The power of tech: How can it bring people back to the workplace?

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Since the Covid pandemic and the various lockdowns it brought with it, the way people work has changed. The standard 9-5, Monday to Friday is no longer the norm, as remote and hybrid working has taken hold across the world.

Some people have relished the rise of remote working, thriving in the freedom it allows and the shift in the work/life balance it offers. According to a survey by Forbes, 91% of workers worldwide have a "positive" view of remote working.

Others, however, are not so keen. According to Forbes, 48% of workers said they found it harder to work with other people when working remotely, and 26% said there were more distractions.

Love it or loath it, remote and hybrid working doesn't seem to be going anywhere soon. But, for those businesses who are ready to encourage a return to the workplace for their employees, what can be done? And can technology play a role? FM Director's Claire Middleton spoke exclusively to Planon Software CEO, Peter Ankerstjerne, for his thoughts.

Peter admits that there are strong arguments for both sides – those who prefer working from home and those who are opting for a return for the office.

"Bringing people back to the office is important, but hybrid work is not going to go away," he said.

"The space that Planon Software occupies is all about workplace technologies – centred around the physical building and who's actually in it."

Planon Software is a facility management software provider. Its solutions allow people to monitor who is in the building, register visitors and count footfall, amongst other things. These are all things which Peter believes can significantly help encourage people to head into the office to work.

"We connect buildings and people in areas such as maintenance planning projects and communication between employees," he explains. "People can use our software for figuring out where their colleagues are, wayfinding and booking meeting rooms – anything they need to accommodate an effective workday at the office."

The Covid Effect

The Covid pandemic had a huge impact on all businesses, and Planon Software was no different, developing significantly since then. Peter explains: "When Covid hit, we were – as most other companies were – a little worried about what it was going to do to the business. But in the immediate aftermath, we actually saw a huge uptake in orders."

Peter added: "Customers were really interested in digitising the workplace and using technologies in a much better way to accommodate the way people were working in the 'new normal'. This included simple things like booking a meeting room or reserving a desk, to more advanced things like being able to monitor where people were working in order to accommodate their servicing regime.

"In those early days after Covid, everything was focused on hygiene and traceability. Our software allowed facilities managers to see the footfall of a property, showing them where people were and weren't working. That allowed them to ensure the places that were being used were properly cleaned. It also meant that time, effort and resources weren't wasted in areas that hadn't been used."

Saving costs

Planon Software's facility management solutions can really help drive efficiencies and save costs in many areas of a business, in addition to cleaning services, such as catering.

"If you know there are only 200 people working on one day in a 500-person workplace, your catering team doesn't need to prepare food for 500, just 200," explains Peter. "This saves money and cuts down on waste."

Why should people return to the workplace?

So why are some businesses so keen to get their workers back into the office at least some of the time?

"Having friends at work is important," says Peter. "I saw a study recently that said the biggest driver of customer success, employee satisfaction and workplace happiness was having a best friend at work.

"It's hard to make friends and to connect with people if you never meet each other. You can have virtual meetings, so you can still chat and build relationships, but they're not going to be the big, deep and meaningful relationships you forge when you have lunch with someone or sit next to them for seven hours every day."

Technology, particularly the kind that Planon Software provides, has a real power when it comes encouraging people back to the workplace, and to accommodate them once they're there. The mobile app

can help people to decide whether to go to the office or not. If a work friend is in, that's a possible motivation for some to head in also. It also makes it easy to book at desk or reserve a meeting room. They can even see what's on the lunch menu! Then once they're in the office, the tech works further to accommodate an easier workplace experience.

Is hybrid working the future?

Despite the benefits of going into the office and seeing your colleagues face-to-face, Peter acknowledges that hybrid working has its benefits and is not something that is going to disappear any time soon. Nor does he think it should. Planon Software as a company has embraced hybrid working and has no plans to force its employees back to the office full-time any time soon.

Peter explained: "We are not planning to return to a 100% office-based model. Our recruitment is now based on hybrid work which means we are not only recruiting people from the local area here in the Netherlands, but we are able to recruit people from all over the world. We can cast a much wider net, meaning you can recruit the absolute best, rather than the closest. Our employees also enjoy the flexibility of hybrid working and the freedom it gives them. They enjoy the fact that they can go to the bank, take the dog for a walk or pick up their kids from school. It's a nice quality of life. So, despite the social benefits of being in the office, I don't think it will ever be the norm to be 100% office-based again any time soon. Hybrid is here to stay, but technology can definitely help!"

To learn more about how technology can help businesses adapt to hybrid working, click here to view Planon's informative webinar – Using Technology to Adapt to Hybrid Working Models – on demand.

sing technology to adapt to hybrid working models

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