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**REINVENT THE
WORKSPACE FOR
THE NEW NORMAL**

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HR & CHANGE

by Alain Thys

OVERVIEW

Workplace realities are changing and businesses need to make changes to the physical workspace arrangements. But rather than come up with arbitrary work-from-home rules or rushing into or smaller office footprints, it's important to rip up the rulebook and think through the workspace reality from this new paradigm.

As an HR leader, you can take the lead of the office conversation and make sure that people are as productive as possible wherever they end up working. And that they can truly live the values of your business when they create, collaborate, produce and socialize when they come to the office.

This will allow your business and people to reap the rewards of flexible work arrangements, but also maintain the cohesion and fun that comes from shared experiences and from being part of the same company tribe.

THE COVID CRISIS HAS PERMANENTLY CHANGED THE WORKING REALITY.

Working from home and team video calls were only trends at the start of 2020.

But today, it's hard to imagine a reality in which we would all simply resume our old office and/or international business travel habits.

For example, 88% of employees who worked at home during the UK lockdown would like to continue doing so in some capacity, with 47% wanting to do so 'often' or even all the time.

THIS NEW-FOUND FLEXIBILITY COMES WITH NUMEROUS BENEFITS.

It saves costs, increases flexibility, reduces travel and allows people to spend extra time with their family. Not to mention that dress codes are a lot more casual.

But it also comes with downsides.

NOT EVERYONE 'CAN' WORK FROM HOME, EVEN IF THEIR JOB CONTENT ALLOWS.

Sure, senior executives have both the physical space and financial flexibility to truly enjoy working from their garden or private office. But even if the nature of their job would allow them to work from home, a significant number of employees find it almost a technical impossibility. Especially if they live in a big city where they share a small apartment with others, have limited internet access and a small kitchen table which they nickname 'the office'.

HOMES ARE SHARED WITH NON-WORKERS.

Even middle-class employees who have the space find that working from home isn't always easy, especially if they share the house with others. Many couples have experienced the complexity of juggling kids and each other's video calls. And we've all seen the funny YouTube videos where a half-dressed partner suddenly appears in the background of a video call...

NOT EVERYONE LIKES IT.

While some personalities may find it a little easier to embrace solitude, those with more outgoing personalities or a need for intense social contact may miss their office. Their colleagues. The watercooler conversations. Or even the opportunity to do some shopping on the way to work.



SO EVEN THOUGH WE ARE CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK, THE OFFICE WILL REMAIN AN IMPORTANT SPACE FOR SOME EMPLOYEES.

But it will also need to fit into a broader context of workspaces in which some tasks happen on the premises and others happen remotely.

As an HR leader, you can take the lead in this conversation and this way ensure maximum productivity and wellbeing of the people in your care. You can help your business to reinvent your workspaces for this new reality.

This involves focusing on three components.

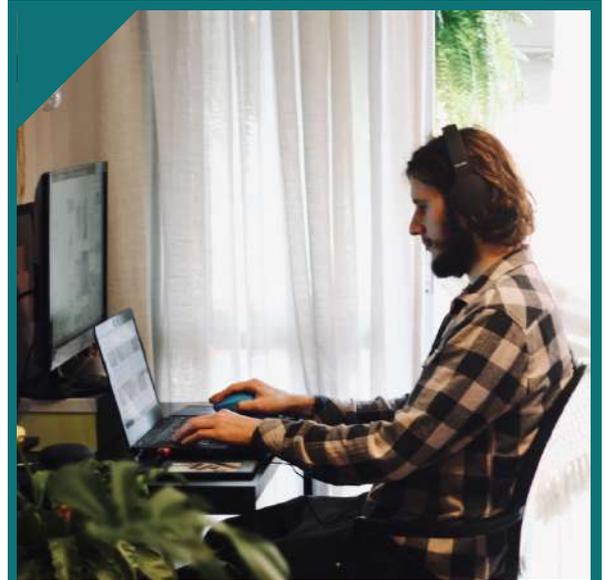
#1 - TAKE CARE OF THE HYGIENE FACTORS

During the COVID crisis, work started happening everywhere. But while the makeshift office in the garage or bedroom has worked for a while, it is not necessarily the answer to long-term productivity and motivation.

As an HR leader, you can help expand your company's concept of office to include all the non-traditional spaces where people work (at home, at Starbucks, in a satellite location, at the airport...). Once that's done, you can help ensure that each of these locations meets the minimum ergonomic, productivity and team building standards required for your business.

#2 - RESHAPE YOUR 'REAL' OFFICE

Even before the COVID crisis hit, our current industrial age office designs were ill-equipped for



HOW CAN YOU ENSURE NON-TRADITIONAL WORKSPACES MEET THE BASIC STANDARDS FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

These can range from checking whether people have decent chairs and internet connections at home to offering them flexi-desks in local office hubs close to where they live. But they should also ensure that management practices are attuned to managing teams working remotely whilst ensuring that there are sufficient remote team building activities. Or that Easter Eggs and Birthday cake get delivered to their home instead of their office desk!

today's working practices. Looking ahead, this disconnect between the traditional office and reality will only increase.

Yes, for those who don't have the space at home or who have client-facing tasks, offices are still the place where they can get their work done. But for those who have the choice, the office will become a place of gathering, creativity, socialising and confirming themselves to be part of the company 'tribe'.

As a result, the physical office layout, which is based on 19th and early 20th century templates, needs to change. A large portion of the cubicles or even open desk spaces will need to disappear and be replaced with social zones, silent zones, creative zones and informal meeting zones.

THIS ENSURES THAT THE OFFICE BECOMES AS MUCH A PLACE OF GATHERING THAT EMBODIES THE COMPANY VALUES AS A PLACE OF WORK.

"This disconnect between the traditional office and reality will only increase."

Alain Thys, Experience Architect



Some even argue that the offices of the future will even need to offer a 'unique office proposition' to convince employees (who have the choice) to make the journey to work rather than work from home.

While this task could be left to the designers of the facility management team (or as I found in one case, the finance department), it's probably wise to make sure your HR team is actively involved.

#3 - REMAIN FLEXIBLE

COVID-19 won't be the last shock to our system and we need to be ready to adapt. We already know that Zoom calls can't solve everything and we still need workspaces that foster collaboration as well as cater for creative workshops and high-touch interactions.

But in a few years, this may change again. AR/VR will be more commonplace and will be able to put people in the same virtual space. Perhaps even with a sense of touch.

PERHAPS THIS WILL CHANGE EVERYTHING AGAIN. PERHAPS IT WON'T.

The same applies to transportation preferences. These will continue to change and will therefore push for even more decentralised working structures. Paris is already introducing the 15-minute city concept in which it wants its citizens to work, shop and play within a maximum of 15 minutes walking or cycling from their homes [2]. Other cities are already following suit with similar programmes.

With all these moving parts, we can only be certain that any workspace reality we construct today will be out-of-date in a few years. As an HR leader, you can stay on top of these broader trends and help your business stay as flexible as possible in every possible way.

ALAIN THYS THE AUTHOR

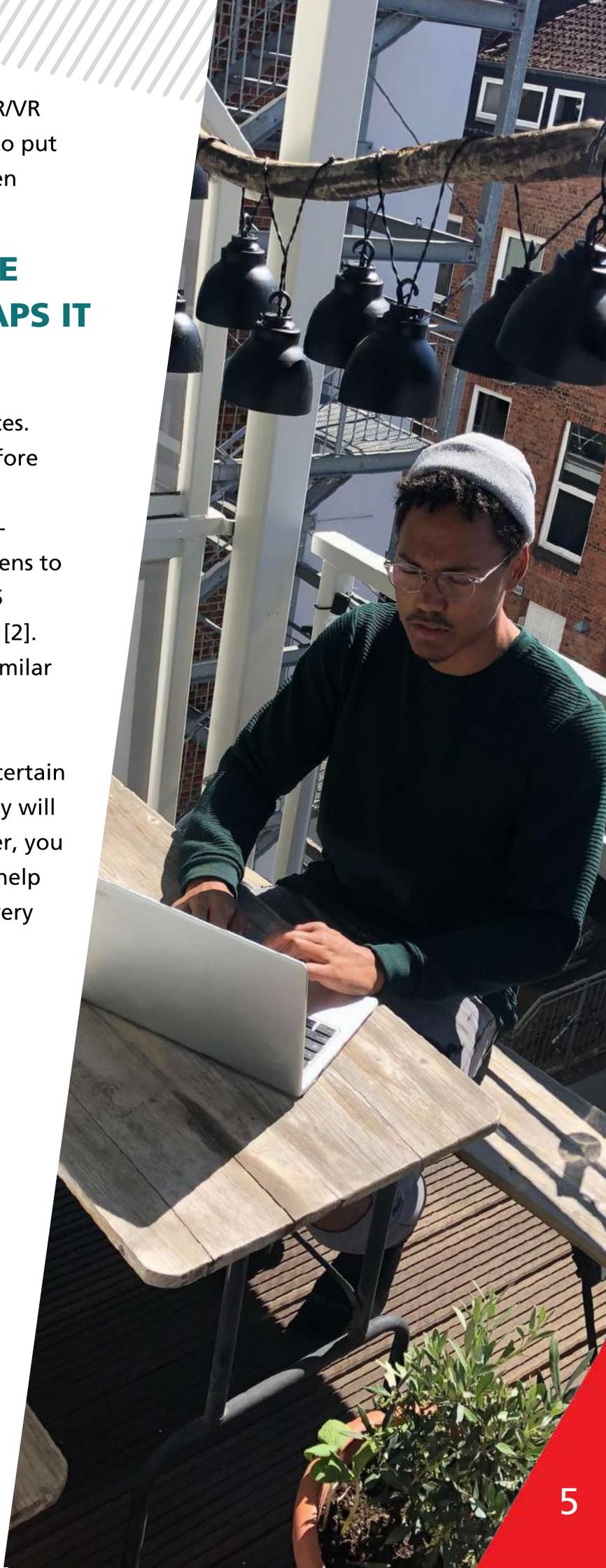


Alain Thys is an experience architect who has led transformation programmes impacting employees in 100+ countries. He specialises in the development of customer, employee and stake/shareholder experiences that delight and transform.

SOURCES

[1] Homeworking in the UK: before and during the lockdown, Cardiff University & University of Southampton, August 2020

[2] Paris wants to become a '15-minute city' - Tomorrow Magazine by Tomorrow City, May 2020.



HR & STRATEGIC CHANGE

AS AN HR LEADER, YOU SEE THE CHANGE

Digitalisation brought us a world of new business models, eco-systems and complexity. New collar jobs require a lot of blend digital, technical and soft skills. Change has truly become a constant. Talent shortage is real.

YOU WANT TO EXPAND YOUR ROLE, BUT LACK THE TOOLS TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

In the 2020s, HR leaders will need to become true talent managers, proactively helping the business to manage the human aspects of digitalisation, uncertainty, engagement and supply chain transformation. And while you want to create tomorrow, your toolkit still focuses on improving yesterday, assuming that HR is only about attracting, developing, retaining and especially administrating employees. If you want to do more, the white papers on Google offer beautiful buzzwords but they provide little practical guidance.

HR & STRATEGIC CHANGE: Key services & tools to support you

- ▲ Personal coaching and assistance from global experts to expand HR to talent management.
- ▲ Craft employee experiences that increase employee engagement and help align behaviour to the company strategy.
- ▲ Engage your people with an organisational purpose that delivers profit and a sense of personal fulfilment.
- ▲ Create a tech positive culture, that uses automation and digitalisation to augment the performance of the talent in your business.
- ▲ Leverage the talent in your company's ecosystem for maximum value to your organisation.

**CONTACT US TO DISCOVER THE NEXT STEPS
FOR YOU AND YOUR COMPANY**



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