HOW TO CREATE AN AGILE OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

for Your Remote Team

BY FLEXIBLE OFFICE EXPERTS UBCUK

ubc UK

How to:

Create an Agile Office Environment for Your Remote Team

The current situation is likely to stay with us for some time. But that doesn't mean your business needs to stay on hold too. The key to moving your business forward is bringing your team back together safely in a professional environment that prioritises wellbeing alongside productivity.

How do you adjust to this new segregated home/office regime for the foreseeable future, without compromising on team morale and performance?

In this guide, flexible office experts UBCUK share their years of workplace experience to help you find an agile environment for your team with the right combination of space and technology, so you can keep your team happy and safe, and your business moving forwards.
Let's get to work.

The Challenges of Bringing Your Workforce Back Safely

Until a vaccine becomes widely available, your workplace approach will need to be agile enough to adapt to shifting safety regulations and, potentially, become part of your longer-term business and workplace strategy.

The challenge of temporarily re-organising your existing office to accommodate your team will be amplified when furloughed employees return to work, and regular in-person business activities such as meetings resume.

One of the biggest challenges is social distancing. Most companies initially chose the size and layout of their office space before the onset of social distancing, which makes the process of working and moving around an office a challenge.

The good news is, since the Spring lockdown, most workplaces - UBCUK included - have implemented new measures to enable social distancing and to provide a Covid-safe workplace.
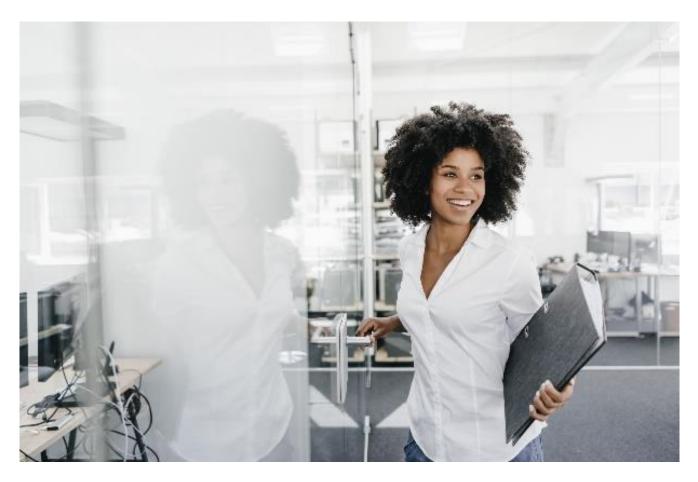
Read more about UBCUK's office safety measures *here*.

How Can I Bring My Staff Back to the Office?

While working from home has proven sufficient as an interim measure, it is not a feasible long-term strategy. Homes aren't designed for business; many lack the space and facilities required for focused work, team collaboration, training, and day-to-day management.

However, some people are understandably reluctant to return to the workplace due to health and safety concerns. Employers need to take these concerns into account and build confidence by demonstrating the measures that have been implemented at your workplace, which may include reduced occupancy, screens, one-way systems around the building, and so on.

We recommend checking the official guidelines for the latest advice on implementing safety measures in your existing workplace: *HSE's Guide to Working Safely During the Coronavirus Outbreak*

For their part, employers should offer a hybrid approach and allow staff to split their working week between the office and their home. This will reduce occupancy in the office and create a safer, more spacious environment.

Operating an office time-share model can help with social distancing. To do this, consider bringing in small teams based on project or department once or twice per week, while the rest of the workforce works remotely. This reduces the number of people in your office space at any one time and enables you to separate desks and chairs to comply with physical distancing guidelines.

This is where an agile mindset is paramount, as you will need to work with a team that is constantly shifting between environments. Managing schedules and keeping on top of day-to-day tasks means effective communication is critical. If you haven't already, now is the time to evaluate your company-wide communication policy and ensure that all your employees - whether remote or in-office - are able to maintain communication effectively.

Should I Distribute My Team Across Regional Offices?

In addition to hybrid work, one important consideration is a 'hub and spoke' workplace model. The 'hub' is the main company headquarters and the 'spokes' are smaller offices located in regional locations. This approach serves a number of benefits:

Regional offices enable staff to work closer to home, but not at home. This means employees can continue saving time and money on commuting while benefiting from a fully functioning business environment.
By dispersing your team, you are reducing the density of people in one space at any one time, which provides a safer environment.
Most regional offices have large onsite parking areas, which means employees don't have to use public transport.
Companies can choose the size of the office that suits the size of their team, with added space for physical distancing.
As we've learned over the past year, many people have suffered from isolation and loneliness while working from home. Providing flexible access to local office space enables your staff to maintain valuable in-person contact with others.

Above all, this model offers greater choice and flexibility for your team.

While many workers are happy staying at home or coming into the office occasionally, others are not suited to this type of environment. This could be because of their personality, or because their job requires frequent interaction with others.

It could also be because their home environment isn't conducive to home working, due to:

- Family members or children at home causing distractions
- Lack of suitable space or equipment for work
- Poor Internet or phone connection
- Feelings of loneliness or isolation
- Individual personality not suited to working alone for long periods of time
- Lack of separation between home and work causing stress or anxiety

Many of these problems have become apparent during the pandemic, and particularly during the lockdown period, as people were coping with restricted movement and the anxiety that came with the situation.

Research from Mind, the mental health charity, found that two-thirds of adults and three-quarters of 13 to 24-year-olds with a pre-existing mental health problem said that it worsened during lockdown (for information and wellbeing support, visit Mind's dedicated resources here).

Therefore, dispersing staff to regional office spaces can be a more constructive and productive alternative to working from home.

What Type of Office Facilitates Regional Hubs?

Flexible office spaces, also known as serviced offices, business centres and coworking spaces, can be found in hundreds of regional locations all over the UK.

These centres provide office space on flexible short-to-mid term arrangements, which means you can sign up to an office for as little as 3 months and continue auto-renewing your space for as long as you need - or as long as the pandemic lasts.

Flexible office hubs come well-prepared for instant move-in, so your team experiences minimal downtime and can get to work instantly - sometimes the very next day:

All offices are furnished with desks, chairs and storage for instant relocation.
Each office has phone lines and high-speed Internet connectivity.
Offices are private, which means your team doesn't need to share space with other people.
Entry to the building and the office is normally by keycard or smartphone access, which reduces physical touchpoints.
Amenities such as kitchens and bathrooms are shared, but these are cleaned and sanitised regularly (cleaning routines have been stepped up in response to the current situation).

How Do Flexible Office Hubs Minimize Risk and Cost?

The current situation is temporary. That means companies don't want to invest heavily in measures such as protective screens or larger offices when this requirement could soon become redundant.

In the meantime, flexible offices provide a low risk, cost-effective solution. Here's how this strategy can solve some of the current challenges companies are facing:

- **My head office isn't large enough to accommodate everybody safely.**
  A hub-and-spoke model using flexible workspaces allows you to disperse your staff into private offices in regional locations. Depending on availability, serviced office centres have multiple suites in different sizes, ranging from small two-person offices to large spaces for 20-30 people. Choose the size of space to suit your team plus additional space for physical distancing.

- **I don't want to invest in expensive safety measures.**
  By reducing density in your existing office and moving staff out to regional hubs, your upfront investment will be kept to a minimum. Flexible office providers, such as UBCUK, have already invested in all the necessary precautions to create a safe office environment, so you don't need to.

- **Dispersing my team and moving offices takes time and resources.**
  Flexible offices enable companies to move quickly; the space is already furnished for move-in and connected with telecoms and high-speed Internet. An onsite team helps with the logistical side to help speed up the process and limit any downtime.

- **My staff don't want to use public transport to get to work.**
  Most regional hubs provide onsite parking, so employees can drive to the office rather than use public transport.

- **Our office Internet bandwidth can't accommodate multiple video conference calls with remote workers.**
  Flexible office companies recognise the importance of connectivity and have made huge investments in their office technologies. UBCUK partners with a specialist provider of office IT and Internet solutions, technologywithin, which ensures our customers have best-in-class connectivity - which is especially important now teams are conducting higher numbers of video conference calls.

- **I am tied into an office lease for a number of years.**
  Serviced offices like UBCUK operate on flexible arrangements, typically starting from a 3-month term, allowing you to choose the duration depending on your own unique circumstances. In the case of UBCUK, your company signs up for a minimum term which can be renewed after the initial term. That way you can keep your team safe by using temporary office space without breaking your existing office lease.

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5 Ways Design Supports Your Transition Back to the Office

Health and safety are paramount, and physical elements such as hand sanitiser stations help people feel at ease. But you also need to provide a reason for your team to want to leave the safety of their home -- and that starts by providing a welcoming, sociable environment.

After months of working at home surrounded by noisy family distractions or worse, working in `isolation with extremely limited human contact, many people are keen to spend at least part of their working week in the company of familiar faces.

Simple design elements can also help create a positive, productive environment. Most serviced offices provide a blank canvas, allowing you to create an inspirational workspace that helps your employees feel relaxed yet motivated. We recommend getting their input along the way, as their ideas and feedback could be vital to the finished product.
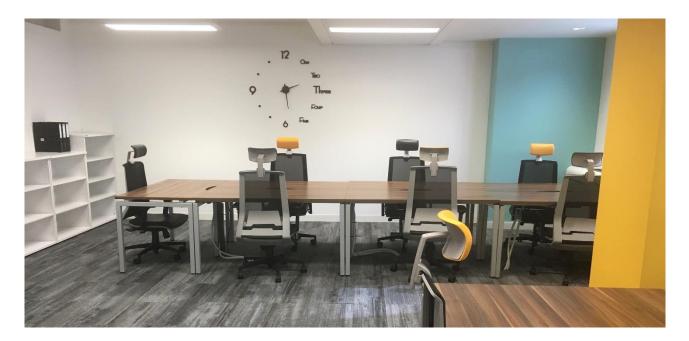
1. Embed Your Brand.

When redesigning or brightening up your office, how can you incorporate your company culture and brand into your workspace? This is particularly important during the current situation as home-based workers may feel disconnected from your company brand. Your office space is a representation of your core values, and you can weave them through your design. For instance, if sustainability is central to your company mission, incorporate recycled materials into the design wherever possible. And rather than plastering your logo across the walls, consider a more subtle integration -- such as deconstructing your logo into shapes and colours. Or let your products speak for themselves by displaying prints that showcase your work.

2. Colours.

When choosing a colour for your workspace, be aware of the impact that colour can have on your employees. When you're sitting in the office for 8+ hours per day, colour can have profound effects on your team. Office design experts, K2, have found that certain colours can positively contribute to happiness, productivity, and even physical health in the workplace:

- Blue can have a positive impact on productivity and is frequently used in open-plan workspaces.
- Yellow is viewed as an optimistic colour and can inspire increased levels of creativity. It can be found in a lot of creative workspaces.
- Red is a bold colour that can foster increased efficiency, but it shouldn't be used in vast spaces. It is more commonly seen in break out spaces and smaller meeting rooms.
- Green can have a calming impact. It can help reduce fatigue during long days at work.
- White can make certain spaces look larger but use it sparingly, otherwise, it can make the space look clinical.

3. Textures and Plants.

Tones and textures are just as important as colour. Natural or earthy tones in the workspace can be complemented by the use of natural materials in your furniture, desk surfaces and wall art, while plants are a wonderful way to brighten up a workspace and 'bring the outside in'. Plants also have therapeutic benefits and can help to improve the air quality in your workspace. Spider plants are great for high shelves and tall cupboards; their fronds hang over the edges and they thrive in partial sunlight or shade, which makes maintenance easy. Another popular choice is the lush and leafy philodendron, which is low maintenance and makes a beautiful filler for empty corners.

4. Office Furniture.

Most serviced office companies provide ergonomically designed chairs, or you can bring in your own furniture if you prefer. For greater wellbeing at work, why not try a height-adjustable desk? They're ideal for people who spend long periods at a desk as they encourage movement throughout the day. As for storage, you should expect a pedestal unit with each desk, and extra storage can be purchased separately. For design consistency and ease, we recommend ordering additional items through your office provider -- but first ask if there are any concessions available (for instance, UBC partners with Lyreco to offer discounts on furniture and office items).

5. Let There Be Light!

Lighting is integral to a happy, healthy working environment, because dim working areas cause eye strain, fatigue and stress, while over-bright spaces can cause screen glare and headaches. You can complement your office lighting in several ways:

- Maximise natural daylight by positioning your furniture so as not to block natural light, whether it comes through a window or glass partitioning.
- Make use of adjustable blinds to avoid excessive sunlight streaming in.
- Desk lamps can help with concentrated tasks, and the more adjustable the better. LED bulbs are usually best as they can be dimmed or brightened, and they last longer too, which reduces your impact on the environment.
- Use light, matte colours and paint finishes on walls to reduce spot glare, which also reduces dark shadows and contrast.

About us

UBCUK has been providing service-led workspaces to growing businesses since 2007. From flexible serviced and furnished offices to managed offices with bespoke design and branding, it's our mission to provide professional wellbeing-focused environments that optimise your team's productivity and support your business growth.

Ready to find out more?

Talk to us: 0800 169 9822

Visit us online: ubcuk.com

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