



CREATING THE 'NEW' EXPERIENCE OF WORK

WHITE PAPER 2021

We will no longer be held back by the old way of doing things – being cautious, fiercely protecting our norms and not reaching great talent beyond our offices.

Scott Farquhar | Atlassian Co-founder

INTRODUCTION

The ‘future of work’ happened. On 11 March 2020 when the World Health Organization announced a pandemic – the way business and our community operates changed.

Big Red Group (home to brands Adrenaline, Lime&Tonic and RedBalloon) came together asking ourselves hard questions. How deep? How long? How far? And most of all how to plan?

Each leader went to work in their area, David Anderson as Group CEO (and Co-founder) set the framework and had each leader play his or her part. McKinsey had a framework for resilience and reinvention which we readily adopted.

We observed that we needed to move from ‘peace time’ to ‘war time’ leadership. A far more urgent (yet inclusive) management approach was needed. It took all of us and a regular rhythm of communication to create momentum, productivity and innovation.

Inside of all this change we also saw commercial opportunity, but we needed to get all our stakeholders in sync; team members, suppliers, experience partners, customers, business clients and the community - we needed them to understand the plan.

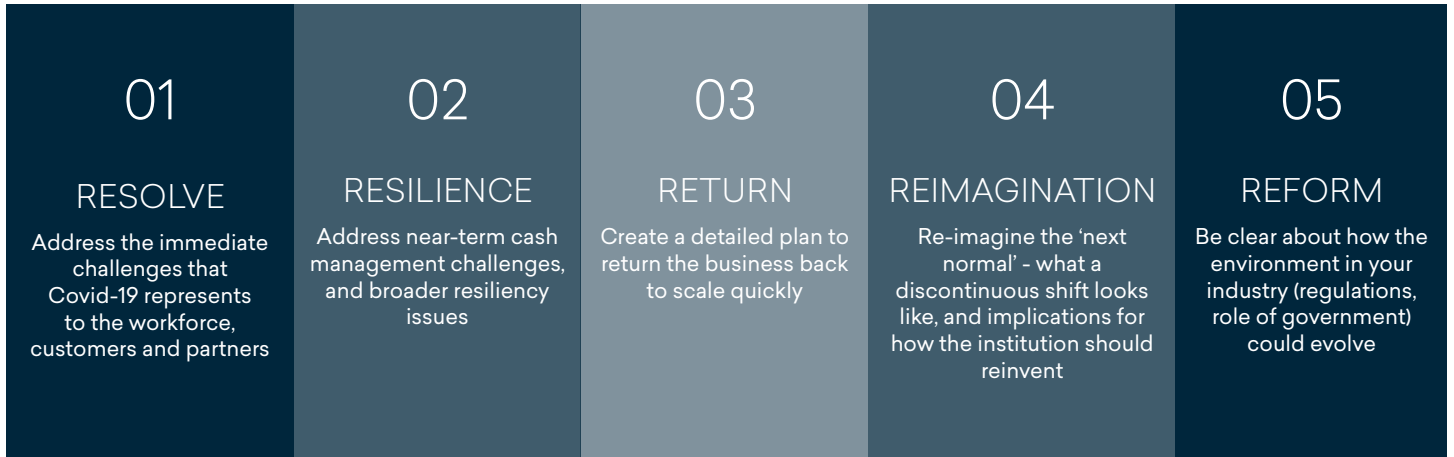


David Anderson | Big Red Group Co-founder & CEO

Naomi Simson | Big Red Group Co-founder | RedBalloon Founder

ACTION ONE

MCKINSEY'S FIVE DIMENSIONS



Establishing a Nerve Center can ensure speed without sacrificing decision quality across these five dimensions.

We had earlier in the year committed to a leadership framework too. We knew who we wanted to be as leaders, and we had a program in place for the people managers so that we were consistent throughout the enterprise (especially given we had left our office in April 2020).

We created our leadership beliefs. This became the overlay on top of the planning and reform framework that we were working to.

ACTION TWO

OUR BIG RED GROUP SIX LEADERSHIP BELIEFS

We are intellectually curious

We contribute

We are human

We are resilient

We breathe life into our purpose

We are adaptive

Yet still there have been more questions we ask of ourselves as leaders. Hard questions. The biggest one is about the 'Experience of Work'.

To office or not to office – or the mixture of both.

We commissioned this work to share with other leaders and business owners. To document the journey that we are on. We stay committed to our incredible culture, and we are not in the camp of having everyone at home indefinitely.

Through doing this work we identified our Six Point Experience of Work Framework. Perhaps it will help you ask the right questions for your business.

Each business is different, they are 'living' beings. As such there is no 'one' way. But in asking the right questions perhaps you will get to the answers that work best for you.

After all, the one thing that has remained is *business is a people game*.

FOREWORD

This time last year, work was a place we attended, to get on with the job at hand.

And rightly or wrongly, people built their identity, self-awareness and connection through how they experienced the workplace. From daily routines, interactions with co-workers and clients, right through to the environments they were in. Values, rapport, and trust evolved this way and helped employees define who they were, and what they were responsible for.

Until 2020, this has effectively been the way we've worked for centuries. People continued on a steady trajectory as we refined the workplace and our attitudes to the point where work became a community in its own right. A surrogate 'family' almost, fostering that deeply important human connection.

But 2020's Covid-19 pandemic has brought with it a fundamental shift in how we work, live and think. Values, priorities and the norm has changed almost overnight, but the need for connection with people remains.

Suddenly, we have an opportunity to reset and reshape our workplaces. A window in time to modify the thinking, break down traditional barriers and leverage technologies to build sustainable workplaces of the future. The choice is ours - how and where do we want to work?

This paper looks at how we might start to create the 'new' experience of work, and why it matters.

Work used to be a place we went,
now it is what we do.

Naomi Simson | Big Red Group

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BIG RED GROUP SIX POINT FRAMEWORK

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current and post Covid-19 landscape pose questions and challenges we have not faced before. Business leaders must acknowledge that communities, work, workplaces, and employee expectations have irrevocably changed.

These challenges are not insurmountable, and in fact, present a unique opportunity to reshape, innovate and collaborate across industry to design sustainable workplaces of the future.

This paper sets out to share current research, insights and interviews with eight Australian industry leaders about how to best navigate through this pivotal time in history.

And as this paper reveals, while work from home (WFH) is the current norm for many, the return to physical office spaces must be carefully considered by each organisation, with no single solution fit for all.



We are beginning to miss each other, we want to connect with our colleagues, experiences at work has a place.

David Anderson | Big Red Group

Executive summary cont...

For some, returning to a physical work location is inevitable, however, that space may be vastly different to what was once required. For others, it might be a hybrid approach or a permanently decentralised workforce.

There are many industry specific nuances to contemplate and considerations such as safety, flexibility, connection, productivity, professional development, technology, personal characteristics and capabilities. These and other aspects are discussed at length in the pages ahead.

As research reveals (McKinsey 2020), employees working remotely are more engaged and have a greater sense of

wellbeing than those in rigid, non-remote jobs. One of the questions we address, is how do organisations strike a balance and get the right outcome for both their business and their people?

And although Covid-19 has shown us that we can work from almost anywhere if we must, to sustain this, we need to build an accompanying set of experiences to engage and motivate individuals.

Ultimately to prosper, businesses must rapidly start to plan and implement their post Covid-19 emergence. It is a time to seize the moment, and if executed correctly, reap future rewards.



DISRUPTION HAPPENED

HOW AND WHY PEOPLE CONNECT HAS SHIFTED.



Culture will not happen without a committed framework for the 'experience of work'.

David Anderson | Big Red Group

One of the absolutes of the Covid-19 pandemic, is the way we work has been massively disrupted.

For businesses to move forward, taking on disruptive business models is a must. While the wider disruption of 2020 has taken us by surprise, it has presented an opportunity.

“I like disruption” says Rod Leaver, the Chief Executive Officer (Australia) of global real estate behemoth Knight Frank (about 18,000 staff worldwide).

And improved IT will see us through and beyond the pandemic he says.

“Technology is going to exponentially accelerate its quality and the way it operates, and come up with innovative solutions.”

Indeed, always be aware of disruption says Big Red Group Co-founder and CEO David Anderson. Look at what Spotify and Apple did to the music sector in terms of disruption, a global music industry destroyed overnight.

“My concern is that some businesses are not able to move fast enough to take advantage of the rapidly reducing windows of disruption that are going on. Covid-19 has brought this massive seismic disruption. It has accelerated it, overnight the world is absolutely different” he says.

The most obvious face of adjustment in the new working world is of course, the office. Staff safety was paramount in the snap decisions by Knight Frank and Big Red Group to move to working from home in March 2020, but the ramifications for businesses are not always immediately revealing.

“We moved home quite quickly. We always had an office, it was quite central to our culture (and) built around the team” says Big Red Group – People & Culture Director, Madeleine Robins.

More of a new chapter Robins says. “What this (Covid-19) is allowing us to do, is to accelerate the disruption and change that is required, so I see it as a positive. We have all the tools and tech, it doesn't feel like year zero, challenges change week to week.”

The need for an office is not as before, but the need for connection remains says Anderson. Keeping employees engaged is not straightforward. Ensuring everyone feels a part of something bigger than themselves and they appreciate that team and culture is different now, is top of mind.

“Work used to be somewhere you went, now it's something that you do. In that context I fear for engagement in the medium term. We have an obligation to provide a safe workplace, but it is more than that. We want people to connect to our purpose and enjoy what they do. Business is a people game.”

The future of work happened.

Madeleine Robins | Big Red Group





WORK HAPPENS ANYWHERE

WHEN SOFTWARE GIANT ATLISSIAN TOLD ITS EMPLOYEES THEY CAN WORK FROM HOME FOREVER, THE CONNECTION OF WORKPLACE CULTURE AND GEOGRAPHIC BASE CRACKED FOR GOOD.

Not everyone can work from home and download an app.

Naomi Simson | Big Red Group

Who wants to work from home (WFH) and what shapes our preferences?

Technology, the physical work environment, age and education all play their part but don't forget that not all industries - manufacturing, food and health are obvious examples - can WFH.

"Not everyone can take their work home and download an app" says Naomi Simson.

An ABC study in August 2020 of more than 1000 workers found most Australians want to return to their physical office after restrictions loosen, with up to 60 per cent keen to split their working time between home and the office.

Beware of mental health and family consequences if the line between home life and work becomes blurred the report states, and encourages a greater surveillance of home workers.

A daily routine goes a long way to keeping you sane, says Business Australia Communications Manager Kim Partridge.

"If you start treating remote work like a holiday and dragging yourself out of bed at 10am, it's likely you'll soon find yourself struggling. Set dedicated working hours where you can shift gears, just as you would at the office."

Good advice but some context is called for. During the 2008 financial crisis, only 1 in every 100 Australian employees, excluding business managers, worked mainly from home says the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

By 2019, about a third of Australia's working population was regularly working from home. And by May 2020, this had increased to 46 per cent. An extraordinary turnaround, but clearly the trend to WFH had begun pre-Covid-19.

The ABC report reveals some staggering shifts, with the Commonwealth Bank having 5,950 employees CBD based around Australia during a one-week period in July, down from almost 18,000 in February.

Westpac performed even more dramatically, moving from circa 1,000 to 22,000 employees working from home in just two weeks.

In the UK, government contractor Capita (45,000 employees) closed more than a third of its 250 offices

While this time has been challenging, it has also presented us with an amazing opportunity to keep pushing further on this flexible way of working – and stretch our imaginations to build what work could look like and how we can clear barriers for us to do the best work of our lives.

Scott Farquhar | Atlassian Co-founder

after concluding its staff are working just as effectively from home or by visiting regional hub workspaces. When the big corporates act in such a manner, it sets a tone.

And when software giant Atlassian publicly told its employees they can work from home forever, the prevailing connection of workplace culture and geographic base cracked for good.

Though trends don't happen without good reason. A McKinsey survey suggests employee engagement, wellbeing and effectiveness - factors that dictate our stance on WFH - are driven by our feelings of security, trust, inclusion and purpose.

After surveying more than 800 USA based employees on work experience, McKinsey found that employees working remotely are more engaged with a stronger sense of wellbeing than those in non-remote jobs with little flexibility.

WFH parents are faring better than more isolated employees and intriguingly, fathers working remotely seem much more positive about the experience than mothers McKinsey says. Crucially, more than 80 per cent of respondents say the crisis is materially affecting their daily work lives.

Bottom line, people have widely varied experiences, perspectives and outcomes and this will dictate their thoughts on whether they really do want to WFH.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT, WELLBEING, AND EFFECTIVENESS ARE DRIVEN BY A SET OF EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE FACTORS

TOP EMPLOYEES NEEDS AND EXPERIENCE FACTORS BY CORE THEMES OF EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Theme	Need (rank)	Employee experience factors	Improvement		
			Work effectiveness	Engagement	Wellbeing
Stable, secure work experience	Job security (1)	Organisational stability	+16.9%	+52.9%	+53.3%
	Financial stability (2)				
	Physical and mental health (6)	Compensation and benefits	+21.2%	+45.6%	+44.5%
Trusting relationships	Being rewarded (8)				
	Working with people I can trust (5)	Trust in leadership	+23.7%	+47.6%	+45.4%
	Being recognised for my work (10)	Relationship with company	+20.9%	+49.9%	+51.3%
Social cohesion and inclusion		Nonfinancial recognition	+20.4%	+55.1%	+49.3%
	Being treated fairly (4)	Fairness	+22.3%	+48.0%	+52.3%
		Involvement	+14.8%	+32.4%	+51.1%
	Having supportive coworkers (9)	Respect	+15.7%	+51.8%	+49.8%
Individual purpose and contribution		Equality	+16.2%	+50.8%	+50.9%
	Achieving work goals (7)	Alignment with organisational purpose and values	+20.3%	+49.0%	+49.3%
	Balance of work and private life (3)				
	Fulfilling my personal purpose at work (11)				

SOURCE: MCKINSEY & COMPANY



1. Leadership

THE NEW NORMAL

WHAT BETTER TECHNOLOGY DO WE NEED AT HOME?
A LAPTOP AND MOBILE CAN DO WONDERS BUT
WON'T CUT IT FOREVER.

Every new movement comes with its own terminology but demographer and author Bernard Salt is not a believer in the much hyped ‘new norm’ tag.

“I am not sure we had a norm previously. (Covid-19) has really brought in a new model of living and working. The workplace and economy is a very complex machine.”

He falls short of saying we are faced with a year zero rethink of how society operates, but such has been the magnitude of global change since March 2020 that the question is not out of place.

And in keeping with the speed of change, it did not take long for WFH - such a hit in the early days once we realised it could be done - to undergo a revision.

Come September 2020, and the narrative around WFH began to shift from what we have gained to what we are missing. But there are few absolutes.

“A lot of what people do can be done from home. Not one society is going to look back to where they were” Salt says.

And although we have the technology, do we have the support infrastructure? What better technology do we need at home? A laptop and mobile can do wonders, but won’t cut it forever.

Seemingly the only agreement about how to move on is that there is no one way to do so.

That the future is already here was officially endorsed in August 2020 through the National Skills Commission report on new jobs. The digital economy dominated, more data architects, data scientist and regulatory affairs specialists were needed.

THE CORONAVIRUS IS CREATING WINNERS AND LOSERS BASED ON SKILL LEVEL

JOBS LOSSES (MOSTLY THE YOUNG AND THE LEAST SKILLED)



Selected 12 leading job-loss occupations out of total 430 occupational categories identified by ABS survey...next survey August, published mid-September.

Leading job losses by occupation in Australia between February-May 2020, ABS Labour Force Survey Cat. No 6291.

SOURCE: BERNARD SALT - BASED ON AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS DATA: THE DEMOGRAPHICS GROUP

BUSINESS AND SKILLS MUST EVOLVE AND ADAPT TO MEET NEW CHALLENGES

JOBS GAINS (MOSTLY THE SKILLED AND THE MOST ADAPTABLE)



LOGISTICS

Supply/Distribution procure managers:
17,000 (48%)

Storepersons:
16,000 (12%)

Delivery drivers:
6,000 (9%)



TECHNOLOGY

Software/App programmers:
12,000 (9%)

Multimedia/Web developers:
11,000 (217%)

Graphic/Web designers:
11,00 (22%)



HEALTH & MEDICAL

General practitioners:
8,000 (13%)

Medical lab scientists:
5,000 (27%)

Ambulance/Paramedics:
4,000 (28%)



AGRICULTURE

Agriculture plant operators:
9,000 (111%)

Crop farm workers:
7,000 (32%)

Farm managers:
6,000 (81%)

Selected 12 leading job-gain occupations out of total 430 occupational categories identified by ABS survey. next survey August, published mid-September.

Leading job gains by occupation in Australia between February-May 2020, ABS Labour Force Survey Cat. No 6291.

SOURCE: BERNARD SALT - BASED ON AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS DATA: THE DEMOGRAPHICS GROUP

Bernard Salt points to a future where the most skilled and adaptable workers will profit most from job gains. Evolution and innovation are essential he says, and targeting the industries with the highest job growth makes great sense (logistics and technology are at the fore).

As for a workable definition of the new norm, it is arguable that simple adaptability fits the bill better than anything.

Though don't overlook YOLO (You Only Live Once) says Salt – it may sound like the latest James Bond offering, but its thrust will be familiar to entrepreneurs the world over.





2. Development

LOOKING OUT FOR YOUR TEAM MEMBERS

REMOTE TEAM MEMBERS MAY HAVE DIFFERENT
DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS.

There has been discussion about employee safety, but beyond welfare, other areas are less clear.

“How do I develop myself? Where am I going? How do I make manager?” will be much asked says David Anderson. Beyond the nuts and bolts of your specific job, how to get ahead while working remotely is a great unknown.

“We all have growth cultures and (via WFH) we have taken away some of the ways to do that” says Madeleine Robins. “Incidental listening is a main way to grow, how do we onboard without sitting people face to face for hours?”

“I’m less worried about the existing workforce, but for the new people, it’s a constant challenge to bring them into the team.”

The greater uncertainty around employees bonding with their employers comes with the newcomers, Anderson suggests.

“My immediate reports are the most comfortable. The older you are, the more comfortable you are in that environment - you have self-awareness, self-confidence and a level of infrastructure around you. It’s harder for younger members of our team.”



I can’t imagine how hard it might be. We were going to have a graduate program this year and postponed because their experience of sitting next to someone with experience, of being directed to the next task, seeing how people behave, would have gone. They would have been sitting from home and been ignored.

Rod Leaver



Rod Leaver is forthright on such difficulties, the organic way of integrating young staff must be bypassed he says.

“I think that building up resilience would count for a lot. How do you build up resilience? It’s through experience and hardship in a way. That’s where experience does come in, (older people) have seen a lot more than someone who is 25 or 30-years-old.”

Indeed, age is pivotal to navigating the new landscape. Different generations connect differently and Millennials are front and centre suggests Leaver.

“The challenge in this environment is how do you judge performance, how do you monitor productivity? The challenge is to work out the performance criteria and how you monitor it to allow people to work from home.”

A Harvard Business Review study suggests regular steps to support remote employees

- Establish structured daily check-ins. Regularity and predictability is key.
- Email alone is not enough. Remote workers benefit from richer technologies like video conferencing that give participants many of the visual cues they would have face-to-face.
- Understanding expectations matters hugely for remote workers. And knowing how to communicate, if it’s urgent, instant message (IM) or phone.
- Structure ways for employees to interact socially while working remotely. Leave time at the beginning of team calls for non-work items.
- Offer encouragement and emotional support: Where the shift to remote work has been abrupt acknowledging stress, anxieties, and concerns is a must.

“If you look at Gen Z’s and Millennials, they are absolute gold because they think differently, and have different expectations” says Rod Leaver.

“If you are going to attract that talent, it’s all about choice. If you give people choice to work from home, do they really need to come into the office at all? And if they don’t, how do you build a culture?”

There will be people who want to work from home because they can, and people who favour a hybrid approach he believes. Then there are the client facing people who love being in the city and want to come in daily. Providing the best technology and flexibility is a no-brainer.

“Ultimately, that’s where I think we are going to end up. It’s going to look like a Qantas lounge.”

When he steps down in 2025 a Millennial will take his place Leaver says, the group will make up 75 per cent of the Australian workforce by then. It is a compelling firepower.

The top down approach aside, a company such as Knight Frank will look at its DNA, find out who the innovators and worker bees are and devise a corporate strategy to meet their needs.

WFH, it’s a better way to enjoy your life. Millennials are very life confident about where they are, from their early to mid-30s they have great power. They are the most progressive part of the workforce and will shape things.

Bernard Salt



“We are an agency dealing in capital markets and have to go and meet clients, do property inspections. It’s understanding who you are trying to craft this outcome for. I think the outcome will be different depending on the culture of the organisation.”

Bernard Salt is adamant that not all jobs can be done from home, but society will not go back to where it was. Millennials can reject the idea of full scale commitment to a job he says.

Numerous studies show Millennials value experiences more than salary and career. A LinkedIn Workplace Culture report showed 86 per cent of Millennials would consider a pay cut to work for a company whose mission and values aligned with their own.

As the future of work moves toward a work-life blend, employees want their career to be a part of their holistic self the report says. An experiential workplace will help employers attract and engage them.

The Millennial evolution will be fascinating. The conventional wisdom is that they cherish experiences, and accompanying emotional connection, over simple goods or services. They are in the experience economy. “Work to live, not live to work.”



3. Collaboration

THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

CREATING LASTING TRUSTFUL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EMPLOYEES AND COMPANY LEADERSHIP NEEDS BOTH SIDES TO PARTICIPATE.

Associate Professor Gianpiero Pertriglieri, an organisational behaviour guru at business school INSEAD, says workplaces by their nature, shape who we become. He calls them identity workspaces.

Offices offer shared captivity, colleagues to laugh and commiserate with and when people work remotely, there's a void he says.

Factors influencing employee experience include the physical work environment, tools and technologies provided, and how committed employers are to employee health and success says Elizabeth Dukes, from America's iOffice.

"What some organisations forget is that their employees are their first (and most important) customers. Focusing on the employee experience is even more critical than evaluating the customer experience" says Dukes.

Companies should never dedicate more time, budget and resources to enhancing the customer experience above the employee experience she believes. It's that important.

Ryan Pendell, from Gallup (US) says engagement comes mostly from relationships and is created daily through the work environment. It's about meeting emotional and social needs, doing work you are good at.

"You can spend a lot of money on internal branding but if an employee has no friends at work, they are likely to feel disconnected from your culture anyway. You can create a beautiful office space but if people don't see how they can grow with you, they are still likely to leave" says Pendell.

If you don't meet the minimum expectations of today's employees, nothing else matters he warns.

To create an employee experience that provides a feeling of meaningfulness, you must show that you value employees across every touchpoint says SAP Concur's 2020 report 'Why Employee Experience Matters'.

"And that's not just adding gluten-free snacks to the break room. It means providing technology that frees people from menial tasks so they can do the work that gives them the most satisfaction, while contributing to the organisation's bottom line."



Companies that create exceptional experiences for employees see exceptional results.

Software multinational SAP says employers who focus on employee engagement experience 17 per cent higher productivity, 20 per cent higher sales and 21 per cent higher profitability.

Web programmer Daniel Alcanja, via the TimeDoctorBlog, is adamant that communications are a huge concern when working remotely.

"Shared values create a strong foundation for a healthy company culture. When everyone is aiming at meeting the same goal, people feel more united and involved in the process."

Trust in the workplace is often taken for granted he says, but creating lasting trustful relationships between employees and company leadership needs both sides to participate.

Employees must be self-organised and team leaders should avoid micromanagement. A trusting atmosphere gives remote professionals the opportunity to see how the company values them.



Shared experience builds trust.

Naomi Simson | Big Red Group





4. Culture

FROM PURPOSE TO COMMUNITY

CULTIVATING AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE ALL
EMPLOYEES FEEL THEY BELONG IS THE SECRET
WEAPON FOR EMPLOYEE RETENTION.

LinkedIn's Workplace Culture report has one overriding conclusion. Culture reigns supreme.

Values define your company and are critical to attracting and retaining great employees it says, with 71 per cent of professionals willing to take a pay cut to work for a company that has a mission they believe in and shared values. Cultivating an environment where all employees feel they belong is the secret weapon for employee retention.

"Employees look to employers for community as much as they look to the employer for a job. So, in this new world, they want to feel part of a community" David Anderson says.

Through WFH, employers now have less ability to influence that experience, the thinking and mental health of employees who are looking to work for community he says.

Since April 2020, surveys have been a feature of Big Red Group's workplace, being conducted regularly.

"It's a channel to get employee feedback (but) it should never be our first and only channel. People should talk to management, team leaders and HR first."

Survey engagement and the quality of feedback is first rate. "People are very open."

Insight does not come from pats on the back though, quite the reverse.

"Disengagement can impact the performance of our business" Robins says, with survey results helping to highlight anyone feeling disconnected.

There can be very different pockets of experiences that people are going through by working remotely, and to crystallise them is key. Engaging remotely is a new experience entirely for most people.

The stand out trend from the surveys has been the simple need for connection.

"We need to see people, and talk to people, and not always online. That's where the experience of working from workspaces comes in. There's a need to be around people."

Recognising the need to provide a space to engage, socialise and connect, in April 2021 Big Red Group

launched a new eco-inspired workspace in Sydney's CBD. The new business headquarters is a 50/50 split of community collaboration areas and more formal working spaces. The balance seems to be right, with socialisation spaces including large community kitchen, table tennis, meeting areas and lounge spaces brimming with conversation and cross team collaboration, while hot desks are heavily utilised on an ad hoc basis. There are a handful of employees who have opted to use the workspace on a full-time basis, with others working part time between home and workspace, and others remaining fully remote.

As Madeleine Robins explains, "our employees now have the freedom of choice – they choose how and where they do their best work, and we support them in their choice. Whether that be full-time in the new office, part-time hybrid working arrangements, or remaining fully remote. Our people have the autonomy to make the choice that works best for them."

The new workspace has materially changed the way Big Red Group conducts its business – the where, the how, creativity, and cadence – and is equipped with the latest technology to seamlessly 'virtually' integrate those who continue to work remotely.

This underpinned by a bespoke employee engagement program – Experiences @ Work which ensures people maintain connection and important cross team conversations even when working remotely. The unique program supports the industry Big Red Group serves, and reminds the team of the business purpose – to shift the way people experience life.





5. Innovation

TECHNOLOGY INSIGHTS

VIDEO MEETS ARE A DIFFERENT BEAST ENTIRELY TO ACTUAL FACE TO FACE CONVERSATION.

As technology expands, do not dismiss what may appear as quirky side effects of WFH as just that. Video meetings (Zoom and Teams are suddenly dictionary staples) are proving a communications lifesaver, but can be a double edged sword.

“As Zoom exhaustion takes over ‘Noooo not one more Zoom meeting’ – the social aspects of virtual Friday night drinks are just not delivering the connection and camaraderie. We must find better ways to build our work community” says Naomi Simson.

Indeed, video meets are a different beast entirely to actual face to face conversation says Rod Leaver.

“You can’t necessarily have that same conversation over a speaker phone that cuts in and out. I can’t see the way you are sitting or what you are doing with your hands. That’s what is missing, the tactile, to be able to see and feel and hear the body language of the room, not just of the person on screen, but to pick up the vibe of the room and respond to that.”

Bernard Salt likewise believes the tactile is an essential part of the workplace mix. When you work with people, you develop trust and knowledge of each other he says.

“You get that information by just being in their space. There are social conversations and reference points and how they use their phone in an office. You form an opinion pretty quickly.”

He is, however, an advocate for video meets when it comes to the big bosses.

“At a senior lifestyle you need to be mixing with other senior people. The CEO and Chairman almost work hand in glove. They know each other, they know the way they are going.”

Pertinently, expect a reaction to WFH and the Zoom meetings culture from the ‘ultra-people’, the ‘suits’ who want to remain in the office says Salt. There is a frisson that comes from being in the workplace that we do not get when working from home he says, and very quickly it can have a life of its own.

“Water cooler and corridor chats were a wonderful way to meet people at work, to get to know them, and build friendships. Having a program of experiences at work

Leaders need a commitment, intention and a never say die approach to transparent authentic communication.

David Anderson | Big Red Group





provides the space and time for people to connect informally” says David Anderson.

Home technology has proved a major challenge and days can morph into one with a blurring between work and social time says the CEO of a national government services provider.

Making provisions to aid employee mental health concerns, whether by holding weekly virtual drinks or dispatching coffees to their homes, is paramount.

Beware too that not everyone is as keen, or able, to use IT at home as they do in the office. Some people can really struggle in their domestic surrounds.

“We had to put internet in (staff) homes, there were lots of IT issues early on. Everything is a bit clunkier at home and you do miss out on farewells and birthdays” the CEO says.

“I think things are probably better for more senior people. They have flexibility and already have the IT.”

There are catch ups weekly, but newer staff are unable to be inducted as before and relationship development concerns in the workplace are prevalent. While managed well, it is crisis management none the less.

“Some of our staff struggled with the changes, younger staff have struggled the most during Covid-19.”

“We are doing (staff) roadshows and talk at length about the detail of the business, being really transparent is the best way to go.”



6. Connection

WORKSPACES & BUILDING TEAM

IT IS NOT JUST OUR PLACE OF WORK THAT HAS ALTERED BUT ALMOST EVERYTHING ACCOMPANYING THE PHYSICAL RELOCATION.



WOTSO WORKSPACE



WOTSO is a shared workspace operator with 17 ‘hubs’ throughout Australia and Asia. Offering offices or single desks for hire on a monthly basis, they are facilitating new shared experiences altogether.

Tellingly, the WOTSO business model is to situate the workspaces in the suburbs, not the CBD.

WFH is not for everyone says joint Managing Director Tim Brown.

“WFH is fine if you live in a six bed house. People under 30 don’t and can’t always get the balance. We are about putting places of work near where people live.”

Add childcare centres, a gym and cafe, which WOTSO is doing, and the need to head into the actual office is greatly lessened.

“The aim is that people don’t have to go to their building, any building will do.”

There are community areas and whiteboards for networking and interaction, says joint MD Jessie Glew.

“We create the space where people can be, but we are not driving the community function. Community is driven by the members themselves. Every space has a different feel and a different vibe. You can have BBQ events and lunches, or come and give a presentation.”

“There needs to be other ways to gather together for collaboration and connection, both for employee growth and for social connection” says Naomi Simson.

There are more than 18,000 co-working spaces worldwide, up from 8,000 five years ago.

The pros are many:

- Flexibility and no long term tie-ins
- People to talk to
- People from other walks of life to connect with (good for fresh perspective on work and life)
- Many hubs are based in the suburbs and so more easily accessible than the CBD office
- A change of scenery from the office and WFH
Technology - good WIFI and people on hand to help out

HOW TO NAVIGATE THE NEW WORKPLACE

TIME TO MODIFY THE THINKING, BREAK DOWN TRADITIONAL BARRIERS AND LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGIES TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE WORKPLACES OF THE FUTURE.

We must find better ways to build
our work community.

Naomi Simson | Big Red Group

LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS & CONSIDERATIONS

What's changed from March 2020?

Everything. Covid-19 has the potential to dominate this decade.

The abiding assumption that work is a place we go to as much as what we do, has been shattered. Mentally, we have already moved on and the successful employers and employees will be the ones who reassess and rebuild their environments now.

Will we return to the office as before?

No. Many surveys show there is no longer the desire by team members to work five days every week in the office. They've seen the light and like it. Nearly a quarter of professionals want to keep working from home until they feel safer, says a LinkedIn survey.

What is the new reality of work?

Uncertainty, but with increasing order and acceptance as employers adapt to new work practices.

The borders conflict between federal and state government has overturned our understanding of how we are governed and who has the final say. Leadership and certainty from employers will be more important than ever to fill this inconstancy.

Feeling safe and purposeful with a strong sense of belonging counts. If we work alone at home or in a sparsely filled office (lesser engagement and encouragement) than an ever decreasing spiral calls. A hybrid working model looms large.

What are the main challenges?

The long physical disconnection since March 2020 will lead to an emotional disconnection and if unchallenged, a gap between employee and employer that may prove impossible to bridge.

Employers must look to create the experiences and connections of the office environment as before or develop something better. And quickly.

How can leaders seize the moment?

Most companies did a solid job of addressing their employees' basic needs of safety, stability, and security during the first phase of the Covid-19 crisis says a June

report by McKinsey. But evolving needs call for a more sophisticated approach as the next phase looms.

The return phase presents an opportunity for companies to rethink the employee experience in ways that respect individual differences—home lives, skills and capabilities, mindsets, personal characteristics, and other factors—while also adapting to rapidly changing circumstances.

How are companies getting through it?

Ongoing and remote employee engagement is not straightforward. Virtual drinks were nice to start with but there must be more.

“For many of us, seeing colleagues every day was a big part of why we loved our jobs,” says Sarah Sheehan, Co-founder of Bravely, an employee benefit platform. “It’s crucial to build new pathways to foster these connections and discover what keeps us motivated from home.”

Workspaces are proving a hit and offer a physical place to go to and see other people. Employers can facilitate this easily. Many workspaces are based in the suburbs to make them easier to access. It is not an exact recreation of the former workplace, but people can congregate.

Offer counselling. Caring and being seen to care matters. Ask employees what they want.

What do employees want help with when WFH?

Somewhere to work from (a suitable space at home or workspace) and technology are a must.

There is, for part of our workforce, an educational element also. Not everyone has top notch IT and laptops at home, and there is a need to educate and up-skill.

We miss physical interaction, and all its tangents, with colleagues. We have probably missed being thanked for small tasks and may wonder how we will be recognised, and rewarded when we are not always visible?

What are the unresolved issues?

Many, and given the Covid-19 fallout is unprecedented, they keep coming. For example, who is responsible if you hurt yourself at home while WFH?

WFH seriously frays the distinction between sick,

personal leave and work time says Forbes. You might be too sick to travel to the office, but not too sick to attend a Zoom meeting.

Personal responsibility will need to step up a gear. We are in this together. What about data privacy, security issues and company IP when you WFH? Who owns what?

There is much to resolve.

Should employees get a pay rise for WFH?

If one hour of their pre-pandemic day was spent on commuting and time-wasting activities in the office they would not otherwise perform, employees have enjoyed a 14 per cent pay rise says The Australian's Economics Editor, Adam Creighton. And that's before WFH workers incidental expenses - travel, dry cleaning, suits - have fallen.

Forbes magazine also believes salaries should go up. If office space decreases through hot-desking and general downsizing, then other employer costs will drop too. Energy, insurance costs, and consumables will also reduce, while energy bills, wear and tear on IT equipment and setting up a dedicated workspace may all fall upon the employee.

Acknowledgment by employers of these extra costs is a must. Maybe offer corporate memberships or vouchers towards home office costs. Clarity over longer-term flexible working policies to allow people to live away from the city will help enormously too.

The long-term impact is to show employers care about employee wellbeing. Companies that are flexible, open and fast-moving will win the talent war in the long term, Forbes says.

What factor does personality play?

WFH will arguably disadvantage the charismatic and personable. Output, not charm, wins when it comes to WFH. Will work levels of extrovert dip when they lack the supporting cast of an office? Deep work time and managing to peoples' strengths become even more important.

How do you manage new remote workers?

A dedicated workspace is a must have.

Getting answers to even simple questions can be a large obstacle when WFH. Lack of 'mutual knowledge' among remote workers translates to a lower willingness to give

co-workers the benefit of the doubt in difficult situations.

Loneliness is a common complaint. Extroverts may suffer from isolation more in the short run, but longer term isolation can cause any employee to feel disconnected.

Photos portraying a parent holding a child and typing on a laptop on the living-room floor is not a great look. Be vigilant and minimise distractions at home.

Help ensure remote team members have dedicated workspace and adequate childcare. With the sudden transition to virtual work, there is a greater chance employees will be contending with suboptimal workspaces and unexpected parenting responsibilities (school and daycare closures). Managers should expect these distractions to be greater during this unplanned WFH transition.

Small team events and a consistent approach to new people (with a nominated buddy) being introduced at team gatherings and activities. Induction is way more than understanding the company history, it is the folklore, beliefs and shared sense of purpose that takes time to understand.

"Trust comes from shared beliefs, inclusion and time" says Naomi Simson.



One of the things we did at Big Red Group was to have a consistent approach to doing activities together, across different teams, within teams, new people, interest groups. Not only are we supporting the small business operator running the event – the special nature of doing such things means that our culture continues, and it does keep evolving. Our number one objective is connection. Experiences do this.

Madeleine Robins | Big Red Group



CONCLUSION

We crave food and water, then friends and love says the Psychologist Abraham Maslow in his 'hierarchy of needs' pyramid and, once done, we can indulge in self-fulfillment and the creative.

Where we differ in 2020 is in how we connect. Maslow's theory implies an actual togetherness and perhaps more than anything, Covid-19 has challenged our presumptions around the need to come together to connect. Covid-19 has shown us we can still connect, for better or worse, in a non-physical way. And that we have more choices than before.

When the pandemic hit Australia in March, employers appeared unified in their desire to put their staff first. The general feedback was pride, that people and home technology stood up, and the connection of workplace culture and geographic base as we knew was done.

It heralds too, the decline of the commute and workplaces as the go-to place to connect with colleagues, businesses and as a place of escape.

But we still need to connect and WFH is not for everyone. Gossip, unstructured learning and obvious reward and recognition - a simple thank you - are vital if we are not to become a nation of droids.

"I met many of my best friends through work" says Naomi Simson. These things matter.

That not everyone working in an office has a similar IT set-up at home may surprise, but is a reality. Businesses need to upgrade as well as up-skill and better educate. Education leads invariably to higher salaries and wider perspectives and, by default, more technology ownership and literacy. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Employers need to not only care about their employees, but to keep them front of mind always.

"Corporate culture will not happen by accident - it will take intent" says David Anderson.

Until society no longer needs to work, then the workplace (real or virtual) offers us community, purpose and above all, is the fulcrum for making the connections and sharing the experiences that define us as people.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Evans has extensive experience in sports and business journalism in Australia and the UK (he is a seasoned tennis writer, sports business and commercial property authority). Richard is a passionate believer that clarity and economy are a must for better communications. His new start-up - richthinking - will attempt to show that good and sparkling writing is the base for success in business.

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Rod Leaver is the Chief Executive Officer at Knight Frank Australia and has more than 30 years' experience within institutional property. Previously CEO Asia for Lendlease, he co-founded the ASX listed Ronin Property Group and James Fielding Ltd and is a former property advisor to the Vatican. He is an avid motorbike enthusiast and has ridden across South America. A plan to ride from London to Sydney was derailed by the offer to head up Knight Frank.



Jessie Glew is joint Managing Director and Chief Operating Officer of the ASX listed property company BlackWall which oversees the national flexispace operator WOTSO. Tim Brown is the other joint MD for the BlackWall Group and is also Chief Financial Officer. He has more than 20 years' experience within financial services and property and has previously worked for Deloitte and Lendlease.



Naomi Simson is the Co-founder of Big Red Group and founder of RedBalloon. For 20 years she has been bringing people together through shared experiences. She had a corporate career with Apple, IBM, KPMG and Ansett Airlines which influenced greatly her ideas about work and corporate culture. She is a sought after speaker, author and blogger and has 2.9 million people who follow her contributions on LinkedIn.



As Group CEO and Co-founder of Big Red Group, David leads the business in its pursuit to deliver an experience every second across the globe by 2030.

With a background in management consulting and following on from success in building a large-scale international retail network, David co-founded Big Red Group with the belief that with state-of-the-art technology, great people and a clear strategy to acquire new audiences for its supply base – transformational growth would be delivered to stakeholders.



Madeleine Robins as the People & Culture Director oversees how Big Red Group team connect and influence each other to be the best they can be – operating with purpose thanks to an optimised growth culture and expert team communications. Prior to Big Red Group, Madeleine was the Head of Employee Experience at RedBalloon, listed five times on BRW's top 50 Best Places to Work.

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Each business is different, they are 'living' beings.
As such, there is no 'one' way.
But in asking the right questions, perhaps you will
get to the answers that work best for you. After all,
the one thing that has remained, is business is a
people game.

Naomi Simson | Big Red Group

WE ARE BIG RED GROUP

Headquartered in Sydney's CBD, Big Red Group is the largest marketplace of experiences in ANZ, and home to leading brands including Adrenaline, Lime&Tonic, and RedBalloon.

Australian owned and operated, Big Red Group leads and grows the experience economy through its scale, expert marketing, state-of-the-art tech platforms, industry alliances and partnerships.

Through bold leadership and continuous innovation, Big Red Group drives connections to audiences, generates growth opportunities and delivers sustainable outcomes for communities. In 2021, Big Red Group serves an experience approximately every 30 seconds.

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