Future of workplaces.

FSCB Insights Summary Report

Since March 2020 there have been huge non-discretionary changes in the world of work. As firms and their people adapted, conversations quickly started to turn to 'what next for the workplace?' The FSCB sought to bring together member firms to consider this issue from an organisational culture perspective.
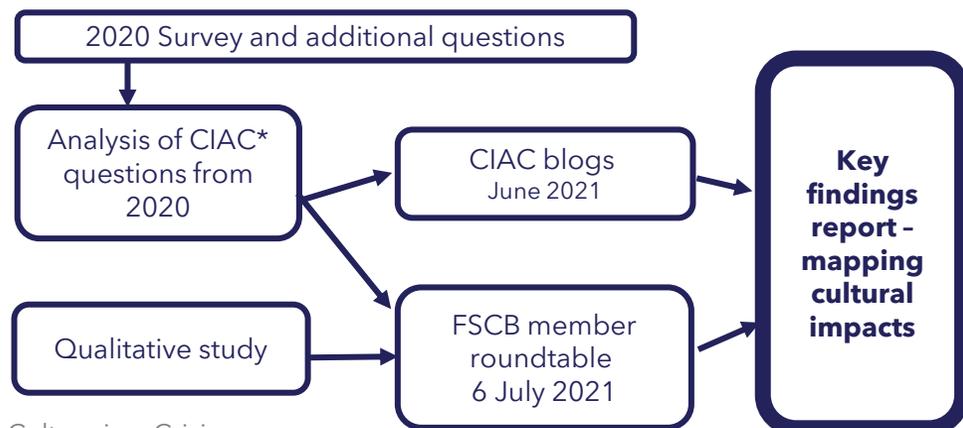
We initially undertook a review of broad perspectives on the future of work, but found little evidence to support the many predictions of how the future of workplaces would look.

We therefore undertook a three-pronged research approach including; our initial review of broad perspectives; the industry-wide results from the 2020 FSCB Employee Survey run across our member firms; and a bespoke, qualitative enquiry conducted with 27 employees from four participating member firms.

As the term "future of work" includes other non-pandemic related effects on jobs such as AI and global offshoring, we chose to focus our project on what we could learn from the changes in workplaces induced by the pandemic, to consider how these might usefully inform future working models from an organisational culture perspective. In our approach we were agnostic around what models organisations might wish to implement after 'work from home where possible' restrictions were lifted.

Phase 1- Explore
(Feb 21 – July 21)

- 2020 Survey and additional questions
- Analysis of CIAC* questions from 2020
- CIAC blogs June 2021
- Qualitative study
- FSCB member roundtable 6 July 2021
- **Key findings report – mapping cultural impacts**

* Culture in a Crisis

Phase 2- Engage
(Jul 21 – Sept 21)

- 1-2-1 meetings with members
- Dissemination of findings

Phase 3 – Apply/Review
(Sept 21 - Oct 21)

- 2021 Employee Survey and free text data
- Scoping - future research and engagement activity
- Implementation of future research & engagement activity

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This Summary Report presents the key findings of our enquiry into the Future of Workplaces, which brought together data from the FSCB 2020 Survey and qualitative research carried out in H1 2021. Bringing both these sources together, fourteen interconnected themes emerged. We have tied together the issues pertaining to these themes into six key prospective challenges for all organisations considering what next for the future of workplaces. The Full Report is available to FSCB members and on request.

1. **Leaders** need to think carefully about their actions because what they do is noticed as much by employees as what they say and is interpreted by them as a signal of desirable behaviour.

2. There is a danger that social capital becomes the preserve of those who can and want to work in offices. This has potential long-term implications for **diversity and inclusion.**

3. Leaders are making decisions now for people whose circumstances differ vastly from their own. Good corporate listening will be a key enabler of **organisational justice**.

4. Connectedness and **collaboration** are different. Whilst many employees felt that they had remained connected to their peers, certain forms of collaboration were more of a challenge.

5. It is not enough to spend money on wellbeing initiatives while issues around workload and the impact of **workload** on wellbeing remain unaddressed. Line managers' **skills** need further development to enable teams to meet the challenges of new working models.

6. Working environment is an important contributing factor for **employee wellbeing**. Both employers and employees face new challenges in their shared responsibility for wellbeing in future working models.

We would like to thank all the individuals from FSCB member firms who participated in this project for their time and their candour.

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Key findings by theme

#	Theme	Finding
1	Organisational justice	There are concerns about how to make new or evolving working models fair for employees
2	Inclusion	Although some aspects of inclusion improved due to new working models, there were differences in individual experiences of inclusion both at work and directly arising from the pandemic itself.
3	Leadership	Many leaders were perceived to be authentic and human, but these perceptions seemed to arise from specific pandemic practices
4	Line management	Line managers have had to adapt to the circumstances with increased remits and responsibilities to their teams
5	Connectedness	Teams were able to connect but there are concerns about how to operationalise hybrid models effectively
6	Purpose	There is a feeling that purpose and living the values have delivered for customers and employees
7	Innovation	Circumstances have created opportunities for agile innovation but some specific innovation activities are hard to do remotely
8	Collaboration	Teams have adapted to work together and get things done effectively, using new technology
9	Technology	There have been wins, but some technologies are not quite there yet, and some specific activities aren't supported
10	Learning & development	Formal learning has been adapted in places, but informal learning and building networks has suffered
11	Decision-making	There is evidence of faster, more agile decision making, more aligned to the size and impact of the decision
12	Responsiveness	Organisations have adapted at pace - responding to customer needs and adopting new ways of working
13	Trust and autonomy	Organisations have trusted employees to work with less direct supervision and employees have delivered
14	Future of banking	There are existential issues in branch banking that have been exacerbated by the enforced move to digital
15	Other Findings	Wellbeing; Speaking Up; Workload; Productivity; Customer Focus; Career Development & Flexibility

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Bringing it all together.

In this section, we tie together the themes that have surfaced in the qualitative enquiry to consider how they might play out in future working models and pose some of the questions that arise for all organisations as we consider 'what next for the future of workplaces?'

Leaders need to think carefully about their actions because what they do is noticed as much by employees as what they say and is interpreted by them as a signal of desirable behaviour.

Themes
✓ Leadership
✓ Future working models

Issues to consider

While the people we spoke to appreciated the openness and authenticity of leaders who admitted not having all the answers during the pandemic, people now want clarity from their leaders on how to make new working models more practical.

Leaders role-modelling any new ways of working in organisations by signalling what is considered the right thing to do need to have an awareness that their behaviour will be followed by others. This can lead to a 'leader pull' effect, which may pull those who *can* or *want to* follow leaders back into the office or may create a precedent for employees to follow leaders who decide to work in a more flexible way.

Prospective Challenges

People do what they see, so how can leaders be good role models in the hybrid world and use their own behaviour to guide managers and employees?

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There is a danger that social capital becomes the preserve of those who can and want to work in offices. This has potential long-term implications for diversity and inclusion.

Themes
- ✓ Inclusion
- ✓ Learning
- ✓ Onboarding and career development

Issues to consider

We have seen evidence that social capital can be hard to build in dispersed working environments. Although some previously dispersed teams did report that things have improved, there remain inclusion issues for those new to their roles, new to their organisation and new to their team. In particular, it can be hard to develop the networks needed to work efficiently, build knowledge and ask questions when it is not as easy as turning to the person next to you. Formalised learning environments such as contact centre onboarding appear to have an advantage over environments that have traditionally relied on informal learning from colleagues. However, we also heard from teams that had put a lot of effort into remaining connected, and building social connections, often incorporating senior leaders, to help people build social networks.

Prospective Challenges

In future working models, how can social capital be built effectively? There are some examples that it is possible, with investment (often in technology), effort and line management capacity and capability, but if organisations do choose to blend workplaces in future, there will be a need to make the inclusion benefits of social capital available to everyone, not just those physically present in a formal office workplace.

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Leaders are making decisions now for people whose circumstances differ vastly from their own. Good corporate listening will be a key enabler of organisational justice.

Themes
- ✓ Leadership
- ✓ Inclusion
- ✓ Organisational justice

Issues to consider

Leaders of relative socio-economic advantage will be making decisions on behalf of employees from much more diverse socio-economic circumstances. In making decisions about future working models and how to ensure fairness and equity at work (among other factors), leaders need to be aware of the unintended consequences of their decisions for people with very different lives. A decision to allow only those who have a dedicated office can work from home may systematically disadvantage employees from multi-generational homes or those who without the space for a separate office at home.

Prospective Challenges

How do leaders make decisions now, for those in different circumstances from their own, which in the long term have fair outcomes for all employees? How can leaders make fairer decisions, and what role can organisational listening play in integrating the perspectives of less socio-economically advantaged groups of employees?

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Connectedness and collaboration are different. Whilst many employees felt that they had remained connected to their peers, certain forms of collaboration were more of a challenge.

Themes
- ✓ Connectedness
- ✓ Collaboration
- ✓ Technology and Innovation
- ✓ Future and flexibility

Issues to consider

Connectedness has been possible despite having to adapt quickly to new technologies, such as video conferencing, which are not always perfect. However, there is a difference between being connected and being collaborative. Some specific collaborative activities are harder in dispersed models. Examples cited included innovation, mapping customer journeys and designing customer experiences. Where previously participants in offices may have used whiteboards, stickies and shared physical spaces (e.g. walls), in a dispersed context the technologies available are not yet fully aligned.

Prospective Challenges

Firms are grappling with what offices are for. Should they be investing in making them into collaboration spaces or in technology to enable collaborative activities in dispersed contexts?

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It is not enough to spend money on wellbeing initiatives while issues around workload and the impact of workload on wellbeing remain unaddressed. Line managers' skills need further development to enable teams to meet the challenges of new working models.

Themes
- ✓ Line managers
- ✓ Wellbeing
- ✓ Workload and productivity

Issues to consider

Line managers' people responsibilities, particularly around wellbeing and resilience, have increased. Where line managers may previously have had wellbeing concerns about individual team members, during the crisis period they were sometimes faced with supporting multiple employee needs, as well as managing tasks and performance. Line managers suddenly had to develop their skills to support their dispersed teams, often without support or training.

We heard frequent examples of unmanageable workloads impacting on the wellbeing of both line managers and their teams. Some employees also told us about negative impacts of working in dispersed environments, such as social isolation and low mood, which were also felt by managers themselves. It is, however, difficult disentangle the lockdown effect from the remote working effect.

Prospective Challenges

How can we address the impact that excessive workload is having on employee wellbeing? Line managers face the challenge of continuing to support their people, offer flexibility and still meet objectives and performance measures. Do they have the skills to do this and what are the implications for managers' own wellbeing? What support and training is required and what can we learn from the informal learning that occurred during the pandemic?

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Working environment is an important contributing factor for employee wellbeing. Both employers and employees face new challenges in their shared responsibility for wellbeing in future working models.

Themes
- ✓ Wellbeing
- ✓ Flexibility
- ✓ Line management
- ✓ Trust and autonomy

Issues to consider

The wellbeing of employees was put firmly front and centre through the pandemic period, and the majority of employees in our 2020 Survey felt that their organisation had appropriately supported their health and wellbeing. Many firms offered their people the flexibility they needed in terms of work location and non-work circumstances.

The most commonly affected of the FSCB's Eight Situational Factors instrumental to employee wellbeing, were workload and working environment but experiences of stress and isolation also presented challenges for employees and their managers although individual experiences have been highly diverse.

Prospective Challenges

If hybrid models are chosen for the future it will be important to consider the impact of permanently changed work environments on employee wellbeing. How will responsibility for wellbeing be shared between employer and employee? What are the implications of organisations outsourcing their cost base and other responsibilities to their employees?

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Full Report available
to Members or by
request at
info@fscb.org.uk

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