



TDA

PEOPLE + SPACE × DESIGN

INSIGHT

**Rebuilding the
workplace for
a healthy and
sustainable future**

A decade of disruption

We are not yet 18 months into this new decade, but already it is clear that we are living through a time of unprecedented change.

In the blink of an eye, the global pandemic rendered almost every aspect of day-to-day life virtually unrecognisable. And we have all had to become accustomed to new ways of living that help mitigate the ongoing risks posed by COVID-19.

Businesses in particular have had to make significant changes to their operating models in order to continue functioning.

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While we had already begun to see a gradual shift towards flexible and home working models, we were still a considerable way off this becoming the norm.




Coronavirus, however, had other ideas.

Its arrival in the UK, and the government's subsequent work from home mandate caused a change that may have taken decades to fully take hold to become status quo overnight.

Businesses were forced to transform in order to survive. And now, having seen the benefits a more flexible working model can offer, employers are serious about implementing this into strategies for future success.

What is clear is that despite its devastating consequences, the pandemic does also have the capacity to act as a catalyst for much-needed, positive change.

In no area is the need for transformation more pressing than when it comes climate change.



IT'S NOT JUST MAJOR
CORPORATIONS THAT HAVE A PART
TO PLAY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST
CLIMATE CHANGE.

Make or break time for the planet

The issue of climate change was on our radar long before the pandemic began.

However, it appears that the new decade has marked a tipping point. There is now a more pronounced sense of urgency surrounding climate change, with governments and corporations making commitments to tackle the issue.

The UK government for example revealed its Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution in November 2020. In it the government announced that it would be making a £12bn investment into key technologies such as hydrogen, offshore wind, nuclear, electric vehicles, heat and buildings. With the intention of leveraging further investment of three times that amount from the private sector by 2030.¹

Meanwhile, Microsoft demonstrated exceptional leadership last year by committing to being 100% carbon positive by 2030. It also promised to offset all historical emissions by 2050.²

But it's not just major corporations that have a part to play in the fight against climate change.

All businesses can do their bit by implementing strategies that not only reduce their negative impact on the environment but actually have a positive effect.

Those that don't will struggle to attract top talent and customers who nowadays are keen to ensure that the companies they associate themselves with share their sustainability values.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-ten-point-plan-for-a-green-industrial-revolution>
² <https://blogs.microsoft.com/blog/2020/01/16/microsoft-will-be-carbon-negative-by-2030/>

Shaping a sustainable future for the post-Covid workplace

COVID-19 and climate change are no doubt the issues that will define this decade.

And businesses need to tackle them both now.

It's a tall order. But here's some very good news.

With the right strategy and workplace design, you can kill two birds with one stone.

In fact, done properly, any changes you implement within your workplace to protect the health and wellbeing of your staff during and after the pandemic, could simultaneously allow you to achieve your sustainability goals, perhaps even earlier than you expected.

Conversely, sustainability strategies could help to protect the health of your staff and enable your business to become more resilient in the event of future COVID-19 outbreaks.

In the following sections, we will show you why investing in a workplace transformation project now is not only going to ensure your success post pandemic but will also demonstrate your commitment to caring for the planet.



PEOPLE

Go green to attract top talent post-pandemic

A key part of many business' strategies for succeeding in the wake of the pandemic will be to build and nurture talented and creative teams.

Research shows that having a robust environmental policy and commitment to sustainability is a big draw for prospective candidates.

In fact, a study carried out by software provider Unily shows that 65% of office workers are more likely to work for a company with a strong environmental policy. While 72% say they are concerned about environmental ethics.³

64% even went as far as to say that they would turn down a job offer from a company with a bad environmental record.

It is shocking therefore that an enormous 83% percent of respondents said that their company is not doing anything, or enough, to fight climate change.

What these compelling figures suggest is that there are huge numbers of talented people out there that want to be part of an organisation that takes climate change seriously, but who are currently dissatisfied with the actions of their current employer.

There is therefore a significant opportunity for smart businesses to attract these individuals by beefing up their environmental policies and implementing green workplace strategies.

Businesses that are serious about luring new talent to their team might even take things a step further by carrying out a sustainable workplace fit out project that achieves a recognised sustainability accreditation.

For example, a BREEAM certification or Ska Rating will quickly demonstrate to in-demand, prospective team members that your sustainability values are aligned with their own. It might just be the difference between securing or losing out on that top new hire.

83% PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS SAID THAT THEIR COMPANY IS NOT DOING ANYTHING, OR ENOUGH, TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE.



³ <https://www.unily.com/media/x5eljtve/unily-future-of-the-sustainable-workplace-guide.pdf>

A sustainable & flexible working culture

Flexible working practices are another major draw for top talent. As mentioned previously, COVID-19 rapidly accelerated what had previously been a very gradual shift away from a 100% office-based, 9-5 working week.

Crucially, it also instigated a big change in employer attitudes towards working from home which, as it turns out, is not just an excuse to slack off.



Employers are now faced with an exciting opportunity to support the wellbeing and productivity of their staff by offering flexible or hybrid working options on a permanent basis. These can even be customised to suit the needs of individual employees.

Not only will this attract talented staff who have considerably higher expectations from their employer when it comes to their wellbeing since the pandemic, it also has some significant and positive implications for sustainability.

The most obvious of these perhaps is the reduction in carbon emissions caused by the decreased need for travel to and from the office.



However, working from home also benefits the environment by making employees much less likely to buy disposable products such as takeaway coffees, plastic bottles and packaged lunches than they are when they spend the day away from home.

Of course, another knock-on effect of adopting a flexible working model is that you may find your existing office space is now surplus to requirements.

But while moving to smaller premises may allow you to cut down on your energy consumption, we'll see in the next section that this isn't always the most sustainable solution to the problem.



+ SPACE

Planning for multiple outcomes

If there's one thing the pandemic has taught us, it's that we simply don't know what the future holds.

In fact, for many of us, living with constant uncertainty has proven more unsettling than social distancing, mask-wearing or even not being able to go to the pub.

Resilience and the ability to adapt in the face of constant change are paramount for businesses to survive and thrive post-COVID.

So, while downsizing might seem like the obvious choice for now, it is a quick fix that may not be conducive to shaping a sustainable future for your business.

In a recent Q&A on [how to get the most from your workplace consultancy project](#), TDA's Design Director Matt Collieran discussed the issue with drastic downsizing:

“At the moment, when asked if they would prefer to work from home, staff are very likely to say yes. Which may lead some employers to do away with desks and cut back on space. But we suspect that peoples' desire to stay at home could have more to do with their fear of COVID than an actual preference for not returning to the office.

What happens when that fear goes away?

People may be keen to come back to the workplace, but employers will no longer have the space to accommodate them.”

Equally, businesses may experience rapid growth and may need to take on new staff once life returns to normal.

Relocating is a smart idea; however, it's important that the new space is large and flexible enough for businesses to potentially welcome back more staff than originally anticipated post-pandemic.

Planning for multiple outcomes is tough. But devising a futureproof workplace strategy that addresses the challenge of COVID fortunately also doubles up as a sustainability strategy.

Get it right and your space will remain efficient and support the needs of your staff for years to come.



What to consider when relocating

When choosing your new premises, you could instantly reduce your carbon emissions by selecting a newer development that already benefits from energy efficient HVAC and lighting systems.

Staff travel is also an important factor to consider when choosing your new location.

In the past, staff may have been reluctant to take advantage of an eco-friendly cycle-to-work scheme due to a lack of appropriate infrastructure that makes cycling to the office either difficult or unsafe.

However, because the pandemic has meant that it's safer for us to travel out in the fresh air than on packed trains and buses, means of travel that emit zero carbon are now being prioritised.

In fact, significant government investment was made last year into improving our infrastructure for cycling and walking. A good example of the way that climate positive change has been accelerated by the pandemic.

When relocating, businesses could therefore consider moving to be closer to their staff, making it easier for them to walk or cycle to work as a way of protecting their wellbeing but also helping the planet.

Once you've found the ideal space and location for your new futureproof office, you can then implement a design scheme that demonstrates your commitment to both your people and the environment.

× DESIGN

Specifying for positive impact

Whether you have chosen to relocate or plan to reimagine your existing workplace, implementing a carefully considered design scheme will allow you to simultaneously protect the health and wellbeing of your staff and achieve your sustainability goals.

First off, when designing your climate positive workplace, you'll need to consider its entire carbon footprint.



Below are the two main types of carbon emissions to think about and ways you can address them.⁴

OPERATIONAL CARBON

Operational carbon is emitted as a result of the day-to-day running of your building and largely originates from heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems.

Technology is hugely beneficial when it comes to reducing these emissions.

Connected smart devices can provide valuable real-time feedback on your operational energy usage. This information will help you to identify ways that you can make energy savings and drive efficiency and sustainability within your workplace.

EMBODIED CARBON

Embodied carbon on the other hand is emitted during the manufacture and construction of your workplace.

The best way to combat these emissions is by choosing to work with designers and suppliers with their own robust sustainability policies and strict protocols for selecting materials that reduce waste and minimise your carbon footprint.

The right fit out partner will help you to make responsible, climate positive design choices to create a scheme that demonstrates your commitment to caring for the environment.

A major bonus of this approach is that it will also allow you to care for the health and wellbeing of your staff.

⁴ <https://blog.interface.com/en-uk/four-ways-specify-positive-impact/>

Living buildings

We talk about [biophilic design](#) a lot on our [Insights](#) page. And for good reason.

It truly is one of the most effective ways to boost employee wellbeing, productivity and creativity.

It is also perfect for businesses looking to improve their sustainability credentials.

A key feature of biophilic office design is making the most of the natural light available within the space. This is great for the environment because it means businesses can rely less on carbon emitting artificial lighting systems.

However, perhaps more important at the present time is the focus on providing excellent ventilation by offering access to natural fresh air wherever possible.

Not only does this help to reduce the amount of energy used by air conditioning systems, it is also vital for keeping us safe while indoors during the pandemic.

Of course, plants also feature heavily in biophilic workplace interiors. As well as looking attractive, they serve a much deeper purpose by removing carbon and toxins from the air, which not only helps to reduce your carbon footprint but also protects your staff against respiratory diseases.





The post-COVID office is green

It is clear from the above discussion that strategies for protecting your staff from the risk of COVID-19 and for tackling climate change are inextricably linked.

If carefully considered, strategies to transform the workplace to ensure businesses can thrive post-COVID will also help them to care for the planet.

Likewise, well thought out sustainability measures will enable businesses to build safe workplaces that are resilient in the face of future crises.

What this highlights, is that there has never been a better time to carry out a workplace transformation project. Nor a more urgent need.

As workplace consultants and designers, we are here to help businesses as they navigate this crucial time in our history.

Our hope is that by taking advantage of the opportunity that the pandemic has given us to reinvent and create positive change, we can all ensure that the decade will not be defined by its turbulent start, but by the way we rose to the challenge.

To learn more about how we can help, check out our [Sustainability & Wellbeing](#) service page or [get in touch](#) and let's talk it through.

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