moment to experiment. On the other hand, home and hybrid workers will need to retain the ability to conduct many of the activities that seem to be done more naturally face-to-face – networking for example – online. Structured serendipity – the formal organisation of things that can happen by happy accident, such as watercooler chats or impromptu coffees – may feel like a digital facsimile that many people want to leave behind. Yet continuing this approach is likely to emerge an important part of home and hybrid workers feeling included and therefore the wider fight against digital disadvantage (see point 10 below).

07/30 minutes

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HEALTHY HYBRID

Vitality

Organisations should schedule 30 minute movement breaks each day for all employees to protect musculoskeletal health

As discussed in chapter two, there is growing evidence that homeworking during the pandemic has created an 'ergonomic timebomb', with cramped and unsafe home offices driving poor musculoskeletal health. This is layered on top of an already challenging context – even before the pandemic, data from Sport England shows the average UK office worker is sedentary for a shocking nine hours a day.[50] Therefore, managers and leaders should look to get ahead of this and draw up robust new preventative strategies that promote good posture, health and safety when working at home.

Encouraging more movement during the working day is a perfect example of a shared value solution, with clear evidence that it would improve individual health outcomes and workplace performance, as well as lowering the long-term cost of physical inactivity to the NHS and wider society. Managers and leaders should look to create time in their organisation's core schedule that is set aside and sacrosanct for movement. The Chief Medical Officer currently recommends adults engage in physical activity for at least 150 minutes every week, therefore just 30 minutes movement a day would help all full-time employees meet that target whilst at work.

To maximise behaviour change, this should be logged in time-recording processes, as with Lewis Silkin's Kindness Code (see case study on page 53). Shared group exercises could even be built into the protective time where appropriate, but for most organisations it will be important not to be too prescriptive given the need to be inclusive of employees that may have long-term health conditions or limitations on their movement. Yet, even then, low-entry activities such as stretching can be promoted to make sure all employees feel included. Moreover, scheduling 30 minutes movement is possible across all locations employees might now work from. Therefore, it can play a central role in any organisation's 'Healthy Hybrid' strategy.

> Draw up robust new preventative strategies that promote good posture

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HEALTHY HYBRID

Vitality

Sustaining 'Healthy Hybrid' values requires consistent reporting and accountability

Effective measurement and accountability are essential for sustaining 'Healthy Hybrid' behaviours and culture, but any new data collection approach must be done with employees' consent. The potential for digital disadvantage – where hybrid workers are more likely to be passed over for pay and progression opportunities – should rank highly on companies' risk registers.

08/Measure

Effective and consistent wellbeing measurement is needed to radically level up 'Healthy Hybrid' behaviours and culture

" Accountability must go beyond CEOs and their formal reporting to boards

" Better data collection could radically level-up wellbeing across companies

Higher employee wellbeing is a driver of workplace productivity, which leads to both business competitiveness and wider social value. Yet, there remains a large gap in wellbeing readiness. To tackle this, accountability must go beyond CEOs and their formal reporting to boards: if culture and behaviour change are to be sustained, there needs to be a much deeper set of incentives for managers to promote their leaders' new wellbeing mandates. Technology can now capture a whole range of objective proxy indicators for wellbeing and productivity – for example, time logged into shared work platforms. This can augment existing ways of measuring wellbeing, such as time-logging processes and utilisation metrics, as well as day-to-day management conversations around issues such as mental health.

When aligned with performance management approaches – for example, managers being evaluated on their ability to deliver high wellbeing, not just productivity or profitability, this could radically level-up wellbeing across companies. However, it is absolutely crucial that any recording of data for wellbeing purposes passes a high bar of employee consent, with extensive consultation through formal employee voice channels – it cannot be seen as 'policing'.

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Vitality

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09/Accountable

Organisational structures must make it clear who is accountable for health and wellbeing mandates, and this must be reflected in training

Equally, even the best approach to capturing and measuring wellbeing may flounder if accountability for turning this into clear action plans is not crystal clear within organisational structures. A quick win for senior leaders would be to create a designated head of health and wellbeing, ideally in the senior leadership team. This person would then lead on the monitoring, measurement and organisation-wide reporting about wellbeing, working hand in hand with the CEO on the new health and wellbeing mandate. Another key responsibility would be training managers in the directives that emerge from the new health and wellbeing mandates, ensuring that over time organisations reward the capability to deliver higher wellbeing, as well as the more technical aspects of management.
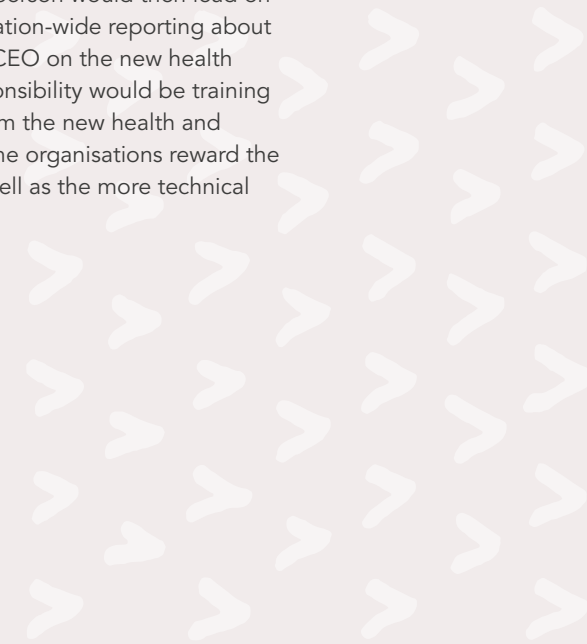
10/Publish

Organisations should track and publish data on hybrid workers' pay and progression to prevent digital disadvantage

One of the key worries for hybrid working models is that it will create a two-tier workforce. The senior leaders we interviewed all expressed fears that a new form of presenteeism could emerge, with those who work from home and digitally dial-in to meetings disadvantaged when it comes to promotion, pay and career progression. This divide already existed before the Covid-19 pandemic – and is particularly worrying for diversity and inclusion, given the likelihood that groups like women and caregivers might gravitate towards hybrid and home working options.

Senior leaders must watch this carefully, monitoring and ideally publishing their own pay and progression data in the way that they already do for women and other protected groups. Any true 'Healthy Hybrid' approach must work hand in hand with wider diversity and inclusion goals, whilst the potential for digital disadvantage should rank highly on any new risk register drawn up to secure a 'Healthy Hybrid' workplace culture.

" Any true 'Healthy Hybrid' approach must work hand in hand with wider diversity and inclusion goals

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Vitality

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HEALTHY HYBRID

Case Study

Vitality

Lewis Silkin

At the start of the pandemic, one of the main challenges for law firm Lewis Silkin was finding a way to clearly "give people permission to take time out for themselves" [to pursue wellbeing activities]. According to Lucy Lewis, partner in the firm, initially this proved difficult, "this time last year, six weeks into lockdown, we'd done lots of nudging and prodding for people to take time away, but all the informal feedback we got was that it wasn't resonating."

The solution came via time recording (lawyers are required to account very precisely for the value of time), with the introduction of a "kindness code" – a timesheet code against which people were asked to log time taken for the pursuit of wellbeing activity, either for themselves or others. The name of the code was deliberate, grounded in a behavioural assumption that people might be more inclined to use the time if it were labelled in a way that drew upon the intrinsic value we give to being kind to others. As opposed to all previous nudges, formal time logging for the kindness code created "an almost immediate behaviour shift". According to Matt Johnson, Co-Chief Operating Officer, the success of the code drew upon role modelling from senior leadership, which convinced people it was taken seriously and considered valuable. But the formalising of this in formal time logging made the difference.

The 'kindness code' has now become a key part of the organisation's wellbeing strategy, affecting its plans for the future. The organisation is planning on reimagining the code as something that might encourage people to become more involved in their community. According to Lucy Lewis, the hope is that "hybrid work represents an opportunity for employees to contribute to their local community" with benefits for both individual wellbeing and wider society.

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Methodology

The blueprint draws on the following mixed-method approach:

- A comprehensive literature review of the evidence base on how the pandemic experience, lockdown and working from home have shaped outcomes for Britain's homeworkers, including data from the Vitality programme.

- A new survey of 1062 homeworkers (defined as people who worked remotely during Q1 2021), weighted for representativeness, conducted with the polling company Opinium. Fieldwork was conducted 14th – 23rd April.

- New RSA analysis of the Understanding Society (USoc) Covid-19 data-series, a longitudinal survey with over 6000 respondents.

- A series of twelve semi-structured qualitative interviews, either with senior leaders of major UK firms or experts in the future of work.

Vitality is a UK-based insurer and investment provider, and one of the UK's leading private medical insurers. Vitality pioneered the 'shared-value' insurance model, which is a unique approach to insurance based on the scientifically proven principles of behavioural economics. Through this model, Vitality uses incentives and rewards to help members take a more active role in managing their own wellness by engaging with the Vitality Programme.

Vitality's corporate health offering integrates Private Medical Insurance with the Vitality programme. Through its expertise in corporate health and wellbeing and the use of data insights, Vitality provides extensive support for employers to shape their health and wellbeing strategy and drive employee engagement. Vitality works with its corporate clients to encourage their employees to develop healthy long-term habits that are good for employees, good for the employers, and good for society.