

How do we collectively learn from the global pandemics' impact on work?

Through a series of round table discussions we are looking to define the positive and negative outcomes of the pandemic and how we can use them to generate a revitalised approach to our design and delivery.

Home - Hub - HQ - how to choose ?

“Organisations are going to have to work really hard to get hard work done.

The new workplace will be about choice, flexibility and individualism.”

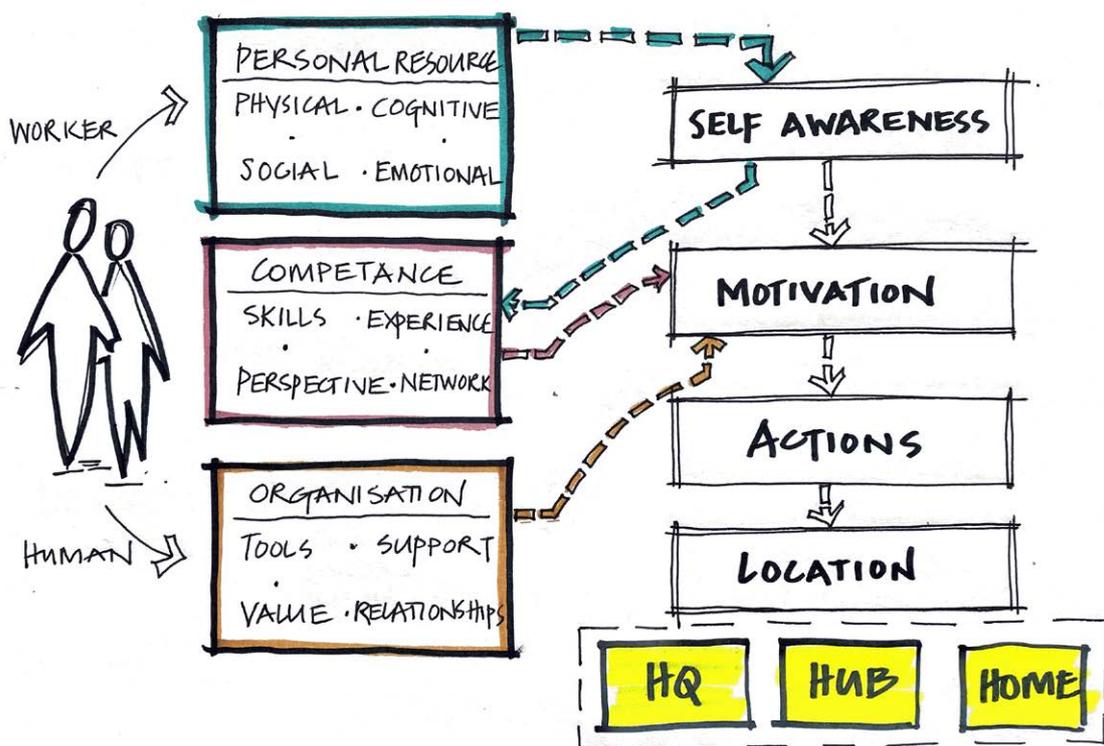
It's clear from conversations with clients over the last 12 months that decision making and investment in furniture solutions and office space has been on hold. With the government road map now in place we may start to see organisations looking to timeline new implementation plans.

As discussed in our first paper with Lily Grey, the new workplace will be about choice, flexibility and individualism and these themes resonated with David, Martin and Luciana at Operandum. This opens up a really interesting debate about the types of space, equipment and especially furniture required to support this model. The general belief is that new working models will be a variable blend of people's homes, conveniently located local hubs and centralised offices, allowing people to maximize their time and increase productivity. Furniture solutions will need to be adapted to suit location and task.

Home – greater need to control the environment in terms of ergonomics and wellbeing. Equalities in set up will be challenging to manage but integral to ensuring all staff have the same ability to work, be productive and progress in their career.

Hub- to be confident the space will be available as and when needed and will accommodate workers needs, most likely for quiet workspace/managed virtual meetings. Could be dedicated local hubs or co-working spaces but would be an opportunity to level the playing field in terms of staff space for appropriate home set ups.

HQ/centralised office –space for client meetings and larger team collaboration alongside space for quiet work when home and hub simply don't offer the correct environment.



Home - Hub - HQ - how to choose ?

“We don’t just offer co-working and office space, but structured learning opportunities for individuals, businesses and larger corporates. We’re really focused on providing access to technologies – AI, 3D printing, IOT and AR/VR – while also bringing together start-ups, industry experts and large corporates to help transform ways of thinking.”
Barclays – Eagle Labs initiative

home working

There are many positives to working from home for those that can. The elimination of travel the element of flexibility to the working day and for some the ability to focus much better on their work than in an office.

Some employers have set staff up ergonomically at home, sending task chairs home and ensuring IT set up is appropriate. Others have given budgets for people to buy desks and chairs. We as an industry have spent many years looking at the long term affects of poor ergonomics in the workplace and this now must surely be applied to the home office for it to become part of the permanent workplace mix. The HSE makes it clear that employers have an obligation to the working safety of their staff.

www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm.

Some manufacturers are looking to offer a full package of home health and safety assessments. For some organisations this will be an impossible task and highly cost prohibitive. We may well see the end of the 9-5 day a real positive in most instances allowing for a much more inclusive, healthier and potentially more active workforce.

We are already seeing major changes in the residential market, with people making location choices to enable work from home, a spare bedroom, garden room, perhaps accepting longer commutes for a few days a week for the ‘team face to face’ days. This could have a positive impact on spreading the burden on overstretched public services, generating a better public transport system and offering investment to areas under serviced at the moment. It will also change the residential deveopment offers within cities as spaces historically offered for retail could be used to provide residents with work hubs within their own buildings.

the local hub

We are pretty much guaranteed that the high street will have undergone a spectacular change by the end of this pandemic – traditional retail will have altered significantly. There are grave warnings of many, even large scale brands, simply not able to weather the economic issues they have faced. High streets have been trending towards a mixed use anyway, an acceleration will undoubtedly occur as there is more available space on offer.

The design of the local hub space will be an interesting challenge. Perhaps not just catering for the more traditional co-working environment of office workers but may be much more multi-functional - homework clubs, open university training centre or community usage out of the typical working hours. What’s really clear is that these places will need exceptional IT/AV provision, very careful management and great suburban connectivity to be of use in the new mix. Use is likely to be for quiet working, online meetings, a space away from home. There are a multitude of pod style furniture solutions coming onto the market currently, they will need a detailed review in terms of flexibility, IT integration and acoustic values.

The local hub has been in play for some time Barclays started this process in 2015 with their Eagle Labs project which utilises a broad portfolio of spaces and geographical locations to support a wide community of workers. There is a widespread view that co-working groups will do particularly well as part of the overall mix of hybrid spaces. Larger clients will definitely use the flex space as part of the rich mix of spaces. As an alternative some landlords e.g. Landsec are offering fully fitted floors based on traditional office space. These spaces could offer a low risk approach to organisations taking city fringe space.

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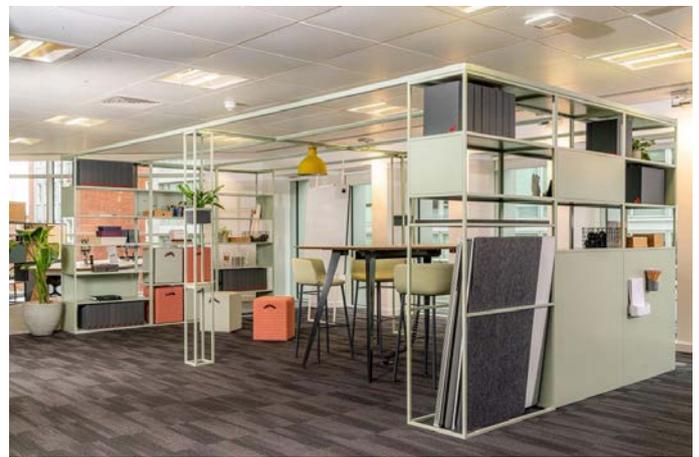
The limitations of daily availability in the new occupancy strategies of buildings will be at the forefront of design – not everyone can work from home on Monday and Friday!

centralised office space

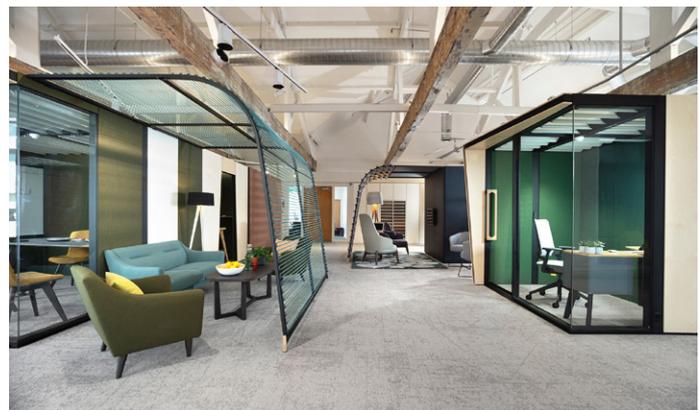
With a large part of the workforce looking to work more flexibly, centralised offices are set to alter significantly in their overall functionality. They are more likely to become places to collaborate and meet with clients. The specification of furniture will need to work harmoniously with desk management, room booking and cleaning regime software. Systems have been in place for many years to support this way of working, no doubt that where not too prohibitive take up will increase. Emerging technologies offer much more sophisticated approaches to the management of people into buildings, through the vertical transportation and on to the floor at a desk. These can be extended to enable a portfolio of buildings to work together too, sitting well with the sustainability agenda ensuring all space is made to work hard all of the time. Co-working on a city wide scale!

Cost modelling for refurbishment and new fit-out will need to be cognisant of these systems as they will start to form part of the expected norm. These systems may well need to integrate with Landlords building management systems too, giving a fully rounded approach to safe management and occupation of buildings as a whole.

We will start to see the design of furniture integrating this technology as we saw with height adjustable desks. This mass market demand should also hopefully see costs reduce to make management systems much more readily available to all occupiers.



KI Colonnade system



Orangebox Campers&Dens system



Movisi Links screen



Frovi Picket screen

Specification and the built environment

2020 saw a 7% reduction in carbon emissions globally as a direct effect of the pandemic, reduction in travel and the growing use of renewable energy.

Practically overnight clients and their facilities teams were asked to react and quickly with no real understanding of the long term view. Many sent staff home with their task chairs and monitors and found other “quick fixes” to continuity of service and productivity. But as we begun to realise this is an “inside and outside pandemic” very little was going to change the outcome by 2 metre distancing in an office that was only partially occupied, this was a sticking plaster approach.

With the vaccination programme in full swing and a year’s worth of knowledge under our belts we appear to be moving into a much more considered response phase. We were all agreed on three key considerations in the planning and specification of furniture going forward;

Flexibility/control over your environment, easy reconfiguration – we may be living with Covid 19 for some time to come.

Health and safety – as we move away from hazard tape and Perspex, knowing the environment is clean and safe will give greater confidence to staff that offices are well managed and a safe place to return to. Specification of materials to balance hygiene with comfort will be key.

Sustainably sourced product- supply chain and confidence in quality are important when budgets come under pressure.

We have no doubt there is an intermediate phase en route to these long term aspirations. Review of existing space and how best to make that work, whilst looking to the future, will take careful review.

What is clear there is an absolute desire across the industry to move on from this highly reactive and in most instances unnecessarily wasteful phase.

Cost modelling

It would appear that the pre-covid 19 rules of design applied to technical analysis, brief gathering and space budgeting have been ripped up. Determining the correct mix of spaces across a more varied portfolio of space will require a much more nuanced approach to the data gathering.

Economically we assume the immediate phase of re-design will require cost savings and efficiencies to be sought. Organisations will want to cost save or at least be cost neutral through this process. It would however suggest that all the ideas discussed require some investment. Occupying buildings at a lower density, budgets for home working space improvements, management software and training alongside the cleaning and maintenance regimes associated. In building a true cost model these hybrid methodologies may become prohibitive to smaller companies.

We feel this may be particularly challenging for organisations that are predominantly open plan now with high density work environments, often utilising large bench desk systems that offer no flexibility. These environments will see the biggest challenges in altering to suit the need for more largescale meetings alongside the contradictory requirement for quieter work.

In this new blended work model – everybody is going to have to work hard to work hard- we will all have to plan our work and be organised to a much greater extent than ever before.

Sustainability

“The nature of human beings is that they’d far rather face the disaster that is happening tonight than the one that is happening tomorrow”

Sir David Attenborough

2020 saw a 7% reduction in carbon emissions globally as a direct effect of the pandemic, reduction in travel and the growing use of renewable energy.

This equates a staggering 2.4 billion tonnes or the combined weight of 400 million elephants.

The furniture sector of our industry could well be seen as a success story in our environmental ambitions if we encourage greater domestic production and rigorous accreditation structures that are supported by the government.

The pandemic combined with Brexit has raised huge awareness of where products and their componentry actually come from. We hope this will lead in turn to a greater demand for transparency on supply chain environmental credibility. Operandum have found getting complete provenance on all products extremely challenging in the past due to the number of components in each piece of furniture. This is further compounded by the expense burden of accreditation for the product being with the manufacturer and final certification being with the client.

In our strive towards net-zero emissions by 2050 there will need to be greater support for both parties to play their part in making good specification choices. This is as much about the credentials of new product as ensuring the specification is so good it can last. The Eames conference chair that’s been sat on day in/day out for 25 years comes out top! Demand is also key here, if we educate clients on this topic the supply for good products will follow. We know that step changes are inevitable but if we look year on year at the percentage of recycled and recyclable material going in furniture and fit-out products, some significant advances have been made already. Operandum have noticed a much greater desire from clients over the past five years to reuse their existing furniture sometimes repairing and reupholstering to maximise the lifespan. Operandum will also offer a coordinated service to resell the clients existing furniture to lengthen its lifespan.

Cost saving in the short term may have a negative impact on these endeavours but we hope that people will see the pandemic as a moment of significant change with sustainability and smart procurement as part of the new norm for everybody.



Material Health

Ensure products are made from the ingredients the Cradle to Cradle standard deems safe and health



Product Circularity

Products/materials that can be returned to the manufacturer or others for full recycling and reuse



Renewable Energy and Carbon Management

determine manufacturers utilising carbon neutral technologies in their production



Water Stewardship

minimise/eliminate water wastage or at best improve local water quality



Social Fairness

support fair labour and human rights principles



In collaboration with:

operandum

www.operandum.co.uk

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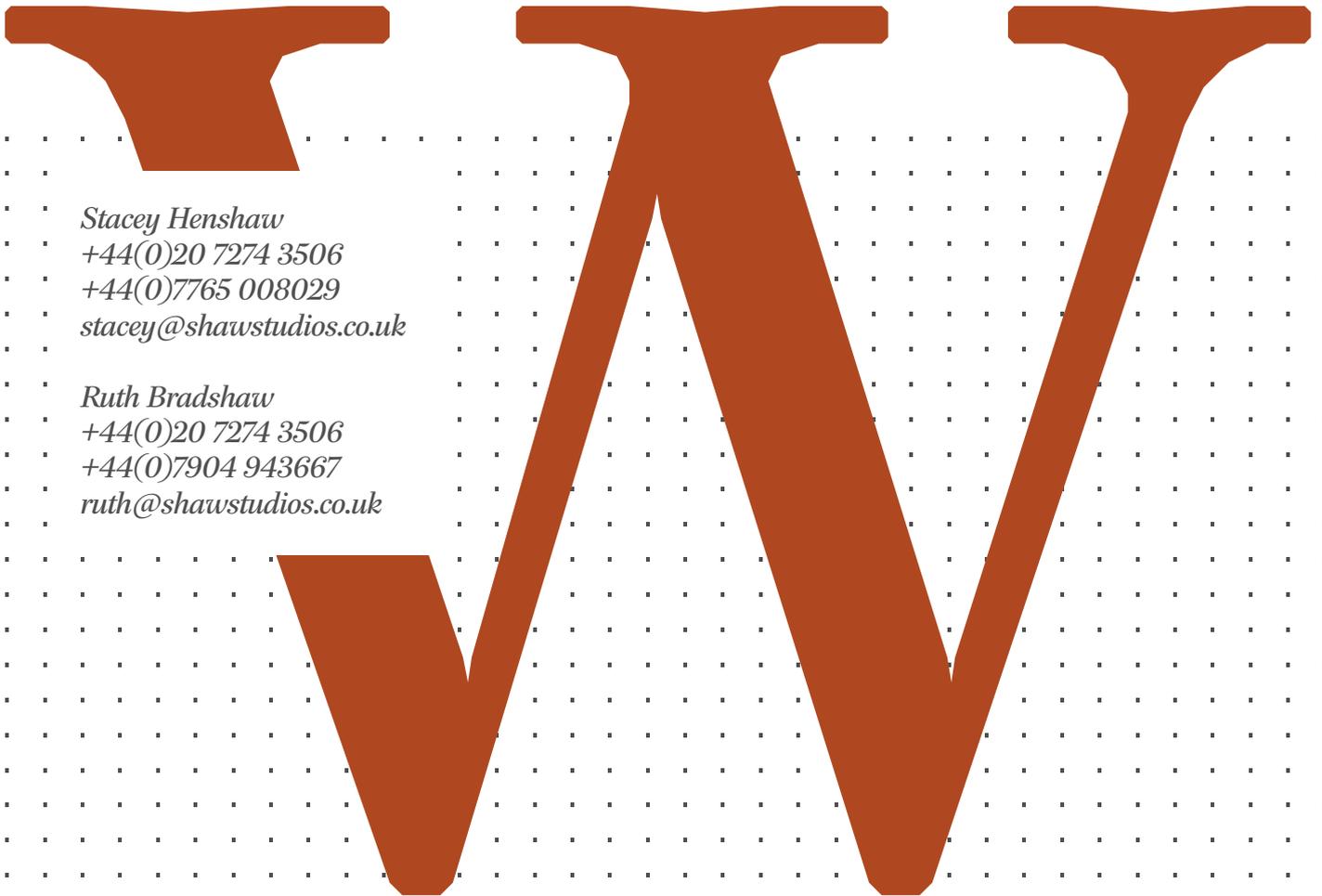
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