



# THE FUTURE OF WORK

REPORT

**SHARP**

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# INTRODUCTION



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The Covid-19 pandemic continues to have a profound impact on our everyday lives and has changed businesses and the way we work forever. A large majority of Europe has been forced to work remotely for much of the last year, with major organisations such as Facebook and Google now offering for many of their staff to work from home permanently, this has been a catalyst for the adoption of technology that brings colleagues together.

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In these uncertain times, businesses need to look to the future to survive; to predict not only how their customers' needs will change, but also how their workforce will evolve too. At Sharp, we believe people are the true power behind a successful business, and it is the needs of people that should define the shape and purpose of tomorrow's technology. As a company leading the industry in new areas of technology products and services that help deliver the future workplace, we can help support businesses with the technology they need. But key to future success is understanding the needs of tomorrow's workforce.

Gen Z's and Millennials are the next generation of workers who will shape the world of work for years to come. Their career aspirations, attitudes towards work, and knowledge of new technologies will define the culture of the future workplace. But data shows us that they are also the generation most likely to have their employment and career opportunities impacted by the pandemic.

At Sharp we previously conducted a series of workshops and focus groups with young professionals new to the world of work, to find out first hand their vision for the 'workplace of the future'. To build on these insights, we surveyed more than 6,000 office workers young and old in small and medium sized businesses (SMBs) across Europe, to understand how the global pandemic has impacted their needs and priorities for the future.

This guide provides a snapshot of our findings, offers expert commentary from future of work psychologist Viola K. Kraus, and advice on what to consider when choosing workplace solutions to support new ways of working. We hope you find it useful and welcome your thoughts or experiences on meeting the needs and expectations for the future workforce.

**Contact us @Sharp\_Europe on Twitter  
#FutureofWork,  
and visit us at [www.sharp.co.uk](http://www.sharp.co.uk)**

# CONTENTS

RESEARCH

## RESULTS

PEOPLE

4

PLACES

5

PROGRESS

6

PURPOSE

7

AN EXPERT'S

VIEW

8

TIPS TO SUPPORT EXPECTATIONS OF

FUTURE WORKFORCE

12

SHARP

SOLUTIONS

14

## RESEARCH RESULTS

# PEOPLE

Sharp interviewed more than 6,000 office workers in small and medium sized businesses (SMBs) in Europe to gain insight into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the youngest generation of office workers' needs and expectations for ways of working in the future:

Increased remote working during the pandemic has changed the way the youngest generation of workers (those aged 21 – 30) view where and when they work:

**40%** two in five think their employer should offer flexible working hours

**58%** almost six in ten said the ability to set the times they work – as opposed to fixed daily hours – is more important to them now

**66%** said the ability to work from anywhere is more important to them now

While they want flexibility in the way they work, they still want opportunities to meet physically and to interact with the workforce to aid learning and development of ideas:

**56%** said the ability to meet with colleagues physically has become more important to them since the pandemic

**34%** believe each age group can learn something from one another in the workplace, with 30% stating they are confident working with multiple generations

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Young workers now expect more from their employers in terms of what they are offering to support their wellbeing:

**36%** said employers should be investing in a healthy work from home set-up (e.g. proper desk, office chair etc.)

**31%** said employers should be offering employees mental health benefits

**28%** said they would like to see the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to monitor working conditions (e.g. air quality, temperature etc.)



**“THEY STILL WANT OPPORTUNITIES TO MEET PHYSICALLY AND TO INTERACT”**

## RESEARCH RESULTS

# PLACES

The youngest generation of workers are most likely to have worked remotely during the pandemic (67%), we explored both sides of their experience:

Benefits experienced from working remotely for youngest workers:

**51%** just over half of under 30's agree working remotely has made them more productive

**67%** agree it gives them more flexibility to fit their job around their personal life

Despite the benefits, young workers do not seem to endorse a full move away from the office:

**61%** agree it's hard to stay informed on what's going on in the company when working remotely

**55%** agree they feel 'cut off' from their team, and work longer hours when working remotely

**51%** agree that they find it hard to stay motivated when working remotely



Aspects of an office that would deter the younger generation from wanting to work there:

**32%**  
Lack of suitable technology

**30%**  
Restricted layout

**26%**  
Dull or uninspiring design

## RESEARCH RESULTS

# PROGRESS

The pandemic has led to a newfound reliance on technology, we explored how this has impacted the youngest generation of workers, and the opportunities and concerns it has created:

Young workers are worried about what future technology might mean for their job security and the impact on their role:

**50%** half of workers under 30 cite the threat of automation from increasingly sophisticated technology as one of their main concerns

**48%** fear that technology is taking over all aspects of business communication and productivity has been negatively affected

These concerns for technology, as well as experiences during lockdown have given new meaning to what the younger generation think is most important when thinking about their role, and what they expect from their employer:

**63%** said opportunities for career progression and training opportunities had become more important

**66%** said their employer must provide the technology they need to enable more effective remote working in the future

**65%** said the training and technology they provide for employees has become more important than before Covid-19

Despite young workers concerns for future technology, it has given them more opportunities to contribute in meetings and work more effectively while remote:

**59%** agree more people are able to contribute during remote meetings

**50%** agree they are more confident at speaking up in virtual meetings than face to face

**63%** agree that technology enables them to do their job more effectively outside the office



**“TECHNOLOGY  
ENABLES THEM TO  
DO THEIR JOB MORE  
EFFECTIVELY”**

## RESEARCH RESULTS

# PURPOSE

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a universal experience and has fundamentally changed the way organisations operate and their relationship with their staff, their customers and even wider society:

**70%** almost three quarters of office workers under 30 said that the way their employer treats its staff is more important than before the pandemic

**69%** said that the mental and physical health support provided by their employer is more important now

**54%** more than half said that their employer's environmental policy has become more important than before the pandemic

**67%** said that feeling recognised and valued by their employer is more important to them now

**65%** almost two thirds now view training and technology provided by their employer as more important than prior to the pandemic



**“THERE IS A MUCH GREATER AWARENESS AROUND MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH”**

## AN EXPERT'S **VIEW**

Viola K. Kraus, Munich-based future of work psychologist with more than 16 years' experience researching and consulting on the future workplace, explores the impacts of the insights collated by Sharp, and the expectations for the future of work.

### **Covid-19 has accelerated workplace transformation**

The Covid-19 pandemic has had some positive effects on the way we work and accelerated progress towards more flexible models of work. And what's clear is that we're not going back to things exactly as they were. We were already seeing a trend towards the gig economy and digital nomads before Covid-19, and the idea is attached to the sense of freedom and work-life balance that is huge among Generation Z. The younger people in the workforce are looking for flexible working hours from their employers.

As a result of the changes caused by lockdown, we will see a solid amount of remote working as standard. It is unlikely that people will want to rush back to the old way of doing things – commuting every day and travelling to face-to-face meetings - especially now that the work-life case has been proven to work. Travel costs have always been a big focus for business. They are a major overhead, so while some meetings are best conducted face-to-face - we'll see most meetings remain virtual, utilising video conferencing technology to collaborate, rather than taking that one-hour internal flight for a short meeting.

How people feel about how much time they spend in the office varies. Sharp's research finds 47% of 38-45-year-olds think their employers should offer flexible hours, but we see this figure drop to 36% for those just entering the workplace and establishing themselves (21-24-year-olds). Older workers probably remember how inflexible work used to be and will demand that flexibility. Younger generations accept flexible working options as a given; they simply won't work for a company that doesn't offer it.



**Viola K. Kraus**  
*Future of work psychologist,  
Munich, Germany*

**“47% OF 38-45  
YEAR-OLDS THINK  
THEIR EMPLOYERS  
SHOULD OFFER  
FLEXIBLE HOURS.”**



**“IT IS PROVING A STRUGGLE TO KEEP YOUNG PEOPLE MOTIVATED AND ENGAGED WITH A FULLY REMOTE MODEL.”**

**How increased remote working impacts Gen Z**

Having observed that younger workers expect and demand the option of remote working from their employer, 21-24-year-olds in particular struggle to remain motivated when working remotely. This is partly because older professionals have more experience, while young people are still learning to navigate the office politics and have a natural need to be sociable and have those human connections. The younger workforce is a spectrum from people who like to be micro-managed, to those who prefer to be macro-managed, so it's essential that there is connectivity between senior managers and younger members of the team to help support motivation.

The younger generation at the early stage of their careers, will naturally be concerned about a potential lack of career development, but they also want stability, so a well laid-out path is important to them. When thinking about the future of work, we need to move away from profiling candidates against job roles but instead look for talent that can be re-skilled and up-skilled and that will be moved to different areas of the business over time. The rigid structure of work is changing, as is the sense that people need to feel they are progressing upwards, because things change so fast nowadays, we're looking at something more lateral than the traditional career ladder.

It is proving a struggle to keep young people motivated and engaged with a fully remote model. This presents a change management challenge, but after nearly a year of working remotely, by the middle of 2021 we will have new ways of working and more clarity over new career progression paths for younger employees.

## VIEW

### The 'hybrid workplace' of the future

Based on what the younger generation – our future business leaders – are looking for, we will see a mixed future for the office. That means cities need to consider planning for a future where office spaces are smaller with more flexible work stations and unassigned desks. Employers must provide collaboration spaces where people can continue to meet in person because in-person meetings are proven to build trust – it's like glue. People are much more open to brainstorm and collaborate when presented with the opportunity to find out more about a person, find commonalities and transparency. That watercooler talk, casual conversation is so important to forming bonds.

So, what does this 'hybrid workplace' look like? There will be a mix of remote and office-based work, but to make it function effectively, technology and training will be critical:

- ✓ Technology must be at employees' fingertips and be easy to use
- ✓ Technology must enter the home with a guarantee of high-speed connectivity
- ✓ Technology must come with data security that non-tech-savvy people can understand

**“40% OF OFFICE WORKERS FIND REMOTE WORKING TECHNOLOGY OVERWHELMING.”**

The move to the hybrid office must be led by business strategy and led at the highest level of the organisation. Cross-hierarchical and cross-generational advisory meetings should also be held to discuss the measures being implemented to ensure they are supported, understood and successfully implemented by the workforce.

Employers must provide training so that company protocols around remote working and the technology that enables it is understandable to all. Sharp's research finds that 40% of office workers find remote working technology overwhelming, which illustrates the challenge for employers. Usually, organisations push these issues to the IT department; this mind-set needs to change, and the board must take ownership and set the path for an interdisciplinary action team: Board, IT, HR.



**“PEOPLE NOW EXPECT THEIR EMPLOYER TO LOOK AFTER ITS STAFF’S MENTAL WELLBEING AS WELL AS THEIR PHYSICAL CAREER NEEDS.”**

Younger people already expect employers to provide the technology and facilitate remote working, but it goes beyond technology – for example, staff will need the right desks and chairs to work for extended periods from home. Another key concern for younger generations is that they are acutely aware of emerging technology – such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its potential to impact their work.

What is clear from Sharp’s research and conversations with business leaders and professionals at all stages of their career, is that for the future of work to be as flexible and democratic as we want it to be, it will take inter-generational understanding. We need to break out of our generational siloes and build learning into a daily routine within business culture; the young have plenty to teach older generations and must be empowered to do so. Likewise, the older generations need to share their business wisdom with the young. We must all be open to listening and learning from each other.

One of the key standouts is that people now expect their employer to look after its staff’s mental wellbeing as well as their physical and career needs. Younger generations, in particular, are more used to discussing mental health, and this is a key driver for change, encouraging employers to support the mental health of their staff and also their physical wellbeing.

Younger professionals’ expectations are really high. While Gen Y and especially Gen X are focused on making money in order to afford a bit more than a ‘comfortable living’, Gen Z want it all; they want a decent salary, but also focused on health and being able to have a positive social impact with the work they do.

Companies that want to remain competitive must take all these considerations on board if they want to attract and nurture the best talent going forward. Only then can they fully embrace the potential benefits of the future of work.

# TIPS TO SUPPORT EXPECTATIONS OF **FUTURE WORKFORCE**

*Viola K. Kraus, Future of work psychologist, Munich, Germany*

Sharp's research provides insights into how the pandemic has impacted the expectations of the future workforce, in which there are many areas that require action. We have developed four tips around these concerns, to help support businesses plans for the future, as we learn to work in the new normal.

The basis for the business tips is to encourage an open communication channel with employees to get a real understanding of what they need, collecting insights to provide tailored measures that really make an impact. It is also important that through this communication channel, employees understand their shared accountability, to voice their concerns along with suggestions on how to improve issues.

The steps businesses take to support the needs of the future workforce will of course be dependent on their resource and size, but ultimately it's about taking small steps, choosing actions that can be easily implemented, monitoring the benefits and sharing successes.

## **1** Technology must be aligned to specific needs and be supported with training

It is easy to assume that the techy savvy generation knows it all and has it all when it comes to technology. This younger generation must be supported with technology they require to work effectively, and training to ensure they get the best from technology in a business environment.

While we continue to work remotely, employers will need to ensure that employees have the hardware and software they need to work effectively, wherever they are. This will need to be tailored to individuals, but could include a laptop with integrated camera and appropriate lighting to support video conferencing, a VPN for secure flexible work arrangements, software to support collaboration such as Microsoft Teams or hand-held devices, especially for the younger generations who want it all at their 'fingertips'. These tools should be implemented with guidance on how they should be throughout the company, and where applicable provide ongoing learning opportunities to develop skills and learn from one another.



# FUTURE WORKFORCE

## 2 Remote and office environments set-up to support wellbeing

In Sharp's survey, over a third of people said their employers should be investing in a healthy work from home set-up. What is most important is that employees are consulted to ensure their home environment is setup to support their wellbeing, for example understanding the type of desk and chair they are using, where it's located and their lighting setup. By assessing their environment the correct support can be provided, whether that's offering the appropriate lighting while working in front of a screen, encouraging mini activities to combat back pain or implementing automated reminders on employees' work devices to encourage them to take breaks away from their screen.

For those returning to the office, the same care will need to be taken to safeguard employees' physical health, such as monitoring meeting room occupancy to ensure they are not overcrowded or that good supply of fresh air is readily available in offices and meeting spaces.

**“TECHNOLOGY  
WILL BE KEY TO  
HELP PEOPLE FEEL  
CONNECTED ”**

## 3 Keeping teams connected

According to Sharp's research, over half of office workers said they feel 'cut off' from their team when working remotely. While employees are unable to meet in person, technology will be key to connecting teams. Utilising video conferencing services to establish virtual informal meetings or virtual lunches will help to encourage social interactions among teams and ensure everyone feels more connected. It also enables teams to share their difficulties while working away from the office, as well as success stories of working remotely, encouraging peer-to-peer learning.

## 4 Create a virtual learning culture to aid career development

There is a growing concern for career prospects among young workers, with Sharp's insights finding that over half are anxious about issues such as keeping skills up to date, lack of training and career opportunities. This generation is looking for a laid out career path as it helps to offer stability, something which has likely been deprioritised as a result of remote working. To support these concerns, employers should look to provide opportunities to upskill for career progression, such as developing a virtual learning path, to ensure that employees have the opportunity develop new skills while continue to working remotely.

# SHARP SOLUTIONS

As the expert in workplace solutions, Sharp has developed a plethora of products and services which connect an organisation's technology, information, people and ideas to accelerate collaboration, no matter the location.

Take a look at our workplace solutions over the next pages which are supporting businesses to meet the needs and expectation of their future workforce:

## Windows collaboration display

The Windows collaboration display from Sharp is our next generation interactive display, with a built-in microphone, 4K camera and IoT sensor hub. It works seamlessly with the best Microsoft 365 collaboration tools and can connect to Azure IoT platform to enable more effective and comfortable business meetings.

[Read more ▶](#)



## Smarter meetings

You can have smarter meeting spaces by bringing the power of IoT into the meeting room, which allows you to gain valuable insight into your meeting environment through our Windows collaboration display. You can track workspace utilisation and environmental factors to help you create a smarter, more comfortable workplace.

CONTINUED: SHARP

# SOLUTIONS

## Interactive and non-interactive displays

Our displays provide an effective way to work and share information. Our interactive displays allow you to work with data on-screen and collaborate with others. They offer an easy way to transition from using whiteboards, with an exceptionally fast and smooth touch response. Our non-interactive displays offer 4K resolution and clarity that you need to communicate fine detail to any audience.

[Read more ▶](#)



## Office printers

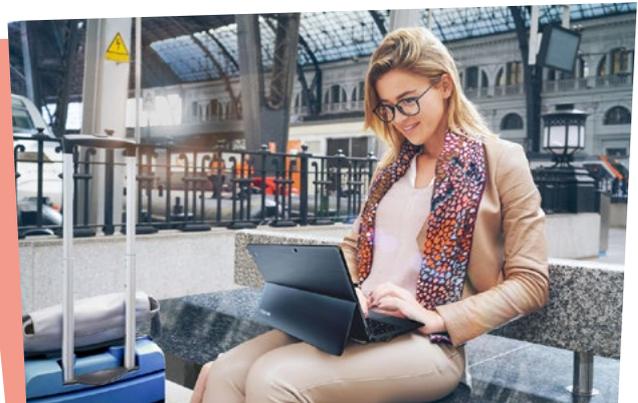
Our office printers offer intuitive ease-of-use, intelligent connectivity and effortless mobility. Their enhanced feature set and smart functionality help people work more flexibly and productively, and they provide a simple way to create, engage with and share information.

[Read more ▶](#)

## dynabook laptops

Our dynabook laptops are designed to support the enhanced workforce mobility needed in the hybrid workplace. They are engineered to deliver the outstanding quality, reliability and performance demanded by today's business and education users.

[Read more ▶](#)



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