



RETURN-TO-OFFICE

MANDATES

According to the WTW Flexible Work Models Pulse Survey, more than two-thirds of companies worldwide have implemented a formal policy requiring employees to be in the office for a minimum number of days each week. Companies including Adobe, Amazon, Apple, Bank of England, Boots, Dell, Disney, eBay, Google, J.P. Morgan, Meta, Microsoft, Starbucks, Twitter (X) and Unilever have changed their workplace strategies enforcing return-to-office mandates. Not all of these high-profile brands are requiring employees to be in the office 5 days a week but what does it mean if remote or hybrid working is your norm?

Before you panic that our way of working is about to be turned upside down again, let's delve into the facts. According to the research by WTW prior to the pandemic about 350 million people worldwide worked remotely, representing approximately 10% of the global workforce. During the pandemic, the number surged to approximately two-thirds of the global workforce, depending on region. Working away from the office is not new, it was

accelerated during lockdowns with many businesses and employees discovering many benefits to their work-life balance.

The WTW research also reported that the drive behind greater in-office presence is based on the belief that face-to-face interactions boost employee engagement within teams (76%), strengthen corporate culture (71%) and increase collective productivity by promoting personal interaction of teams (63%). This contrasts the leading benefits of remote work, including promoting attraction and retention of specific roles that could not be filled without remote work options (82%), increased engagement by having better work-life balance (80%) and greater employee retention (68%).

Whilst companies will be influenced by the major corporations who are employing R-T-O mandates, there are numerous factors to take into consideration to ensure a happy workforce. Many employees will enjoy the flexibility of remote working that suits their lifestyle, whilst others prefer to engage in-

person with their colleagues and feel that being in the office offers more opportunities such as a promotion or pay rise.

It's a case of match-making depending where employees are in the career path, their personal and family circumstances, their proximity to the office and what they perceive the advantages are of returning to the workplace. It's key to remember that whilst there are benefits to remote working, there are also downsides - you need to give employees compelling reasons to come back to the office, rather than just enforcing it. Try a flexible approach of 1-2 days to begin with, instead of a hard 5 days, so that they have time to adjust to their change of work patterns.

If you're an employee, you need to be adaptable and try to find the right equilibrium of what you want versus what your employer wants. Collaborating with your colleagues, learning new skills, socialising and well-being programmes can all play a positive part in making your working day more productive, satisfying and enhance your career prospects.