

New research calls for hybrid working to be more sustainable

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The increase in the amount of hybrid working post-pandemic—where office-based employees work remotely for part of the week—needs to be more sustainable, according to a new study from experts based at The University of Manchester and Lancaster University.

A mass duplication of [office](#) equipment and the simultaneous heating and lighting of homes and offices are among the things the research article, published in the *Journal of Consumer Culture*, calls "worrying."

In 2019, 5 percent of the employed population typically worked from home, with less than 30 percent hybrid working only occasionally. The overnight shuttering of offices as part of the first lockdown in March 2020 meant 47 percent of employees were working from home by April 2020.

Home working quickly became a common feature of British life, and now looks set to become part of the new normal, with hybrid working emerging as the favored model even though returning to offices full time is an option.

Previous research suggests that working from home could be an opportunity to downsize the consumer economy, with less commuting leading to less emissions. However, this study shows that existing office equipment was not sent to employees' homes during the pandemic, meaning that there was a mass duplication of carbon-intensive technology and furniture which could have been mitigated.

The research also found that while people were accustomed to co-working spaces in offices, when working from home, they were unable to share space with others in their household who were doing the same thing. The article says that working from home can be more demanding in terms of space than office working, as privacy and comfort feels different when work is not shared.

The [research article](#) says that businesses should aim to redistribute technology and furnishings to their employees' homes to avoid further unnecessary duplications of materials. It also says that households could embrace their own 'hot desk' strategies—with one person working from

[home](#) while others are in the office—or employ low-tech privacy solutions such as screens or shelving to create 'separate' spaces.

The study suggests that hybrid working is not necessarily better or worse for the environment, but instead, that lockdowns have made domestic consumption more complicated.

"Given that this hybrid model is still in utero, now is the time to make sure that sustainability implications are carefully considered and addressed by those making decisions around office working," says lead author Dr. Torik Holmes from The University of Manchester. "We call on these decision-makers to place sustainability front and center of hybrid working models, alongside the principles of productivity, flexibility and wellbeing that are already being discussed."

"The pandemic has taught us that we have the ability to make large-scale changes in the face of challenging and pressing circumstances. Climate change represents such a circumstance and the sustainability implications linked with the embrace of hybrid working deserve critical attention and call for novel policy and organizational responses," says Dr. Torik Holmes.

More information: Torik Holmes et al, Locking-down instituted practices: Understanding sustainability in the context of 'domestic' consumption in the remaking, *Journal of Consumer Culture* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/14695405211039616](https://doi.org/10.1177/14695405211039616)

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