

Starting up

- Have you been working or studying from home since the Covid-19 lockdown began?
- How have you found the experience?
- If you normally work in an office or study at a college or university, have you missed the face to face contact?
- What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of working from home?
- Would you like to continue working or studying from home?

Reading

Is this the end of office working as we know it? To find out more, read the article and then answer the questions below.

Reading comprehension

After reading the article, say whether the following statements are true, false, or there is not enough information given (N). Quote relevant extracts from the article to support your choice.

- 1 Most office workers have been working from home during the lockdown period.
- 2 If and when the pandemic is over, some companies may decide to reduce the number of employees who are office-based.
- 3 Many companies have struggled to adapt to having employees working from home.
- 4 Many big companies are starting to question whether they need so much office space.
- 5 Accountancy firms in particular are planning to reduce the number of office-based employees.
- 6 Most people who have started working from home seem to have got used to it.
- 7 But some CEOs have missed the office environment.
- 8 There are definite advantages to online working, such as arranging video conferences with people in many different locations with no need to travel.
- 9 Sir Martin Sorrell, boss of S4 Capital and former CEO of advertising and media company WPP, is not convinced that home working is the way of the future.
- 10 He plans to invest in more office space as leases are now cheaper.

The end of the office? Coronavirus may change work forever

¹In the world of social distancing, many of the world's office workers have not seen their desks for weeks. But when coronavirus lockdowns finally ease, there may be fewer desks to return to.

²Facing a sudden need to cut costs, chief executives have indicated in recent days that their property portfolios look like good places to start given the ease with which their companies have adapted to remote set-ups.

³"The notion of putting 7,000 people in a building may be a thing of the past," said Jes Staley of Barclays. "Maybe we don't need all the offices that we currently have around the world," mused Mondelez's Dirk van de Put, while Sergio Ermotti said UBS was already thinking about moving out of expensive city-centre offices.

⁴A PwC survey this week found that a quarter of chief financial officers were already thinking of cutting back on real estate, while the Site Selectors Guild, whose members help companies locate new buildings, said half of US office searches had been put on hold since the crisis hit.

⁵Tom Stringer, who leads accounting firm BDO's US site selection team, said that while most of its projects were going ahead, clients were having serious discussions about cutting back.

⁶"In six weeks we've taken almost the entirety of the back offices of corporate America and moved them to kitchens and living rooms and it's been pretty seamless," he said. "People are getting used to it."

⁷Many chief executives also seem not to miss the office.

⁸"I have been so much more connected to 20,000 employees in the last six weeks than I have in the last six months thanks to the technology we are using," said Jim Collins, of biotech and agriculture group Corteva.

⁹Salil Parekh, of IT consultancy Infosys, said it had been easy for him to book in clients for video conferences from home, rather than having to travel to meet them. He saw little need for his employees to rush back, he said, and predicted that some would remain home workers.

¹⁰Even Sir Martin Sorrell, the 75-year-old advertising boss who runs S4 Capital, said he had found working from home "energising", and expected it to herald a "permanent change" to his working practices. The former WPP chief executive has already started ending leases at some sites.

¹¹"I spend around £35m on property in a year," he said. "I'd much rather invest that in people than expensive offices."



Vocabulary

Find words and phrases in the article which match these definitions and explanations.

- | | | |
|----|---|-----------|
| 1 | become less strict and intensive | (para 1) |
| 2 | when you do something without difficulty | (para 2) |
| 3 | systems of working | (para 2) |
| 4 | idea | (para 3) |
| 5 | wondered, thought | (para 3) |
| 6 | reducing | (para 4) |
| 7 | frozen, suspended | (para 4) |
| 8 | all | (para 6) |
| 9 | without any problems | (para 6) |
| 10 | be the beginning of a new way of doing things | (para 10) |

Grammar – phrasal verbs vs prepositional verbs

- 1 Which of these definitions applies to phrasal verbs, which to prepositional verbs and which to three-part phrasal-prepositional verbs?
 - a verbs followed by a preposition that cannot be separated
e.g. *to work for* a company
 - b verbs + adverb particle, which adds meaning to the verb
e.g. *to work something out*
 - c verbs in three parts: verb + adverb particle + preposition
e.g. *to look forward to* hearing from someone
- 2 Match these three examples from the article to one of the definitions above.
 - a cutting back on (para 4)
 - b going ahead (para 5)
 - c book in (para 9)

- 3 Complete these sentences using a phrasal verb, a prepositional verb or a three-part phrasal-prepositional verb from those in the box.

go ahead	cut back	cut back on	book in
set up	put off	bring forward	put up

- a We have decided to _____ with the project, in spite of the pandemic.
- b We will need to _____ a decision on that till we have more information.
- c As things are more urgent than we thought, we will have to _____ the launch of the new system.
- d As we will be using a lot of home working in the future, we should _____ our investment in new office space.
- e I'll _____ you _____ for a video conference call next Thursday at 11.00.
- f We must be sure that our offices are correctly _____ for social distancing.
- g We have already overspent our budget for the first quarter, so we will need to _____ this quarter.
- h When bars and restaurants eventually start opening again, they may decide to _____ prices to try to recover some of the income they have lost.

Discussion

- 1 Do you agree that working from home will become much more widespread after the lockdown eases and things start to get back to normal? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of this?
- 2 What are some reasons not to reduce office-based working in the future?
- 3 What will be some of the challenges of restarting work in offices after Covid-19, especially in high rise buildings?
- 4 If there is a greater use of home working in the future, what are the implications for the commercial real estate industry?

ANSWER KEY

Reading comprehension

- 1 N. That's probably true but we are not actually told this.
- 2 True. ... *when coronavirus lockdowns finally ease, there may be fewer desks to return to. ... Facing a sudden need to cut costs, chief executives have indicated in recent days that their property portfolios look like good places to start.*
- 3 False. ... *given the ease with which their companies have adapted to remote set-ups.*
- 4 True. *"The notion of putting 7,000 people in a building may be a thing of the past," said Jes Staley of Barclays. "Maybe we don't need all the offices that we currently have around the world," mused Mondelez's Dirk van de Put, while Sergio Ermotti said UBS was already thinking about moving out of expensive city-centre offices.*
- 5 N. We are not told about this.
- 6 True. *"In six weeks we've taken almost the entirety of the back offices of corporate America and moved them to kitchens and living rooms and it's been pretty seamless."*
- 7 N. We are not told this. Indeed, we are told the opposite, *Many chief executives also seem not to miss the office. ... "I have been so much more connected to 20,000 employees in the last six weeks than I have in the last six months thanks to the technology we are using," said Jim Collins, of biotech and agriculture group Corteva.*
- 8 True. *Salil Parekh, of IT consultancy Infosys, said it had been easy for him to book in clients for video conferences from home, rather than having to travel to meet them.*
- 9 False. *Sir Martin Sorrell, the 75-year-old advertising boss who runs S4 Capital, said he had found working from home "energising", and expected it to herald a "permanent change" to his working practices.*
- 10 False. *The former WPP chief executive has already started ending leases at some sites.*

Vocabulary

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------|
| 1 ease (verb) | 6 cutting back on |
| 2 ease (noun) | 7 put on hold |
| 3 set-ups | 8 the entirety |
| 4 notion | 9 seamless |
| 5 mused | 10 herald |

Grammar

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| 1 a prepositional verbs | 3 a go ahead |
| b phrasal verbs | b put off |
| c three-part phrasal-prepositional verbs | c bring forward |
| | d cut back on |
| 2 a three-part phrasal-prepositional verbs | e book ... in |
| b phrasal verbs | f set up |
| c prepositional verbs | g cut back |
| | h put up |

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