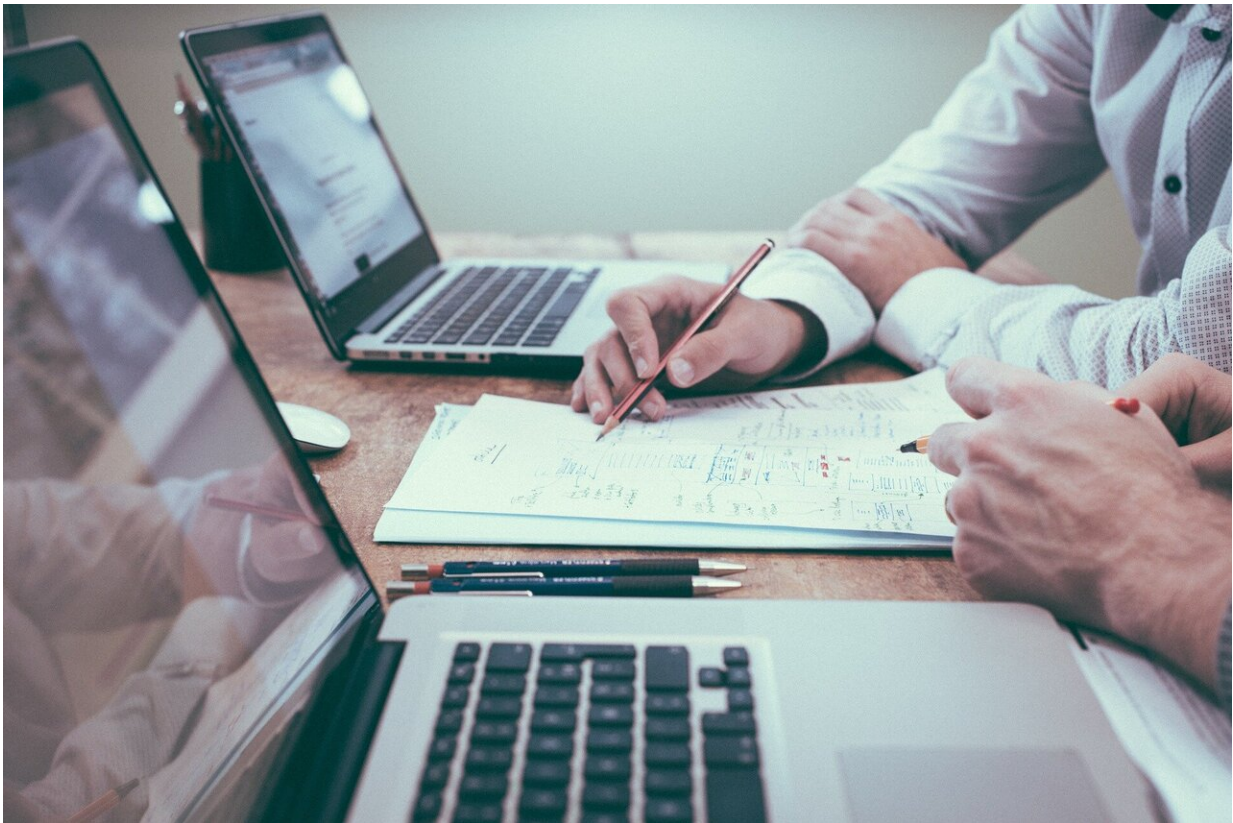


What does COVID-19 mean for the future of work?

March 27 2020, by Professor Emma Parry,



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In a time when we are all adjusting to a new way of working as a result of COVID-19, it is interesting to reflect on what this might mean for how we work in the longer term.

Over the past two weeks, many employers have been forced to both reconsider the global mobility of their workforce and to facilitate the large-scale adoption of home working. Prior to this, despite a common rhetoric around the decline of the physical office, evidence suggests relative low levels of home working (less than 5%) with little signs of this growing considerably in the near future. Will COVID-19 represent a shock to the system that changes our ways of working moving forward, so that higher numbers of individuals work at home?

Certainly, many more individuals will have developed the capability to work at home in relation to using relevant technologies. Organisations have also been forced to invest in such technology and to modify formal processes in order to manage a remote workforce. Managers might also develop the skills in supporting and developing a workforce that is not located with them physically. These changes undoubtedly mean that working at home might be easier moving forward. Some employees might also discover that they prefer working outside of an [office environment](#). Let us not forget, however, the evidence of the importance of social interaction for wellbeing and mental health. The [social environment](#) that a physical workplace offers is an essential part of the employee experience for many. Therefore I would expect to see more people work at home—and for people to work at home more often—but perhaps not the landslide of a change that some others are predicting.

One aspect that might be more likely to change is international travel—particularly short business trips for meetings or events. This period of isolation coincides with continuing improvements in technology for collaboration and communication and faster internet connections across much of the world. Coupled with increasing concerns about the impact of air travel on the environment, this might represent a tipping point that will lead to more significant and longer-term change.

It remains to be seen how the COVID-19 pandemic affects our ways of

working in the long term. It is clear that we are all on a steep learning curve that might lead to increased capabilities and efficiencies in the future. It would be naïve not to expect some long-term change as a result of this but the extent of this is yet to be seen. I would recommend that organisations weigh up the benefits of different approaches outside the current situation and develop their people strategies accordingly.

Provided by Cranfield University

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