Q2

If flexibility and working from home aspect of Activity Based Working is so great, how come some of us struggled to work away from the office?

Five main factors played important roles in facilitating people to acclimatise quickly to a sudden change of working in response to the pandemic lockdowns:

1. **Having access to areas that support work activities**

2. **Team agreements**

3. **Flexibility of choice**

4. **Understanding how the worth of work is measured**

5. **Willingness and readiness of leadership to allow and trust their employees to work from a location other than the office.**

1. Access to areas that support work activities

While we already practice an activity-based way of living and our homes are designed to facilitate the specific activities that we choose to do at home such as socialising with family members, resting, preparing food, personal hygiene and practising hobbies, many homes are not appropriately sized or designed to support all the various types of work we do daily.

In some countries (in particular many Asian countries and other high-density areas around the world), home living conditions did not provide adequate space. Think of the small 'shoe-box' like apartments of Tokyo or family apartments where three generations occupy one small residence as we see in Singapore, Hong Kong, and India. So global companies now considering a new way of working might be tempted to take a common approach in all their locations as this would be most 'efficient'. However, the cultural and demographic diversity, the diversity of work styles, and the inclusion of different views employees and teams might have about working from home/remotely are crucial to secure a successful and sustainable future way of working.

Home Activities
What activities do we do at home?

Sleep

Bathe

Relax

BATHROOM

LIVING ROOM

BEDROOM

STUDY

KITCHEN / DINING ROOM

Work

Dine

2. Team agreements

During this pandemic, there were competing engagements with our 'home team'. Where normally we have built clarity and trust around living activities (e.g. whose turn it is to prepare a meal, shower, the time we eat together, have alone time), having to quickly adapt to working from home as a result of COVID-19 gave people neither the opportunity nor the grace of time to have similar discussions and agreements with our home team regarding working requirements. There was also ambiguity about how we interact with our 'work team' during the crisis in order to maintain clear communication, connection, and collaborate productively. Those who managed to establish appropriate team agreements report being better facilitated to be more productive.

Work Activities
Where should these activities be in a home?

Focus

Process

Call

Create

Coordinate

Duo

Dialogue

Inform

Inform

Technical
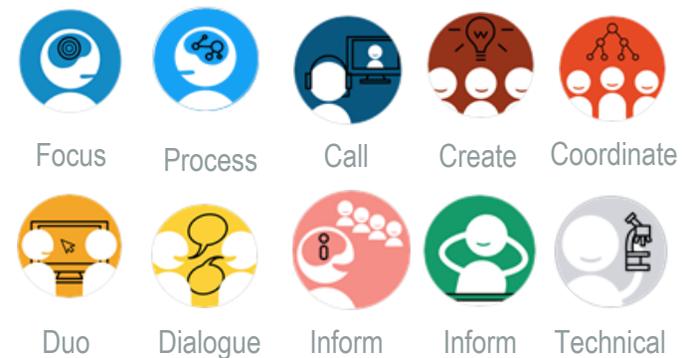
3. Flexibility of choice

As the situation was not triggered by choice where employees could choose whether they wanted to work from home, go to the office, or take their laptop to a café or park and work from there, we experienced a loss of agency over our own lives. When we lose control, it is common to feel anxious and tense. Having limited control of our work lives becomes a restricting factor. Lack of exercising one's choice about working times and hours, locations, work outcomes, and so on have a similar impact on employees. It is not surprising that many organisations reported having low levels of employee engagement even before COVID-19 and how removing one more element of choice exacerbated this.

4. The worth of work

Those teams measuring the 'worth of work' by hours spent in the office (as opposed to outcomes-focused) or who were counting on physical proximity to learn, share, decide and communicate were caught off-guard when they had to start working remotely overnight. This has highlighted several missing cultural conditions (trust, clarity, etc) & underdeveloped leadership capabilities (empathy, connection, facilitation) , that are fundamental to making Activity Based Working successful and sustainable.

5. Readiness of leadership to trust

According to Straits Times, a survey by a Nikkei unit showed that while as many as 88 percent of Japan's large corporations have adopted telework, only 46 percent of small and medium-sized firms had done so by mid-April.

A South Korean study found that only 40 percent of firms were willing to let staff work from home. In Japan, firms Fujitsu, Hitachi and Ricoh, Lixil, AGC, and even the Tokyo Metropolitan Government have kept in place telework arrangements as the "new normal", even after the state of emergency over COVID-19 was lifted last month. So different countries and different surveys tell a different story. In our view, the readiness and willingness of employees to continue to work remotely for parts of the week are as important as the readiness and willingness of leaders to lead teams differently. Those teams whose leaders have built Trust, are open to diverse views, keen to hear everyone's voices, and manage by outcomes would be more inclined to work flexibly (both in times and in space) and optimise both individual and team effectiveness. Those whose leaders prefer a control and command approach to work are less willing to embrace flexible and remote working and likely suffer lower productivity when not co-located.

The Shifts in Attitude

Despite the 5 factors mentioned above, many people have enjoyed at least part of their experience of working from home. One global study conducted by Workplace Evolutionaries - a community of the International Facility Management Association (IFMA)[1] - found that 68% of people felt successful working from home. This matched the sentiments of leaders, with 70% saying that working from home resulted in the same or better on average in their team's work performance.

Those surveyed stated the following preferences to work-from-home post-COVID-19

Americas: 73%	Gen X (80%) Gen Y (74%)
Europe: 68%	Boomer (67%)
Asia: 51%	Gen Z (44%)

A survey conducted by Citrix in April 2020 on 1000 office workers found that 78% believe remote working will become more common even after the crisis has resolved. In the same survey, 74% of 320 CFOs globally stated that they would move at least five percent of their workforce to permanently remote positions. A quarter said that they would look to have at least 20% of their workforce working remotely.

While remote working is here to stay as a concept, it might not benefit all employees in all organisations equally. Some will, through necessity, want to have the choice to work from the office or a location other than the office or the home. This will be an important consideration for each organisation to decide when creating its new Blended Workstyles Strategy.

> *"I feel that the work we have done with Veldhoen + Company over the last couple of years has certainly set us up to be as successful as possible in the current situation [during COVID19] – a big thanks for the guidance and support that the team has given whilst we have been going on our journey!"*

"Chris Chapple – CEO, 151Property, Australia

The Smooth(er) Sailing

It is worth sharing that those organisations that had embraced the deeper cultural change embedded in Activity Based Working before the Covid19 crisis, were not only able to continue working seamlessly, but they also benefited from speed of adaptation to the new circumstances. They continued to have deeply connected teams, a trust-based way of working and to navigate the uncertain times with relative ease.

> *"With us embracing early on, the Activity Based Working philosophy where people can work with whomever, whenever, and wherever we need, we didn't feel negative when our choice was limited to working from home. Rather, it was the process to further deepen the trust and responsibility in a positive way."*

Hiroaki Ninoyu, FM design GM, ITOKI Corporation

In Summary:

This crisis has given us an unprecedented opportunity to review paradigms of productivity and get a glimpse into unexpected and new ways of working. Our teams strongly believe that if organisations don't look to learn from this crisis by investing time and resources in applying the science of Activity Based Working and activity-based thinking to consciously shape the new work culture, it will be a massive lost opportunity to redefine new rules of engagement. And a missed opportunity to identify their own Blended Workstyle to support their business strategy going forward.

VELDHOEN⁺ COMPANY