

# The Workspace of the Future

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2020 will likely be remembered for its unprecedented disruption to the way we work, learn, travel, and socialise. In an attempt to mitigate the spread of novel coronavirus, at the height of the pandemic governments around the world enacted guidelines and measures to encourage workers to work from home where possible. The first lockdown measures were introduced in the United Kingdom in late March: six months on, many employees continue to work from home.

COVID-19 has obviously forced the issue of agile and remote working to the front of many organisations' priorities and strategic planning. However, these trends and shifts in working behaviour have been gaining pace for the last several years.

Future workspace is about flexible, responsive, energy conscious buildings that are an integrated part of the urban infrastructure. It's all facilitated by new technology - PropTech - which promises to deliver greater efficiency and greater productivity. In order to deliver on its potential, it's also critical that these advances are congruent with what people want from their workplace. Top talent will be aligned with top specifications and employers will be relying on developers, owners and landlords to create this environment for them. Here are four trends we think are here to stay.

## 1) Virtual collaboration that preserves productivity, regardless of physical location

The emergence of an increasingly collaborative and agile workforce has been widely discussed, and it is clear the revolution is far from over. The next wave of visual collaboration technologies allows the sharing of multiple streams of visual data to accelerate decision making in real time, across numerous devices, regardless of location. Traditional meeting room technologies with their hard-to-use systems and unreliable function are outdated.

More so than ever before, businesses must respond quickly to challenges and opportunities - to include communicating rapidly with employees and stakeholders. Our professional lives are now more immersive and intuitive experiences, and employees seek access to systems that will improve decision making and dramatically enhance business process efficiency. Augmented reality (AR) will change how and where we interact with others, share information and complete our daily tasks. AR is already commonplace thanks to apps such as Snapchat and games like Pokémon Go.

This technology combines the physical and the digital by overlaying what you can see with computer-generated graphics, information and data. We expect AR to streamline working processes, create immersive experiences and vastly improve communication, with a particular focus on meeting, learning and collaboration.

## 2) The office will become more of an innovative laboratory, and less of a factory

Although working from home is a viable alternative for many workers, the physical office will likely remain an important asset for most organisations. Furthermore, as our adaptation to social distancing measures in the workplace continues to improve, it is arguable that office spaces will become more specialised and sophisticated.

Following months of extended remote working, it is possible that actual interaction with colleagues could become a highlight of the working week: an opportunity to come together (even if less often than before) to catch up, discuss ideas, and take advantage of collegial support in a safe environment. In recent years, we have already seen the office become less important as a client gateway, but instead more of a place of gathering and sharing.

We expect to see less of a production line and more of a laboratory: a place of belonging and collaboration, and not just of transaction. For example, in professional services such as finance, management consultancy and even law, colleagues could do the majority of their work from home, but meet once a week in state-of-the-art facilities to explore new ideas or have conversations that benefit from face-to-face interactions. We believe the office of the future is less hierarchical, with a strengthening of peer-to-peer, adult-to-adult leadership trend, away from command and control. Co-creation is the direction of travel.

## 3) Smart Buildings and streamlined processes will become “must haves”

Smart buildings are those which make use of The Internet of Things (IoT). This is the ability to give everyday objects digital connectivity, by sending and receiving data via the internet. Already at work in some of the world's smartest office buildings, IoT applications are very varied. These could include, for example, printers that know when

they're low on ink or paper and can automatically order more; air conditioning and lighting that detects employees' individual preferences; and scanners that can transfer text to computer in record time.

If workers are only spending one or two days in the office each week, for example, that time is likely to become all the more precious. Systems and technologies which minimise the friction of everyday tasks (or indeed, minimise the need to physically touch or interact with objects) are anticipated to be in high demand.

Take ambient technology (Aml) for example, which uses IoT as the infrastructure through which it operates. Aml relies on environments fitted with sensors and intelligent systems to deliver personalised services in anticipation of user needs. By monitoring the presence of people, recognising their identities and context, acknowledging activities and adapting to changing needs, Aml will make it possible to automatically rebook meeting resources if one meeting overruns and allocate workspaces based on users' needs, diary commitments and task lists.

#### 4) A renewed focus on the things that matter most: health and sustainability

We anticipate that the offices of the future will feature technology which is capable of monitoring workers' health and safety. Good buildings will be those that recognise the importance of mental and physical well-being. In addition to featuring temperature monitors on entry, for example, workspaces could also provide discrete telehealth kiosks, whereby employees can quickly and efficiently obtain medical advice or treatment.

As for wellbeing more generally, offices can be attuned to circadian rhythms and provide greater access to fresh air. A variety of settings will allow people to move around more, in a way that acknowledges the difference between tasks requiring high engagement and collaboration, and those for deep concentration and chamber working with few visual and aural disruptions.

During the coronavirus pandemic, many of us experienced a deeper connection to - or longing for - fresh and open spaces. Arguably, there has been a heightened focus on sustainability and stewardship of our environment in the last year.

Undeniably, the ways in which we build and engage with our offices and homes can have a huge impact on the climate and natural ecosystems. Technology can also help make our built environments healthier and more eco-friendly. Smart buildings, such as Deloitte's The Edge in Amsterdam have environmental benefits as well. The Edge decommissions unused floors on quiet days to reduce heating, lighting and maintenance costs, and identifies when facilities are ready for cleaning or maintenance.

We believe that the workplace of tomorrow can provide a wealth of opportunities for workers and employers alike. And of course, the above trends are just some of the ways in which technology can be adopted and adapted to meet the many challenges faced by businesses.

#### A bit about DAC Beachcroft's PropTech Expertise

DAC Beachcroft's PropTech Team brings a wide-ranging service that helps manage the response to change. At the heart of this is a nationwide team of property and technology experts that can address the risks in this rapidly changing environment.

- 140 real estate lawyers who work in every part of the property lifecycle for organisations whose property assets are at the heart of their business. The team has the breadth and depth to have dedicated experts in offices, retail destinations, residential, leisure and health.
- A 50-strong Technology Law team, acting for both creators and users of technology. Our work is at the leading edge of technological innovation and informs our work for users and owners of property assets, ensuring that IT is aligned with core commercial objectives.
- The integration of specialists into the main project team - procurement, litigation, construction, IP - is a particular point of difference that brings efficiency in communication and excellence.

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