

Culture and Communication

Creating New Work and Social Paradigms Article 6

All the speculation around working from home during the pandemic has created a variety of workplace shifts that we will only fully comprehend in the future. From digital communication patterns changing, to juggling work and kids concurrently and having more Zoom and online meetings than ever before – what effect on work has the pandemic really had?

Unsurprisingly, virtual communication increased and preconceived limitations for large meetings, large emails and online forums were completely diminished during COVID-19. Even though these communication alternatives took the throne, many employees found it harder to stay engaged in long virtual meetings compared to in-person. Organisations utilised the quick and easy accessibility of meetings, with data showing that meeting times decreased but the number of meetings in a day increased – good or bad that you might be seeing your colleagues faces more often, who will know...

Inclusivity in communication was also noted through the lens of virtual communication. Emails sent to a wider scope of people helped facilitate organisational challenges which likely cut across the business and information became more relevant to all. In an already unstable working environment during COVID-19, when people felt like their jobs and work were not in their control, this type of inclusivity would have provided a wealth of benefits to employees.

Prior to COVID-19, many remote workers often felt left out or 'shunned' compared to team members who worked in the office. As more people begin to shift to flexible working from home arrangements, or remote working all together, incorporating all team members, at home and beyond, needs to be addressed. Whether it is the incorporation of an exclusive remote working policy, the hybrid approach (working from home flexibility) or frequent Zoom catch ups, each presents unique

challenges where loneliness and separation can be exacerbated.

Despite these challenges, the hybrid model of work is here to stay, and managers need to prepare for this new work paradigm as the 'new normal'. Managers can promote participation and carefully construct teams to enhance team building initiatives. For example, hosting informal social events (e.g. virtual coffee chats, team celebrations, new employee recognition, and awards ceremonies). These events should be genuinely supported and promoted to give employees a collective approach and foster inclusion across the board.

During COVID-19, some well-known organisations provided employees with cocktail nights to support team building exercises by making cocktails. This event was conducted virtually to facilitate the inclusivity of team members. These types of events were highly important, especially for those who started working during the pandemic and may have never met their team in real life.

The same cultural cohesiveness that has been promoted during COVID-19 team building should also translate to the general behaviour of staff that do choose to work from home in the future. Prior to the pandemic, many people hesitated to work from home because there was a perception that they would be penalised for this behaviour, often having to negotiate with managers beforehand.

Working from home is becoming the social norm, and managers should build a culture to

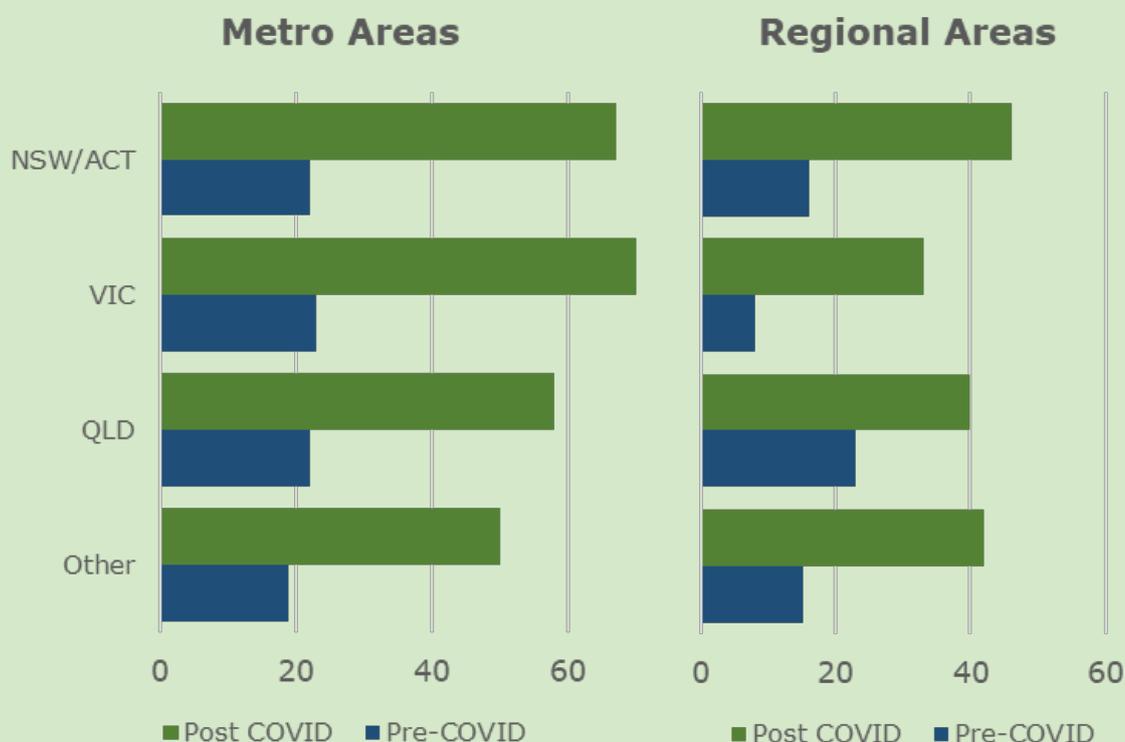
support the hybrid or remote working schema of the organisation. Organisations should provide consistent feedback policies and transparent appraisals to encourage the work completed outside the office.

The new work and social paradigms derived from COVID-19 are not in a hurry to disintegrate, in fact, they will more than likely become the 'new normal'. The 'new normal' not only blends work and home life environments, but also adds social aspects into the virtual world which will be another element to consider as we progress further into the tech savvy devices at our fingertips.

COVID-19 has proven that the technology in place currently works, virtual communication on a micro and mass level is effective and can enhance inclusivity on a large scale.

What is stopping us? The power is now left with organisations and managers to continue supporting those who want to work from home, knowing it can be effective and encouraging social initiatives to continue team building beyond the physical office.

Working from Home (WFH) Before and During the Height of COVID by State – Metro & Regional Areas



Percentage WFH Before and During the Height of COVID.
Source: University of Sydney Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies (ITLS)

Initially, COVID-19 sent many organisations into a reactive response strategy, and it has been a learning process ever since as many employees remain relatively comfortable working from home. However, the technological cohesiveness that the pandemic highlighted will continue, and many organisations will establish innovative proactive responses to tackle the work, social and home life paradigms.

The cultural mindset around working from home will also continue to shift, as many employees believe their managers will allow them to work from home more often post-pandemic.

In our next article...

'The impact of COVID-19 on Wollongong's Commercial Landscape'

