

Mind the Gap

Managing a Multi-Generational
Workforce in the Age of Hybrid Working

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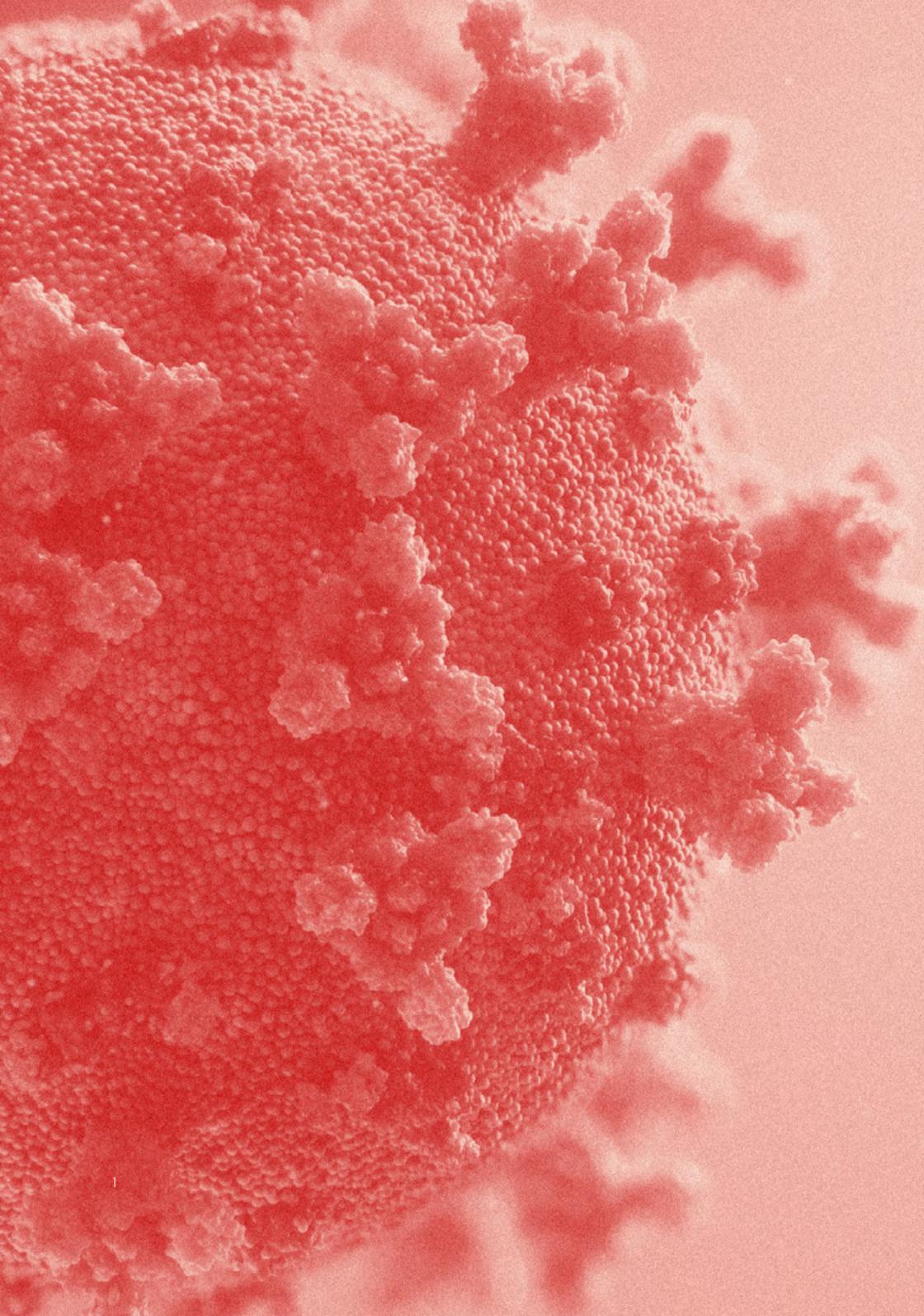
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Section 1

The Covid-19 pandemic will be remembered for many reasons: its impact on our households, the turmoil of homeschooling, lockdown birthdays, long walks to nowhere, our new relationship with tech and the state, and the halting of all travel and leisure plans. But it perhaps has most profoundly shaped our relationship with work. Our reliance on ‘frontline workers’ and our own shift to home-working symbolises the biggest shake up in working patterns since the Second World War.

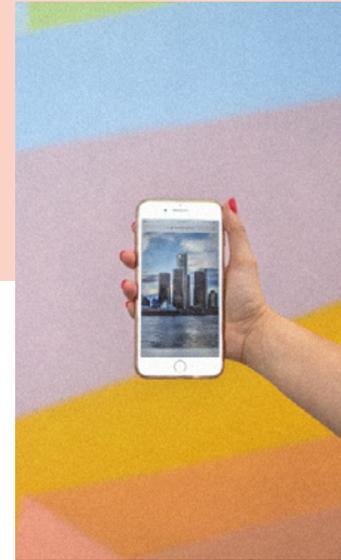
COVID is an age discriminate disease that has impacted every generation of working age differently. While older workers have felt more vulnerable in terms of their physical health, it has impacted younger generations’ economic and social health.



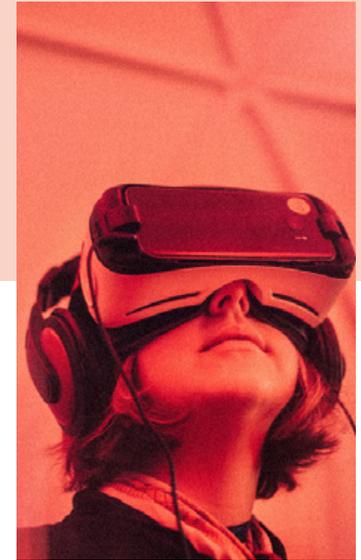
BABY BOOMERS
1942 - 1965



GENERATION X
1966 - 1980



MILLENNIALS
1981 - 1996



GENERATION Z
1997 - 2010

Baby Boomers

Tim, 62, Kent (England), works in corporate finance

After the initial shock and fear that came with the start of lockdown, to my surprise, I quickly settled into the rhythm of this new life and remote working. My youngest son, who had returned home from university to self-isolate with us, showed me the ropes of Zoom. The time I used to spend in the morning commuting on a train to the City, I spent walking across the fields with my two dogs.

We are lucky enough to have a spacious home office within our annexe, close enough to the kitchen for my wife to bring me cups of tea during the day! I took a full hour away from my desk to enjoy a home-cooked lunch with my wife and son, who was participating in his university lectures online.

I used to spend half the year on an airplane and I have realised that a Zoom meeting, more often than not, can do the same job. After work, rather than getting onto a sweaty, cramped train back to my nearest station, I had the time to get stuck into gardening.

There have been some tough times as well. Our eldest daughter had recently given birth to our first grandchild and my wife and I had been looking forward to our grandparenting duties. Although we Zoomed regularly, it was hard to only see her virtually.

Before COVID, I was thinking of retiring in 6 to 8 years time, however I have decided to fast-forward and retire next year. At the beginning of the pandemic, it was the first time that I felt old and vulnerable. It was a real wake-up call and lockdown allowed me to take stock of what was important in life.

14% of UK workers aged 55 and over say that Covid-19 has sped up their retirement plans. According to the Pew Research Center in the US, the pandemic has triggered a record number of Baby Boomers to retire. 3.2 million more than those that retired during 2019.



Gen X

Sophie, 49, Munich (Germany), Marketing Director

Juggling work, family and domestic duties during lockdown was very stressful. We have an office at home as I already worked two days remotely pre-pandemic. But with my husband and I both working from home, and our three children (16, 13 and 10 years old) doing online learning around the dining table, I sometimes would find myself taking important calls in the car as it was the only place I could find any peace!

My siblings live abroad, so the responsibility of looking after my elderly parents fell to me. My father has dementia and had recently gone into a care home and my mother is quite vulnerable and lives on her own about 20 minutes away from us. I would visit her daily. I also found it very hard to keep on top of the housework without our cleaner, who normally came to the house once a week.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 34% of Gen Xers in the US were caring for an ageing parent, compared to just 13% of Baby Boomers¹.

Millennials

Winnie, 35, New Jersey (United States), Account Manager for a major drinks brand

Working from home has had its positives and negatives for my partner and I. To allow us both to work full-time jobs in Manhattan, our two-year-old son goes to nursery for three days a week and then my mother looks after him for the remaining two days. With no childcare during lockdown, it was a real struggle to work a full-time job and entertain a toddler. Needless to say a lot of Paw Patrol was involved!

We live in a small two bedroom house, so we had to convert our dining room into an office for my partner, and I would work from the kitchen table.

I was very worried about my parents as my Dad suffers from an auto-immune disorder and therefore they were both shielding. I would leave groceries on their doorstep every few days, and they would wave at me through the window.

We have found that by not commuting and not spending a fortune on childcare, we have saved a significant sum of money. We are both determined to work from home a few days a week and I am very thankful that the conversation about working from home no longer has to be initiated. Finally, as a woman of colour, I have really enjoyed the freedom that has come with remote working. I have encountered numerous microaggressions throughout my career, and the virtual environment has provided a welcome respite. I know that for any future employment, hybrid working will be a core requirement for me.

97% of African-American knowledge workers in the US want the future of the office to be remote or hybrid².

Gen Z

Rajesh, 23, Mumbai (India), Junior Account Executive for an advertising company

I live in a city-centre apartment with three other friends, one of whom managed to get back to his parent's homes just before the lockdown was officially announced. I didn't have that luxury as my parents live in a small house and are in poor health.

For the first month, it was quite fun working from my bed but the novelty soon wore off. My other housemates were also working full time from home and there was no privacy or enough space to work in the communal areas. As a result, I ended up working in my room on a kitchen chair and with my laptop perched on a chest of drawers.

I had only been with my company for 12 months before the pandemic hit and I have found it very hard to get myself heard on Zoom calls and meetings. I didn't feel like I could bring any new ideas to the table. I have really struggled to motivate myself and to get excited about work.

My mental health really suffered as I have spent a long time worrying about my future and I have struggled with the distinction between work-life and home-life. The pandemic has also caused me to think about changing sectors completely. I have decided I want to work in a role where I have more of a sense of purpose and where I am giving something back to others.

71% of Gen Z in India say they are merely surviving or flat-out struggling with remote working³.



At the beginning of the pandemic, the Canadian Federal Government sent out an important message to its employees: “You are not ‘working from home’. You are ‘at your home, during a crisis, trying to work.’” Let’s remember that the remote working experiment during a pandemic is not a working model for the future. People were forced to work from home without any formal planning or proper infrastructure during a global crisis. What it did do was open up a conversation about flexible working that has been decades in the making.

Bringing Yourself to Work

‘Bring Your Whole Self To Work’ has long been the career advice mantra, but this has only become a reality during a global pandemic. Our colleagues have seen our dirty washing, our pets, our kids, even our emotions. One in six workers, according to Microsoft’s 2021 Work Trend Index report, cried with a colleague in 2020⁴. On Slack, emoji usage jumped 80%⁵. The workplace has become more informal and more equitable. On video calls, everyone has a seat at the table and participants all appear as equal-sized randomly arranged rectangles.

Emerging Class Divide

But let’s not pretend that this debate about the future of work impacts all workers to the same degree. Remote and hybrid working is of course confined to the white collar workforce. According to a report by the Economic Policy Institute, only one in six Hispanic workers and one in five Black workers were able to work remotely due to COVID in the US, compared with one in four white workers⁶. The ONS in the UK revealed that 70% of all staff in London’s Richmond upon Thames worked from home at some point during the pandemic, compared to 14% in Burnley⁷.

Even within the white collar cohort there are clear social disparities and a digital divide. Workers from low-income families have struggled to access adequate technology.

According to a 2019 Pew Research Center survey, 82% of white adults own a desktop or laptop computer versus 58% of African-Americans and 57% of Hispanics⁸. The hidden costs of an infrastructure at home to enable remote working, such as a high speed internet connection suitable for video conferencing, plus a desk and office chair, can be huge. As home-working becomes even more established, the onus will be on companies to provide a level playing field.

Global Differences

The UK adapted to remote working more readily than their EU colleagues⁹. The UK is in many ways unique because of its existing commuter culture, especially in the south-east of England where 1 - 1.5 hour commutes into the capital are commonplace. British employees intend to request more working-from-home days in the future than those working in Western Europe. In the US, it is expected that up to 20% of the entire workplace will continue to work from home permanently, compared to just 5% before the pandemic¹⁰. By contrast, Asia is seemingly bucking the hybrid working trend. According to a survey conducted by the CBRE Group, 66% of companies based in Asia expect to add office space in the next three years, up from only 28% in October 2020¹¹.

¹¹ The Next Great Disruption Is Hybrid Work—Are We Ready?, Microsoft, 2021

⁵ Jordan Marshall, Arcadis’ new London HQ: What goes into a post-covid office, Building, 25 February 2021

⁶ Elise Gould and Jori Kandra, Only one in five workers are working from home due to COVID, Economic Policy Institute, 2 June 2021

⁷ Homeworking in the UK Labour Market: 2020, ONS, 17 May 2021

⁸ Internet/Broadband Fact Sheet, Pew Research Center, 2019

⁹ Joanna Partridge and Kalyeena Makortoff, Out of office: what the homeworking revolution means for our cities, The Guardian, 27 February 2021

¹⁰ Jose Maria Barrero, Nicholas Bloom & Steven J. Davis, Why Working from Home Will Stick, National Bureau of Economic Research, April 2021

¹¹ A Future Office For A New Normal, 2021 Asia Pacific Occupier Sentiment Survey, CBRE

How Do the Generations Differ in their Attitude Towards Work?



The future is hybrid

There are clearly gender, economic and geographical divides but the one determinant which sets your attitude towards hybrid and home-working is your age and generational cohort.

Gen Z are the most pro-office

Two thirds of Gen Z prefer to work from an office, as it gives them a sense of belonging and purpose and increased levels of productivity and motivation¹².

Gen Xers and Boomers are the most pro-remote working

21.4% of Gen Xers and Baby Boomers want to work remotely full time—almost 200% more than Gen Zs, and 50% more than Millennials¹³.

Gen Z have missed office and city culture: meeting rooms, events and talks, free coffee and food, gym facilities, good WiFi, social interaction and focused areas to work

37% of Gen Z miss the office as a place to do quiet, focused work, compared to Millennials (25.6%) and Gen Xers & Baby Boomers (19.8%)¹⁴.

¹² Clockwise Report, June 2021

¹³ ¹⁴ Should We Ditch The Office Report, Hubble, March 2021

Millennials are most eager to work remotely from another country

Almost 45% of Millennials would be keen to work from abroad when not in the office¹⁵.

Millennials are more worried about the impact of WFH on their physical health than on the environment

54% of Millennials say their overall mental health has worsened during the pandemic¹⁶.

All generations have enjoyed no commute, increased savings, and spending more time with loved ones

Millennials and Gen X were keen on the extra flexibility remote working offers around childcare

Global non-profit Catalyst found that women with childcare responsibilities are 32% less likely to leave their jobs if they have access to remote work¹⁷.

¹⁵ Should We Ditch The Office Report, Hubble, March 2021

¹⁶ The Future Of Work, Nationwide and IPSOS Mori, March 2021

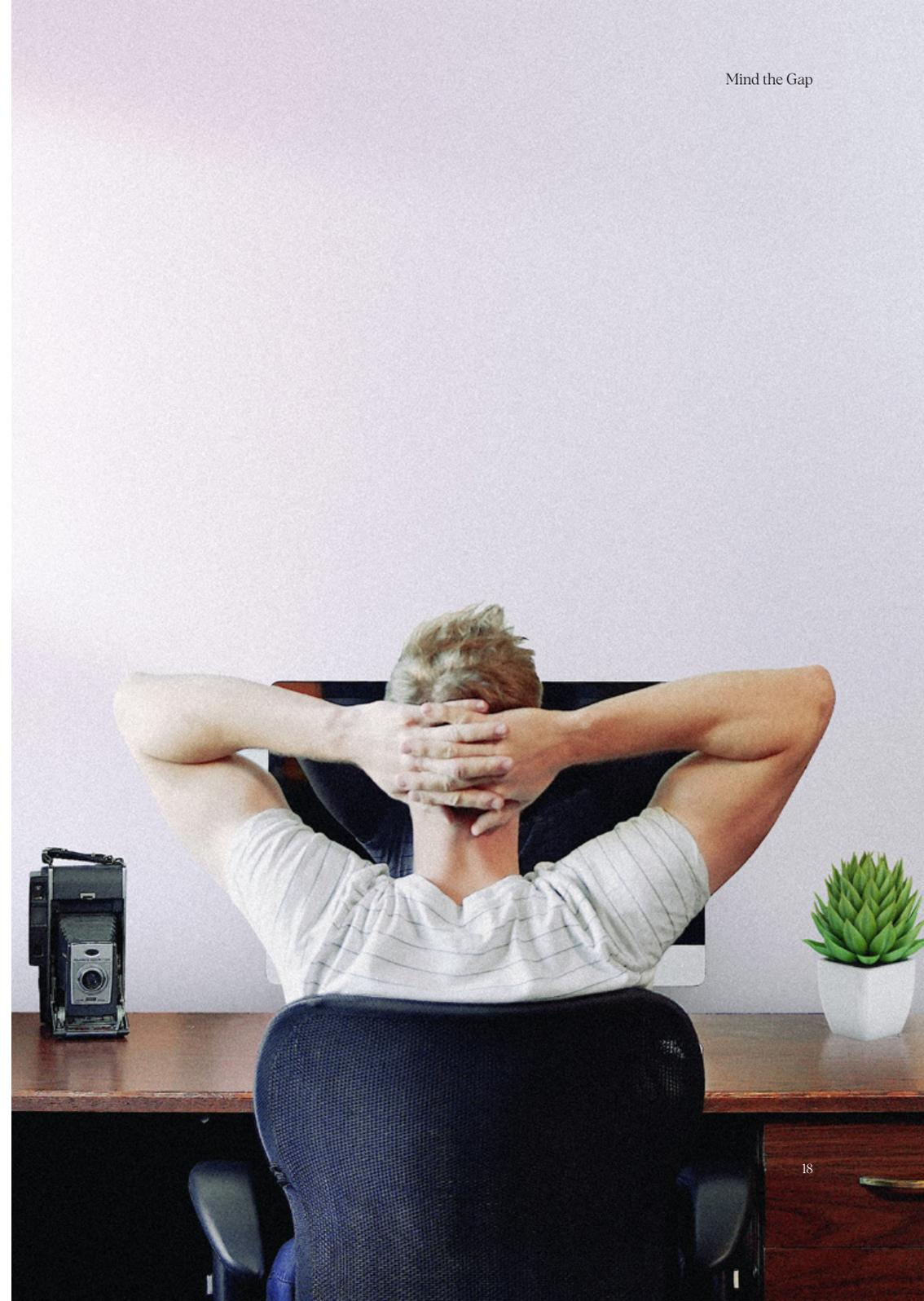
¹⁷ Remote-work options can boost productivity and curb burnout, Catalyst, 2021

Taking Back Control

During the pandemic workers built up new habits, new appreciations and new values in respect to their work.

Workers are determined to take back control and reassert some balance into their working lives, and this is an important and justifiable shift. For far too long, flexible working has only gone one way: employees making themselves available to their employers at all hours of the day, sometimes seven days a week.

All of us felt a sense of relentless productivity, but also waning purpose over the course of the pandemic, which is unsustainable. A heightened respect for frontline workers corresponded with a dwindling respect for what we ourselves did. According to Microsoft, 41% of the workforce globally is likely to consider leaving their current employer within the next year, with 46% planning to make a major pivot or career change¹⁸. If companies do not get their hybrid working policy right, the percentage may well be more.





Section 2

Companies right now are trying to navigate the tricky transitional path from WFH to their hybrid future, so why should the multi-generational aspect be factored into these decisions?

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- Age is the biggest determiner of your experience and level of work as well as your living conditions, energy levels and willingness to learn. The pandemic has been a real test for companies and forced them to be more human-centric in their thinking. The more you understand your employee's needs, desires, pressures and responsibilities, the better you as an employer can serve your workers.
-
- Age diversity is as important as gender and ethnic diversity in impacting a company's bottom line. All companies require that mix of experience and ingenuity and cannot afford to generate a culture of age-discrimination (either for the old or the young).
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- We must be mindful not to just satisfy one generational cohort but to understand how values are changing for the young, and how they can best be integrated without alienating older generations.
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- Generational analysis is a starting point, not an end point. Generational stereotypes are to be avoided but understanding the context, values and behaviours of each cohort can help create empathy across the generations and raise the consciousness of leaders to ensure better decisions are made.
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- There was a generation gap in the workplace before COVID: with four generations in the workplace, all with different ways of communicating expectations of work perks and leadership. This has only exacerbated during the pandemic.
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- Those companies who do not adapt will suffer: talent is your biggest expense and your best asset, both young and old. There is a real fear that young staff are not only experiencing burnout but are also reconsidering their career options. According to Aviva, 87% of people under 25 are re-evaluating their careers as a result of the pandemic¹⁹.
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- The companies that are quick to adapt to the new era of hybrid working will get the cream of the crop of new talent. They will also get the best of more experienced talent who have left organisations who have not given it due consideration.
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- It may be harder to climb the rungs of the career ladder from home. Work expert, Nicholas Bloom (Stanford University) conducted a random survey of 500 employees who switched to home working, and found that promotion rates fell by half in two years²⁰. Remote workers are often not able to develop relationships and managerial skills as readily, or do not have the opportunity to demonstrate those skills. Presenteeism is the major danger in the future of hybrid working. This in turn will have a knock on effect on your Diversity and Inclusion agenda. In the US, women of colour, for example, are more likely than white workers and men to prefer remote work.
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My fear is the biggest cost in the long run is all the single young men come in five days a week, and college-educated women with a 6-year old and an 8-year old come in two days a week, and six to seven years down the road there's a huge difference in promotion rates and you have a diversity crisis.

”

Nicholas Bloom
Stanford University





Section 3

How can it be overcome?

How can companies implement a hybrid model that carefully takes into account the multigenerational aspect of their workforce?

Your evolving strategy is obviously dependent on your values, people and size, but all businesses would do well to consider the following.



1 Gen Z Need Looking After NOW

Make the Office Work for Them

They are the most pro-office of all the generations. They want the office for team culture, desk work, training and development, collaboration, networking, but also for concentration and individual work, if they do not have the capacity to do this at home.

Employ the Family, Not Just the Individual

You probably know the family set up of your senior partners but what about your young recruits? Many of them still live with mum and dad or moved back in during the pandemic. Families have never been so economically or emotionally tied. There is a reason why former PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi wrote letters to her employees' parents. She believed that these actions allowed for new and intimate lines of communication, not just with parents, but also with her top employees. Parents want to be a part of their child's careers (as they were in their child's education). According to a 2007 Michigan State University report, 31% of employer respondents had experienced a parent apply for a job on behalf of their adult child; 15% of the employers surveyed had received complaints from parents about overlooked children; 9% had a parent try to negotiate the new hire's salary or benefits, and 4% actually attended job interviews alongside their adult children²¹. In 2013, LinkedIn launched a global initiative called 'Bring In Your Parents Day', with companies such as ASOS and The Economist taking part. Amazon holds a similar event at its Seattle headquarters and welcomes over 7,000 parents from all 50 states as well as India and China²².

Reassurance and Communication

Arguably they have had the toughest and loneliest lockdown, and they may be the least committed to the company given the amount of years they have been there. They need reassurance that you are looking out for them. This is a generation that, because of social media culture, is used to raising their voice and being heard. Discover what they want from the office.

Set an Example

They are the least effective at switching off, so how can you create a culture where they are not expected to be regularly answering emails at 10pm? Eager to make an impression, they may well be the ones doing this. Managers should ensure that such behaviour is not rewarded but actively dissuaded.

Create a Peer to Peer Community

Consider how you can help Gen Z help each other; this is a generation that is used to creating networks. Their work relationships may have stalled as a result of working remotely. Friendships at work are as important as leadership in creating loyalty and attachment to a company. This is particularly challenging for your new recruits. Over the last 18 months your onboarding was probably entirely virtual. Consider making it a hybrid experience and backdating it for those who joined during the pandemic

Enable Regular Face-to-Face Contact

They are digital natives but they more than any other generation view face-to-face communication as the definition of personalised service and leadership.

Hire on Values

Of those who graduated in 2020, only 18% of graduates were able to secure jobs before graduating (compared with the usual 60%). New talent have not had the same opportunities to hone their CVs, this needs to be accounted for. As the CEO of Sky once stated: 'hire on values rather than skills; skills can be taught, values cannot'. This is even more pressing in the hybrid era.





2 The Office Reimagined

Employees will be expecting a hybrid model that is not only equitable across teams but is also bespoke, one that takes into account an individual's domestic situation and responsibilities.

Redesigning the Working Week

Sundar Pichai, the Chief Executive of Google and Alphabet, is developing a hybrid workweek, where most Googlers will spend approximately three days in the office and two days wherever they work best. Citigroup has announced a similar plan.

Some companies like PwC are already well ahead of the curve and have long since embraced a culture of 'everyday flexibility'. PwC works to continuously adjust its approach according to the evolving needs of its employees. For example, it recently announced that team members would have the ability to decide themselves when they start and finish work for the day.

We are no longer talking about just one office, but three:

- 1 HQ
- 2 Home Office
- 3 Tech Office (infrastructure enabling people to work from anywhere)

The 'architecture' of the last two needs to be as carefully considered as the first.

1 HQ

“

The real opportunity now is for workplaces to be the values of the organisation, not just logistically calculated grunt work factories.

”

Thomas Heatherwick

Designer of Google's new building in London's King's Cross

Consensus Building

Most generations want to have an office. It is not about cutting down on office space necessarily, but about reimagining that space, and turning it into a destination where people want to go. Over the last ten years, office design has taken its cue from the tech sector which constructed vast buildings with cafes, gyms, sleep-pods, gardens - designed like a casino to keep you in there as long as possible. Now the purpose should be: how can your employees make the best of the time while they are there.

A Quiet Place to Work

Designated areas for singular work, similar to a university library, will be important for those unable to do this at home. In fact, imagining the HQ as like a university campus will serve you well; a place, however big, that is designed as a place of learning, concentration, collaboration and socialisation.

A Social Hub for Collaboration and Interaction

The office is where you go for growth, learning and interaction (both planned and unplanned) with your fellow team members. US Bank Fifth Third's President Tim Spence has asked employees to leave time in their schedule for "unplanned conversations".

A Wellbeing Centre

Wellness is the buzzword of the moment but the definition is also expanding. Employees may no longer expect a gym or breakfast bar in the office but may come to value an on-site mental health practitioner, a GP, even a financial adviser in their workplace.

Engagement with the Highest Echelons of Leadership

HQ is the place where company values and motivation are reinforced mainly through interaction with the leadership, not just with one's line manager, but the higher echelons of the company. While hot-desking in the hybrid era makes logistical sense, should we abolish hierarchy in the office layout completely? Probably not. There still needs to be a sense of the managerial structure within the building, it creates a sense of responsibility and accountability. Moreover, the CEO's office also gives everyone something to aspire to! Contact, accessibility and communication are key. Employees need to come away from their trip to the office feeling excited, invested in, and engaged with their work.

Pied à Terre

Remote working and remote living could well mean that people will need a place to stay nearby the office. Companies may find themselves investing in sleeping quarters or creating partnerships with hotels and private members clubs, so that those commuting long-distance domestically or internationally Tuesday through to Thursday, will have somewhere to stay.

2 Home Office

Health and Safety

According to the Institute of Employment Studies, there was a significant increase in musculoskeletal complaints such as back pain and 'laptop' necks during lockdown. These injuries and complaints need to be a priority. Health and safety in the home will need to be considered as much as health and safety in the office.

The New Expense Account

Makeshift home offices are no longer viable. Employees need a dedicated home workspace that allows them to be productive every day of the week. Will they be required to get furniture and equipment from a set supplier? Many of your colleagues will have already spent their own money on equipment over lockdown - will they get that money reimbursed? Like office work wear, employees are also likely to want office furniture that suits and reflects their personal style. Following record-breaking sales in summer 2020, the US office furniture retailer Herman Miller opened its first concept stores in Los Angeles and New York, allowing prospective customers to try their home-office upgrades before they buy. Home office furniture is the new heels and suits²³.

Generational Differences

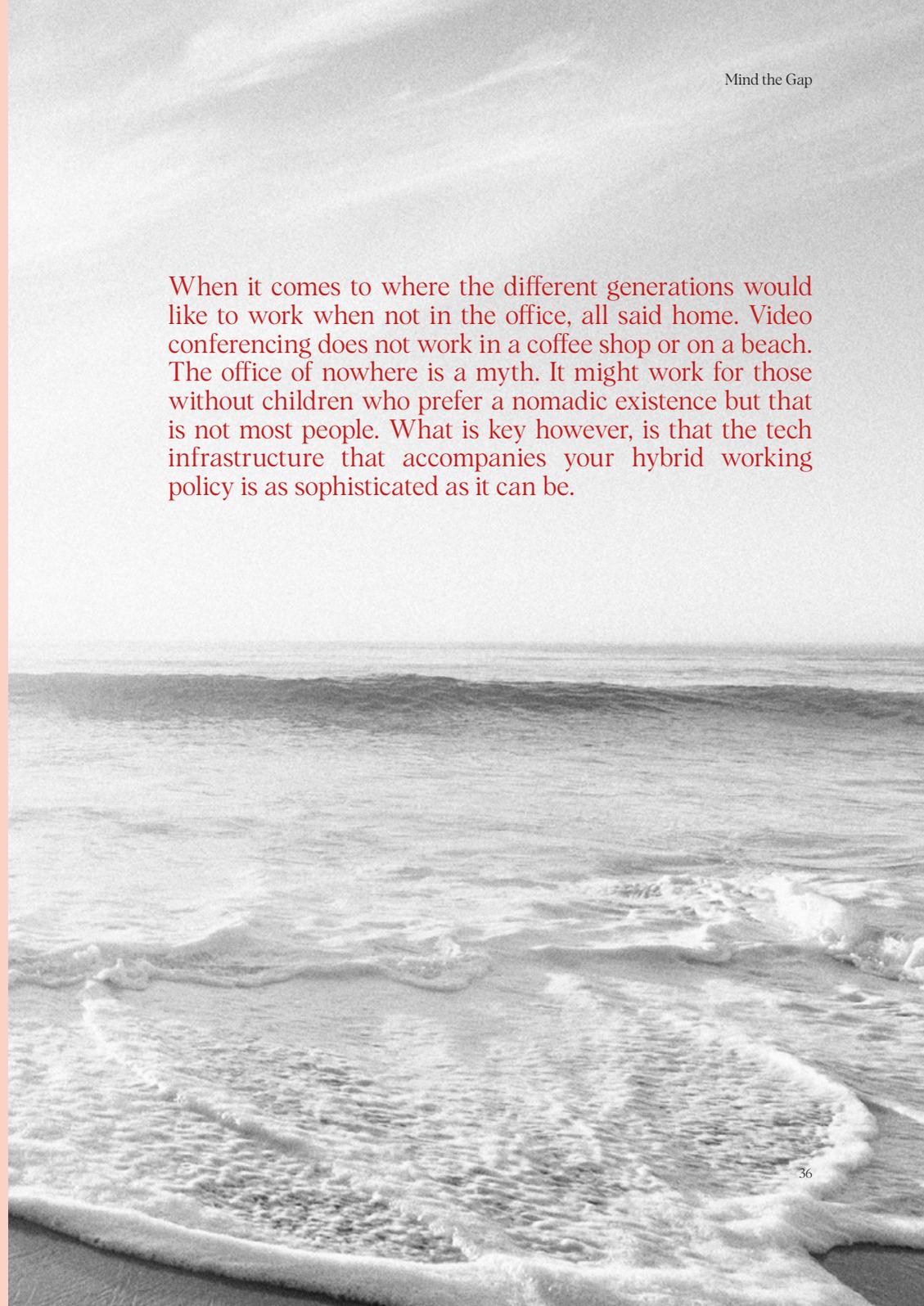
Different generations place importance on different aspects of their home office environment. Millennials want a standing desk. Boomers and Gen X want a garden office. Gen Z wants a food allowance and coffee subscription at home to replace the coffee stations and subsidised salad bars found in HQ.

Security of Information

Any company will be wary that security risks have increased. 70% of office workers surveyed by HP Inc admitted to using their work devices for personal tasks, while 69% are using personal laptops or printers for work activities. Almost one-third of remote workers have let someone else use their work device²⁴.

When it comes to where the different generations would like to work when not in the office, all said home. Video conferencing does not work in a coffee shop or on a beach. The office of nowhere is a myth. It might work for those without children who prefer a nomadic existence but that is not most people. What is key however, is that the tech infrastructure that accompanies your hybrid working policy is as sophisticated as it can be.

35 ²³ 2021 Style Trends Report, Modsy, November 2020
²⁴ Blurred Lines and Blindspots, HP Wolf Inc, May 2021



3 Technology Infrastructure

Technology Can Make or Break a Workplace

Adobe company Workfront's annual report revealed that 49% of the UK workforce say they are likely to quit their jobs due to frustration with inadequate technology, up from 33% before the pandemic²⁵.

Technological Experience is as Important as Physical Experience

The Adobe Workfront report also suggested that Gen X were thriving in a digital first workplace, even more than millennials. They were more confident when it came to resolving issues and building trust over a screen than their younger counterparts²⁶. This is because Gen X were more likely to have worked remotely pre-pandemic and are also better versed in corporate culture (and of course did not have the distraction of very young children).

Always Being Watched

One worker confessed how he is only allowed five minutes away from his computer during the day (other than 40 minutes for lunch) before his manager is alerted. If he steps away from his desk, he sets an alarm for 4 minutes 30 seconds to allow him enough time to return to his desk! Others have discovered tricks to subvert surveillance. Apparently if you click on an email, then hold down the 'insert' key with an object, you will constantly appear on-line. Surveillance software was up 51% between June and September 2020 compared to the pre-pandemic average. As digital natives, Gen Z are particularly aware of surveillance. 42% of Gen Z (and millennials) prefer to browse in incognito mode, according to a survey by private search engine Privado.

Measuring Productivity

How do you measure productivity? How does modern technology inhibit productivity? Instant messaging and email can often be a hindrance as we are now expected to be 'always on' and this can preclude workers from focusing on the tasks that are important. According to a report conducted by the University of California, it takes an

average of 23 minutes and 15 seconds to refocus on a task after an interruption²⁷. And as a result of the pandemic, we are spending much more time on workplace messaging platforms. On Slack, workers spent an extra hour connected to the platform. A study by Stanford University found that media multi-taskers who are regularly bombarded with IMs, emails and texts do not pay attention as well as those who prefer to complete one task at a time²⁸.

Video Meetings

Microsoft estimates that the average Teams meeting in 2021 is now 10 minutes longer than in 2020. The amount of time that workers have spent on Microsoft Teams has tripled since March 2020. Some companies are choosing to cut video meetings off after 50 minutes to give staff a brief buffer, to avoid a day of back-to-back calls. Many colleagues prefer to have their cameras off throughout, does that hinder or help connection? And why have we stopped making audio-only calls? It is still the most effective form of remote conversing there is.

Integrated Meetings

One of the biggest challenges in hybrid working will be how to create seamless connectivity and democracy between those those who are at home and those who are in the office. A recent survey by Zoom across ten countries found that two-thirds of workers would prefer a mix of virtual and in-person meetings. There is a danger that the hybrid shift will mean that those actually in the office are simply just logging into video calls from their laptops. A day in the office will end up feeling just like a day at home (just less comfortable and more cumbersome). How can you ensure there is a level of fairness and integration wherever you are dialling-in from? Can it be done by good management alone? One answer lies in virtual reality. How long before work is one giant 'metaverse' where everything is done virtually? Microsoft have recently launched Microsoft Mesh, a platform that allows virtual teams to join using holograms. It is designed to enable much more collaboration, brainstorming, design sessions and encourage virtual hangouts. Colleagues in different physical locations are able to have more collaborative meetings, conduct virtual design sessions, assist others, learn together and host virtual social meetups.

37 ²⁵ ²⁶ The 2021 State of Work Report: How COVID Has Changed Digital Work, Adobe Workfront, 2021

²⁷ Too Many Interruptions At Work?, Gallup, 8 June 2006

²⁸ Adam Gorlick, Media multitaskers pay mental price, Stanford study shows, Stanford News, 24 August 2009

A vintage typewriter is shown in a dark setting. A sign is placed on top of the typewriter, displaying the word "RECORDING" in large, bold, white capital letters. The typewriter's carriage and keyboard are visible in the foreground, and a small label with the number "13556" is visible on the typewriter's body.

RECORDING

Asynchronous Communication

Can you separate your synchronous communication (that which requires immediate attention) from your asynchronous communication (information that can be digested at people's leisure such as recorded videos of meetings/podcasts/messages). This will become crucial for companies to help maintain connection, values and productivity in the hybrid era. Slack has been developing a number of subtle tweaks to nudge towards asynchronous communication, such as putting up do not disturb notifications if people connect their calendars and are in a meeting.

Careful though, if companies are producing summary video content of conferences, speeches, meetings, projects or even creating an on-line learning course it will need to be well produced. Remember your employees are used to Netflix, Spotify and TED Talks. High-quality video production units are going to be a core investment as a way of disseminating your values to a disparate workforce. Create content they will want to watch.



3 Communication

All workers will need to be consulted about the hybrid working model and efforts made to make it as bespoke as possible, with a degree of autonomy and trust built in. This is incredibly challenging, especially for SMEs. Employees, on the other hand, need to understand that flexibility goes both ways in the workplace. If hybrid working is to operate, it needs to be reciprocal.

Rebuilding Networks

According to data from Time Is Ltd, the number of connections new hires make at work has decreased 17% compared with pre-pandemic. Companies should encourage individuals to rebuild their wider networks, both personal and professional. They should be given time to do so: send them to conferences, make space in their diary for networking lunches and build in more time for networking within the organisation and within their profession. Your employees will appreciate it.

New Roles

'Head of Remote Work' is the hot job title for 2021. It will be their responsibility to create a seamless work experience between remote and in-house work and employees. The role involves writing guidelines for things like reducing meeting frequency and length and navigating time zones, liaising with the legal team on tax implications for remote workers and advocating for remote employees when planning benefits. You may hire a Head of Remote Work but much more important is educating your managers on the hybrid policy and how to manage their teams around it.

Snackable Communication

Make your internal communications more like social media: short, sweet and easily digestible. According to Kristin Graham, Head of Employee Communications for Amazon Web Services, most people stop reading any message over 111 words, so snackable content is key for Amazon employees. Images, live video and dynamic presentations can keep all generations' attention, not just Gen Z. We are living in the video age, internal comms should reflect that.

Mothers

According to Lean In and McKinsey's 'Women In The Workplace' 2020 report, one-third of mothers are considering changing their working patterns or leaving the workforce entirely in the wake of the pandemic²⁹. Your business cannot afford to lose that talent. Special attention should be paid to mothers who have had a difficult and stressful pandemic, especially those who have been on maternity leave in the last 18 months (particularly if it is their first child, they may feel that their time caring for their newborn has been short-changed because of the pandemic). As with everything, demonstrating how this is done rather than saying it can be done is always key. Precedence is always so much more inspiring than policy.



Case Study

Vincit

Instead of “Lunch and Learn” meetings, software company Vincit USA hosts “Fail and Learn” meetings where employees can share something that didn’t work and what they learned from it. And once a month, they make an employee CEO for the day with an unlimited budget. The only condition is that their initiatives should have a lasting impact on Vincit employees. Changes have ranged from policy updates, introducing a new tool, and extending invitations to speakers. Vincit have won numerous awards for their workplace culture and have a low staff turnover.

Learning and Development

- Learning and Development is the easiest way to please and satisfy your Millennial/ Gen Z employees who, have spent a lot longer in education than previous generations and expect a culture of learning in the workplace. So too for your older workers, who may be thinking about retiring early because of the shift in technology, or equally may well be conscious that retirement is a long way off.
- Many will also want to know that their learning will not be halted just because they aren't in the office full time. This is particularly true of trainees, whose specific needs will need to be recalibrated for the hybrid era given they will not have the same opportunities of learning via osmosis.
- In the age of AI, it has never been more important for workers to keep retraining and up to date. L&D may well be your most valuable department but the training will have to be bespoke, high quality and a mix of online and face to face.
- SMEs may have limited resources but they should take inspiration from big organisations on this front. You also have the benefit of outsourcing. If you've had a difficult year and budgets are stretched, can you give your employees time to source learning for themselves or set out a five-year-plan for their development? Most of us see our career in a 'Sat Nav' capacity - we all want to know the direction we are taking, not just the end destination.
- At Yelp, everyone has stretch roles. By giving people responsibilities just beyond their current capabilities, this helps to create an engaged workforce and mentorship culture. Employees of Etsy can attend 'Etsy School' where they can both teach and learn in classes on a wide range of topics like tap dancing or how to navigate a difficult conversation. At eBook company OverDrive, employees are provided with a Professional Growth Planner.

Wellbeing

Use technology to create boundaries

- Technology enables fluid working but how can you use it to reclaim boundaries? Encourage a schedule-send culture!

Enable access to a therapist for your younger employees

- Mental health is something that all generations but especially young people have come to prioritise in the workplace. This is to be encouraged rather than dismissed especially as we emerge out of the pandemic. Johnson & Johnson have a bespoke mindfulness and resilience app for employees, as well as six covered therapy visits per year and on-site counsellors in some offices. Additionally, the family members of each J&J employee also have access to the same resources to ensure positive mental health at home.

Open up the floor for a conversation around mental health

- A culture of openness is key when it comes to mental health and remember that mental health comes in different forms for different people. In 2016, EY launched their “r u okay?” programme as a way to increase discussions around mental health in the workplace. Within the first three months, they saw a 30% increase in calls to their mental health assistance line.

Dr. Eliza Filby is a writer and speaker who specialises in ‘Generational Intelligence’, helping companies and services understand generational shifts within politics, society and the workplace.

Eliza has worked with a variety of organisations from VICE media to Warner Brothers, from the UK’s Ministry of Defence to the Royal Household, with banks such as HSBC, Barclays, BYMellon in Canada and Macquarie in Australia. She has spoken at the EU’s Human Rights Forum on teenagers and technology; the Financial Times CEO Forum on the future of work and to the UK’s House of Lord’s Select Committee on intergenerational unfairness.

She is the author of *Fuelling Gender Diversity: Unlocking the Next Generation Workplace* and recently launched her own podcast, *It’s All Relative*, in which she interviews famous families on the generation gap. It is available on Spotify and Apple.

Eliza received her PhD from the University of Warwick and subsequently taught at King’s College, London and the University of Renmin in China. She writes regularly for CityAM and Unherd and her writing has also been published in *The Times*, *Guardian* and the *Financial Times*.

You can find out more on her website www.elizafilby.com and follow her on Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. Eliza also produces a monthly newsletter which goes out to hundreds of subscribers featuring her latest insights, research and articles.

If you would like Eliza to come and speak to your organisation, please contact katy@elizafilby.com



Endnotes

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