



# Five workplace trends will shape life after lockdown

We are experiencing the biggest remote work experiment in history – but many are beginning to imagine life after lockdown. Amid unprecedented [global job losses](#), concerns about transport infrastructure and the continuing need for [workplace social distancing](#), governments are launching back-to-work plans.

Meanwhile, the latest US research reveals that [74% of businesses want some workers to permanently work remotely](#) and business leaders are actively shedding leased office space – hinting that not everyone will go back to the office.

Here are five key trends that will shape the future of how we work.

## 1. Commuting will change forever

We might miss the social interaction of the office, but most don't miss commuting. This was one of the key findings in my [four-year remote work study](#).

Before lockdown, US commute times reached [record levels](#) and most UK workers spent more than a year of their lives travelling to and from work. People tell me that a hybrid strategy of working from home two days a week, is one ideal scenario.

Those eager to go back to the office will have to wait. Many will need to work from home for weeks or months to come. The situation is fluid, but governments are drawing up plans for workers to stagger working times, so public transport is not overwhelmed.



*Nobody misses this.* [Shutterstock](#)

The genie is out of the bottle, and commuting is not going back to how it was.

## 2. Bad email etiquette won't be tolerated

Workplace communication is rapidly transforming and email is a case in point. More than ever, creating a clear separation between work and leisure time is vital.

Research repeatedly shows that sending out-of-hours emails is not only bad etiquette – but creates a coercive work culture that requires people to be available 24/7. Social scientists argue this turns us into worker/smartphone hybrids and causes stress and burnout. Expecting quick answers to email is increasingly seen as bullying.

Many now realize that colleagues might need to work flexibly due to caring responsibilities. Lockdown has encouraged a new acceptance of flexibility. But this shouldn't extend to

having a culture that expects people to be available all the time.

### 3. Video calls will be limited

Zoom calls will remain part of our lives – but we will change and adapt how we use them. Research shows that video calls are more draining and tiring than in-person meetings.



Smile for the camera. [Shutterstock](#)

While video calls are appropriate for some meetings, we don't need to use them for all our communication. Research suggests many are shifting back to phone calls – which as one manager explained to me “feels more spontaneous and flows better”.

### 4. More co-working spaces will emerge

Workers forced to continue working from cramped living spaces are desperate for alternatives. When lockdown lifts they will turn to the cafes and co-working spaces that are still in business. Before COVID-19 hit, co-working spaces were projected to increase more than [40% worldwide](#).

The paradox of remote working is that people crave the flexibility but know that being around others boosts productivity. My research shows that over time remote workers crave the physical closeness that comes with just being alongside other people. It's exactly why in 2017 IBM pulled many employees back into the office, despite having previously published a [2014 white paper in support of remote working](#).



Coming soon to a high street near you. [Shutterstock](#)

Local co-working spaces, as opposed to big investor-funded brands such as WeWork, will do well. Independent co-working spaces in some areas were thriving before COVID-19 - they may become more mainstream if they survive lockdown.

### 5. Could we become part-time digital nomads?

[Digital nomads](#) are extreme remote workers that post Instagram stories from exotic locations. Right now, that lifestyle seems unrelatable, impossible and to many unethical.

Nonetheless, many decently paid workers in New York, London and Paris are stuck in uncomfortably small flats, dreaming of escape from lockdown. As a housing manager recently confided to me: “London living without nightlife and culture, isn't fun. Everyone wants to escape to somewhere outdoorsy when allowed. I'm not sure I approve but it's understandable.”

For now, remote working from different locations is not allowed. But the allure of relocating to a picturesque location remains – and Brian Chesky, CEO of AirBnB, is banking on it. He sees COVID-19 as a business opportunity and [told Bloomberg](#): “People are realising they can work remote ... that's a huge opportunity.”

Not all will agree – it could cause long-term sustainability issues – and many will not have this privilege. But when lockdown fully lifts, who's to say more people will not work remotely from different parts of the world, beyond their living rooms.

---

**Author**

[Dave Cook](#)

*PhD Researcher, Anthropology, UCL*

**Disclosure statement**

*Dave Cook does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.*

---