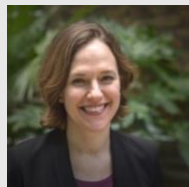




AN EMPLOYEE-FIRST APPROACH TO FUTURE-PROOFING WORKPLACES

Allison English, Deputy CEO of Leesman, sheds light on insights that can help HR Executives future-proof their workplace strategies, while maintaining a strong focus on employees' needs for the new workplace normal.



Allison English
Deputy CEO
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As HR Executives prepare for the post-pandemic workforce to return, they are faced with many new challenges never experienced prior. Getting employees excited and ready to return to the new workplace after over a year of working from home requires strategic planning. Unfortunately, there isn't a blueprint to steal from. That's why Comfy enlisted Allison English, Deputy CEO of Leesman – the world's leader in measuring and analyzing employee experience in the workplace. In this interview, Allison elaborates on data and expert insights from Leesman's recent report, [Workplace 2021: Appraising Future Readiness](#), to help formulate workplace strategies to get employees back to work safely, happily and with confidence.

Q: Leesman's latest research report stresses how using data and evidence to inform workplace strategy is crucial for creating a strategic workplace plan. Can you give a few examples of key data points HR Executives should pay attention to?

Firstly, 83% of employees agree their home environment enables them to work productively while 64% of employees prefer working from the office. So, on the whole, employees find their homes to enable productivity more than their office spaces, which are specifically purposed for work. This is worrying for a number of reasons, not least because the organizations who want to draw employees back into office environments will have a lot of work to do to make them appealing, as they're currently just not fit for purpose.

Informal social interaction (55% supported) and learning from others (66% supported) are what employees have suffered with the most for over a year in many cases while working from home, and the cumulative effects will be huge. Future workplace strategies need to ensure employees have space to interact, socialize, learn from each other both by osmosis and more formally, in collaborative spaces.

On top of this, it's worth noting that those under 25 have suffered most as an age group with home working. They show the lowest H-Lmi scores (Leesman's home working experience metric) as a demographic, largely because of the work settings available in their homes—a significant 72% of under-25s do not have a dedicated room to work from at home. For those who've perched on the ends of their beds, used a kitchen table or sofa to join conference calls while battling for acoustic privacy with housemates, the idea of a space that supports them to do what's needed from them in their roles must be front and center. Not only should HR teams take note of this from a duty of care angle if these employees are expected to continue working from home in the future, but also if they're not – the workplace they will have available to them again needs to help make up for lost time.

Q: Leesman collected home working data from more than 160,000 employees in 2020, the largest dataset of its kind. What is the most surprising learning you've encountered so far? Additionally, what would you say will be the biggest challenges to HR Executives?

A: Out of our wider home working database, 48,413 global employees also told us how they saw themselves distributing their time between their homes and their offices in the future. 85% stated a preference for a blended workplace model, which includes working away from the office at least two days per week.

With return to the office plans in full swing for many and looking more and more feasible the next few months for others, the clock is ticking for organizations, and this responsibility doesn't just sit with one team. Our data suggests that employees' intentions to return to the office greatly depend on both the quality of their home working experience and on the quality of the workplace they'll be returning to. So, organizations must change their goal from "returning to normal," regardless of whether that's an old normal or a new normal. In short, employees simply aren't going to want to return to "average" when they have had an outstanding experience in their own homes.

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Q: How can HR Executives use technology to help employees thrive in the new workplace reality?

A: Communication is key, so having tools to connect with employees is vital. If a tool passes the toothbrush test and is used twice a day, then it becomes a key medium for reaching employees hearts and minds. A lot has changed the last year and a lot will change in the future. Communicating workplace change has always been critical, but now that teams are more dispersed and high-profile comments are being made about the future of work across a multitude of media platforms, it's even more important.

Having a communication plan that explains to employees changes - to both the physical and digital workplace - will go a long way to fostering collaboration and creativity. Employees who are being brought back to the workplace also want to know the correct safety measures are in place, the office isn't going to be overcrowded, the amenities needed will be available and there's a space for them to work when they get there. Technology can aid in alleviating some of the stress points employees have about their return.

Having a mechanism to provide feedback on any changes, the process of returning and the overall experience of being part of the global workforce in 2021 and beyond is also going to be very important to ensure employees feel like they're part of their organization going forward, particularly in a world that's becoming increasingly virtual.

For more data and insights, check out the full Leesman report by [clicking here](#).

THE NEW WORKPLACE REALITY

HR Executives developing change management strategies for the hybrid workplace need expert guidance to ensure their strategy is sound and set up for success.

That's why Comfy has co-authored a step-by-step Change Management Playbook that provides HR executives with all the resources needed to reopen safely and with confidence.

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