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Learning from lockdown

The way lockdown has forced office workers to adapt - by staying at home, using virtual tools such as videoconferencing, and juggling the demands of family and the job at the same time - may well change working habits from now on.

Until the pandemic, it's been convenient for employers to say, 'my responsibility to you as an employee begins when you cross the threshold of the office'. That isn't going to wash any longer.

I admit I used to be the sort of CEO that preferred to have my team in the office as far as possible. But since lockdown, I've had to trust them to pick up the ball and deliver what was expected, without the usual close supervision of line managers. And they have. They've repaid that trust, even if it wasn't voluntarily given.

Reporting lines have evolved too; they are now less formal and more agile. Rather than saving up issues for a weekly one-to-one, we now have a much more dynamic information flow using digital tools. And I admit that - bizarrely - I've probably communicated more with the organisation during lockdown. Because I can't just wander across the office, I have to be more proactive and intentional in how I engage with colleagues.

Meanwhile, I've seen how taking away the necessity of the daily commute has improved people's work-life balance, their working efficiency, their mental well-being and their carbon footprint. There have been challenges, including isolation and the demands of childcare, but there have been positives too.

As employers, we are having to get a bit closer to the nitty gritty of people's lives, to appreciate how their personal situations might impact their professional work. This has reinforced what we already knew to be true: looking at employees holistically, and supporting them in a reasonable way, benefits the organisation too.



Bruce McGill
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