



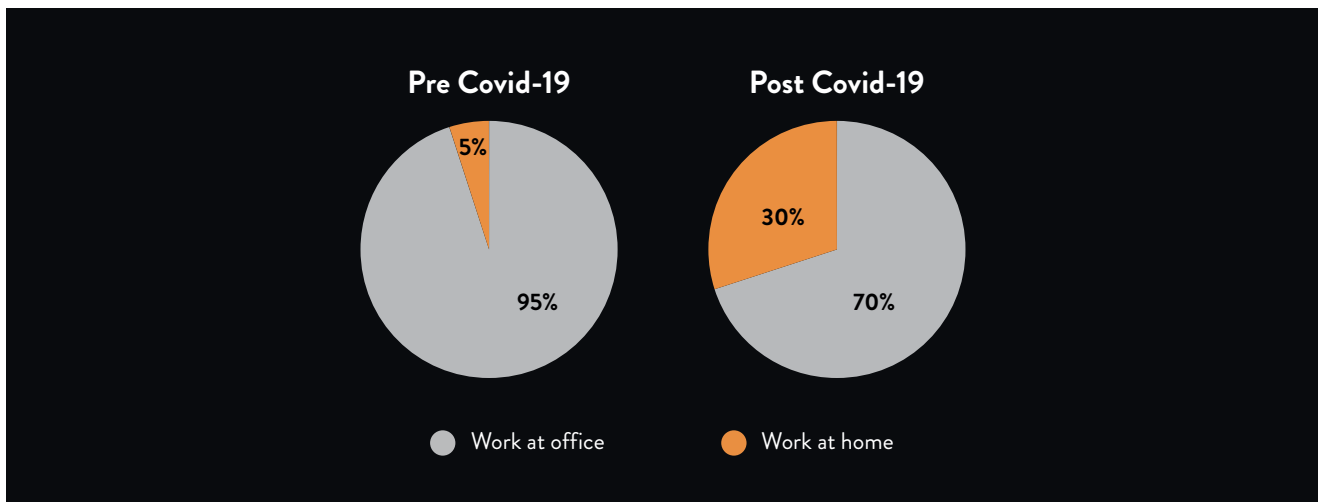
## Our new way of working – five steps to an effective hybrid environment

In just a short time, the pandemic has forced us to embrace digital and virtual ways of working. Now we need to build a hybrid environment that can be sustained over time, with convenient video conferencing as a core resource. To achieve this, corporate offices need to be redesigned and home workspaces have to be upgraded.

We have to deal with three major changes that are happening simultaneously: offices need to be adapted to social distancing and more video conferencing, we need to create good conditions for continued home-working and we must accept that business travel will not be properly back on the table for some time.

### NEW ROLE OF OFFICES

A survey by analysis firm Frost & Sullivan in June 2020 indicates that six times as many people will be working remotely after the pandemic than were doing so before\*. This changes everything for a company's offices. While more people working from home frees up space, we will need to maintain social distancing whenever we are in the office. In addition, we will need many more rooms that are fitted out for video conferences, and in those rooms people will want to sit much further apart. A common scenario may be that every other chair is removed from the meeting rooms.



### HOMEWORKING NEEDS TO BE UPGRADED

Research firm Global Workplace Analytics has conducted one of the largest surveys of homeworking during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, 31% stated that they could imagine working from home one day a week, and now that figure is up to 76% of respondents. Home workplaces therefore also need to be brought up to a standard that will last. Naturally this applies to ergonomics, lighting, acoustics and other physical conditions – but also the digital environment and the ability to hold numerous and sometimes long video conferences. Simplicity and quality will be key factors to consider.

### BUSINESS TRAVEL OFF THE CARDS

The conditions for business travel have also fundamentally changed. In a survey\*\* conducted in August 2020, the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) reports that 78% of respondents now believe business travel will recover more slowly than they thought. Almost 40% agree that, even three years down the line, the business travel market will not have recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

Meetings with customers and partners will therefore have to take place online, in the first instance, for some time to come. When a first meeting with a new customer occurs on screen, everything needs to work perfectly, since the video conference is now the environment in which the relationship will be established – making it entirely business critical.

We have identified five steps to help a company create a hybrid environment that supports life in the new normal, ensuring that everyone can work and communicate effectively and efficiently, wherever they might be physically.



### STEP 1: MAKE SURE EVERYONE IS INCLUDED IN THE HYBRID TEAM

Tomorrow's working life will be more dispersed and virtual. Analysis firm Frost & Sullivan calls this a hybrid team\*, where some work from home and others in the office. Even as more people are able to return to the office, many are keen to cut back on their commuting time and be able to work with more focus and fewer distractions on certain days. Factors to consider as the workforce becomes more spread out:

- The leadership must come up with a good structure for keeping communication and management up to a satisfactory standard.
- Smart collaboration tools are required, so that everyone knows who is working, where they are and whether they are contactable.
- Create flexible office spaces that can accommodate employees when they are in the office, but can also be used for video conferencing and distance meetings as required.
- Create an organization that is prepared for rapid changes in how employees want to work and external parties want to meet.



## STEP 2: MAKE IT EASY TO HOLD GOOD VIDEO CONFERENCES – BOTH AT WORK AND AT HOME

Video conferences have become an entirely natural part of the working day, both in the office and at home. However, many people experience frustration with technology that doesn't always work or offices and home offices that have not been adapted for the growing number of meetings:

- Create a clear policy on what video equipment is needed in a home office. Let the number of external and internal meetings per day guide the quality level.
- Will one or more external screens be used? This will determine the positioning of the conference camera.
- Eliminate any anxieties about video conferences and other distance meetings by choosing tried-and-tested technology that everyone finds easy to operate.
- If possible, choose conferencing products from the same supplier for both the home offices and the company's own offices to make things easier for employees and IT support.
- Ensure that there are enough rooms for separate video conferences in the office, so multiple meetings can be held at the same time.



## STEP 3: IMPROVE SKILL LEVELS REGARDING MEETING TECHNOLOGY AND TECHNIQUES

As the number of distance meetings has risen, it has become apparent that many employees are not used to operating in this environment. Valuable minutes are often wasted before the meeting gets under way due to both technical issues and inexperienced meeting leaders and participants. And during the meeting, we often find it difficult to know who should speak and when. There is huge potential for improvement in this area, with a few key points to consider:

- Make sure that everyone who will be holding important video conferences has a chance to practice both the setup and implementation in a safe environment, before they are let loose on the real thing.
- Start larger and more important meetings by quickly going through the procedural rules: how do we decide who speaks, should everyone have their video and microphone on, are we allowed to interrupt with questions or should we keep them until the end, and so on.
- Add meeting techniques to the induction for all new employees, so that over time the company establishes a single vision of how distance meetings are conducted.
- Video conferences can often be the first meeting with new customers and partners, so make sure that crucial first impression is not damaged by faulty technology or poor technique.



## STEP 4: MAKE AUDIO THE MAIN FOCUS

Headsets can work fine when we connect individually to a distance meeting, as an alternative to a personal speakerphone. When sitting in a group, we always need to ensure that microphones and speakers are tailored to the situation and the number of people in the room. Also bear in mind that we now need to sit further apart in the meeting rooms, and this places greater demands on the speakerphone's pick-up range, which may need to be expanded with extra microphones. One thing that many people have noticed, as video conferences have become longer and more frequent, is that audio quality is a crucial factor. If we can't hear well, the meeting will not go well, which is why we need to put audio front and center:

- Check the audio pick-up range in all the meeting rooms, bearing in mind that we want to be able to maintain social distancing, perhaps occupying alternate chairs in the conference rooms, while still being able to speak in a regular conversational tone.
- Choose speakerphones that are able to pick up the audio even when the meeting participants are moving around the room, for example when showing something on a whiteboard.



- Remember that home offices also need a good working environment and comfortable audio equipment, so a headset may need to be supplemented with a good speakerphone for long meetings.



#### STEP 5: UPGRADE THE VIDEO QUALITY

We all know that video adds an extra dimension to a distance meeting. In the drive to build relations, it has become clear that we want to be able to see everyone taking part in the meeting.

- Even in the smaller meeting rooms it can often be worth investing in video equipment, so the

meetings can be conducted with good quality images and sound.

- Choose a video camera that is suited to the size of the room, the number of meeting participants and the purpose of the meeting. This means selecting a camera with the right field of view so everyone can be seen, but also if possible the ability to zoom and pan, so the camera doesn't restrict the dynamic and creativity of the meeting.
- A sharp, natural image boosts the impression of professionalism and can enhance the capacity for personal expression.

*\* Post Pandemic Growth Opportunity Analysis of the Meetings Market – June 2020 – by Frost & Sullivan.*

*\*\* Global Business Travel Association, 2020 Coronavirus Poll August 13, 2020: <https://www.gbta.org/Portals/0/Documents/gbta-poll-results-20200813.pdf>*