

GRF Viewpoint – Fine Tuning the New Work Place

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COVID-19 has transformed 2020 in ways unexpected. Nevertheless, we have adapted ourselves almost seamlessly. Once the pandemic is more or less brought under control, the expectation is that we will not revert back to pre-COVID-19 times. That may be especially true with regards to certain sectors that have begun to continue their work online. Online working is not anything new. What is new is that the pandemic has accentuated existing possibilities and created a new baseline. Maybe we would have reached a similar situation, but the pandemic has sped them up. We shall see if this will continue once the benefits and challenges are weighed in a clear and comprehensive manner. We would like to offer our view on what the situation may look like.

If you are working from home, odds are that you get up later than usual and you are not wearing a tie, jacket or office shirt. If you previously travelled to work by public transportation, you are avoiding commuting. If you drove to the office, you now save on energy and do not congest traffic or add to pollution. You need not find a parking spot or get yourself and your friend a cup of coffee. You do not have to go out to lunch, you can just go to your kitchen any time you desire. You can look after your loved ones at home and continue doing your work. You are less stressful, as you do not have to be in a cubicle or share office space. You will not have nosy colleagues around and most importantly you will never have to worry about harassment. You do not have to travel to odd places as you can participate from afar.

On the other hand, if you are a social person, making new friends might be more difficult. You are mostly alone. Thus, networking and interaction with your managers becomes difficult. This could also influence your advancement. The two dimensional virtual meetings are not as satisfying as the real thing and there can be a breakdown in communication and exchange of information. You will always have to be available to answer questions and requests and therefore have to continuously check your smart phone, tablet or PC. You might have to be stuck in front of the screen for long online meetings. You might also face a cut in your salary.

There are obvious benefits and negative aspects of working in such circumstances. One must be able to balance the pros and cons, and delineate the outcome. There might indeed be less need for office space, less travelling, thus creating savings for the company, which would offset reducing salaries.

Terrorism had changed the way we travelled, with 9/11 increasing flight safety precautions. COVID-19 will now certainly add additional health measures making travel even more daunting.

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Yet, can we really stay away from each other? We are social animals, after all. Things indeed may not be the same once we rid ourselves of the pandemic. What we have to adopt may just be a modified version of what we had before, as we fine tune the possibilities COVID-19 forced upon us.

What might be more useful is dividing the week between the office and home, thus satisfying both sides. This would continue to, among other things, address traffic congestion, make life less stressful and keep social interaction at a level that can be optimal. The pandemic has changed our habits and some of these changes will most probably stay with us for a long time. Eventually, we will reach a new normal - hopefully through dialogue.