

Openness and respect



Smart meetings and emailing



Respecting rest periods



Mindful delegation



MBC – Covid and a return to the office 15 September 2020

A discussion event held to explore collective thinking around and the application of MBC to the next phase of people working both in the office and remotely.

Question 1: for your pillar, and bearing in mind what you noticed during lockdown, which could have been positive or negative, what difficulties do you foresee as we emerge into a mix of people working in the office and remotely?

Participants discussed the above question in breakout groups in relation to a particular pillar of the MBC, using Time to Think principles to guide the discussion. We then all reconvened and participants were asked to nominate a spokesperson to relay two of their freshest observations to the wider group.

First pillar – openness & respect

- A potential divide between those who want to get back into the office and those who are feeling apprehensive, and the implications that may come from that.
- Potential issues that might arise: are you more likely to get work if you're visible in the office, making sure people get the right supervision, peer pressure if your peers are in and you're not.
- Contrast to the closeness people have had in lockdown when they were battling a common 'thing'.
- In terms of meetings - being respectful that some people are in the office and some at home and making sure everyone has a voice and feels heard and listened to.
- Making sure that, because of access to equipment, office jobs such as printing and scanning don't land too heavily on the shoulders of those in the office.
- Colleagues across companies will potentially have to work in different ways for some time – both globally between countries with different restrictions and within the UK with varying local lockdowns. Make sure lines of communication are open.
- We've had a window into people's personal lives during lockdown and we don't want to lose that, how will parents cope if school children are sent home or wrap around care isn't available?
- Cultural differences around concerns about Covid that come into the openness and respect for differences have been observed, as well as people's different health concerns or risk appetites

Second pillar: smart meetings & mailings

- Scheduling meetings. We've got into a practice of more flexibility around having meetings outside working hours and accommodating of different working practices. Balancing that with reduced flexibility of those with a commute.

- Inclusion - individuals in the office are more visible so they may have chats among themselves and people may lose some of the aspects of the work delegation points if they're working at home. Planning around team meetings and work elements during mix of home/office working - has the firm got the technical and physical set up to allow people to have conference calls at their desks (if they're not allowed to gather in meeting rooms)?
- Positive of hybrid meetings is being able to do things globally and regionally.
- Equality of contribution. Technical point - we don't want those in the room to get frustrated with those at home where, for example, they are having audio difficulties.
- Had to relearn how to run a meeting. Volume of meetings and day of back to back zoom calls which can be mentally exhausting. Important to make sure that those meetings are effective. Parity of agendas, parity over expectations of who can speak and when. Think more carefully about how we schedule meetings.
- Building in time for breaks in between meetings to allow people to unwind.
- In the office with back to back meetings there can be a natural break walking between rooms which is missing at home. People miss chit chat around the outside of a meeting which can be useful in terms of understanding content and each other.

Third pillar : respecting rest periods

- Blurring/blending of work and home life. Stealth of meetings taking place slightly earlier in the day because of no commute and into the weekend. People feeling like they don't have permission to delineate breaks.
- Sense that everything will be going back to normal when we return to the office. In fact people may be more stressed.
- How do we enable people to manage their own rest periods?
- If we are taking holiday at home making sure we're not dealing with work stuff.
- A gradual acceptance that people were not available at all times was observed. Now that we're getting back at different rhythms there might be a mismatch of expectations between those that remain at home with their own needs and those that are in the office.
- Taking time off – most vacations were cancelled during lockdown as people couldn't physically go anywhere. Not sustainable. Need to encourage people to pause as the work rhythm was and remains very demanding – juggling not only the work but all the other pressures of being in lockdown.

Fourth pillar : mindful delegation

- Competition – between law firms. Covid situation may have created increased external competition with clients – potential competition on both pricing for work and turnaround time. With potential shorter turnaround times that can have an impact on delegation and individual workloads.
- Process of delegation – when people are physically in the office it is easier to see which people are busy/have capacity. In lockdown we've been required to think more formally and create a process around delegation and give a little more thought to the delegation process itself. May be a positive – could create a more level playing field for people and prevent the same people being passed work. In turn could have a positive impact on fairness, inclusion and equality. Rather than favourites in teams/people in close proximity/who have worked with a partner in the past getting the work. Own firm has a 'resource manager' role, to create some fairness and parity around delegation.

- Flipside of the last point above – the out of sight out of mind point – concern that people will slip back into bad ways and only give work to people that they can actually see, because those physically present are easier to supervise. A problem during remote working has been missing out on non-verbal signs re how people are coping/whether they've understood.
- People's inability to push back on expectation created during lockdown that because you are less able to do other things you will be free to the work which has created concern about pushing back.
- Risk that people will feel they need to be constantly present to prove that they are working as hard as those in the office and are valuable – particularly at a time when people are concerned about job losses. Worried about it creating a pressured environment for people when they feel they can't disconnect.
- Concern for more junior people. How do they learn by osmosis by being around people?

The breakout discussion groups then considered the question below and reported back as before.

For your pillar, bearing in mind your previous conversation, and the twin aims of MBC to work more healthily and effectively, what solutions do you suggest where you have people working in a mix of settings?

Openness & respect

- Picked up on the successes of lockdown and wanting to take those forwards. Primarily around communication. Possibility of being quite prescriptive with heads of teams about, for example, check ins with individuals and what those sound and look like.
- Having an awareness of individuals and their differing backgrounds and home environments.
- Continuing to reinforce physical and mental wellbeing. Their firms had been putting out blogs, tips, town hall sessions – keep the best of those going.
- Getting used to those different ways of working but still thinking about time in the office and how that's structured. Trying to have as much clarity as possible so that people understand. It might help to hold a taster day for people are nervous about coming back to the office.
- Don't let social elements dwindle. Important to people. Those working virtually still need to feel connected and part of the team.
- Managers are going to have a huge part to play in terms of making sure work is allocated properly, that lines of communication are open. Look at ways to guide managers and provide them with the info they need. Connect managers with each other to share experiences and best practice. In turn, by ensuring managers develop good relationships with their people it should ensure open lines of communication remain open with those working from home so that they feel they are being treated fairly and with respect that they feel empowered to say no and speak up if something is going wrong
- Messaging about going back to work – if it really is voluntary then be careful about the tone from those in the office and what you're saying about your own return so that it doesn't put others under pressure to come back eg sharing that those in the office are working on an exciting new matter risks making those outside the office feel disconnected and under pressure to come back

Smart meetings & mailings

- Theme of carrying on the positives around what has been working well: regular check ins and social discussions and meetings. Making sure that we can have breaks. Offering to have

mandatory breaks between calls/ limit meetings to 45 minutes to allow a 15 minute opportunity for a social discussion or allow for social discussion elsewhere.

- We need to go back to basics and make sure people understand meeting requirements as well as accommodating attendees at home and in the office. Eg providing an agenda, making sure that all Chairs are aware of the expectations as to how to manage meetings.
- Where conversations are of a sensitive nature allowing people to be more anonymous eg asking a question through the chat function may feel safer. Opportunity to raise points in a different way.
- Opportunity to be purposeful. Shift to a philosophy of a more purposeful mindset. We can't move into a hybrid world and expect people to realise the issues and assume they know what they're doing. Need to support people with the mindset shift with eg training. They discussed an example of some training sessions led by a psychologist to work with supervisors and managers to think differently about they were running meetings. Idea – keep a note of who in the meeting has spoken up. Has there been a fair contribution?
- Providing **guidelines**. Be aware of cultural nuance. What might seem a good idea in the UK in terms of structuring a meeting might seem rude elsewhere. Create a more consultative approach – allow people to come up with guidelines on having meetings at a local level.

Respecting rest periods

- Looking to establish the rules of engagement. People want clarity. The rules will drive discipline in their execution and accountability.
- Tone from the top is important – your management leading by example eg being clear when they go on holiday that they aren't taking their phone/answering emails. Gives permission to other to follow. A cultural artefact.
- A practical idea - blanking out diary spaces for eg spending an hour at the gym. An important symbol that rest periods are important for our wellbeing.
- Need for a new code of conduct in this new environment?
- Accountability structures –manager led but two way accountability driven by a guiding principle of ensuring that the trust and respect that people have engendered during the lockdown period continues and remains into this new way that we have to find of working together with mixed teams in the office and remotely.
- Important that senior people working remotely show that they are taking breaks and that that is permissible and encouraged eg blocking out time in calendars/ sharing photos out walking dog

Mindful delegation

- There is a real opportunity because these issues are in front of senior management teams at the moment and in their minds. Use that opportunity. There is going to be, we're already seeing, preferential treatment of people in the office. Why wouldn't we treat people who are working remotely as a network group?
- A large part is educating people giving out work about their biases but first about educating people about what they are currently going through . A training issue – but there is a need to do some research first to interrogate the data to find out what people are doing and experiencing at the moment because that will make the training far more effective.
- Solution to out of sight out of mind – now using VC much more regularly. Six months ago members of the team might join meetings via audio which led to talking over each other and

made it difficult for those working remotely to insert their view or follow other peoples'. On VC there is more structure and you can see when people want to make a point – more inclusive.

- Have capacity charts where associates will talk amongst themselves about what they have coming up. Not in presence of managers to allow more open discussion but content is fed back.
- Have work allocation managers who use a number of different metrics to hand out work, including factoring in preferences as to work that people are interested in doing.

be brave.