

Why should people work at home?

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The 'return to work' now being enforced by many organisations makes no sense for many people or the planet. It really is time for us to have some enlightened managers who do what is best for people and the world and not what they see as being best for them.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQN_Fb03RfE?si=AX-MO3WkAlfNhqTO

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=ucerq-173759a-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&button-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

Why should people work at home? This seems to me to be one of those interesting issues that is being quietly swept under the carpet at present, and yet which should be subject to debate.

We all know that, of course, there was a massive move towards working at home during the COVID era, and amazingly, the economy kept going.

Not everybody could, of course, work at home. We know that. Retail workers cannot work at home. Care workers cannot. Healthcare workers, by and large, cannot. People

who work in factories cannot. I know that all this is true. And so, of course, what I'm discussing will not apply to everybody in the workforce. If you work in those sectors, you will, by and large, have to work in a location where either the customer comes to you, or the customer is already present, or the capital that you require to do your job is present. That is an inevitable constraint for those people.

But there are vast numbers of people where that constraint does not apply, as we found out in 2020 and since. But the world's managers are demanding that people return to work. We're seeing this in accountancy, we're seeing it in government, we're seeing it in most administrative roles. People who were, two years ago, happy to let their workforces, by and large, work from home are no longer willing to do so.

There is no evidence that the productivity of people necessarily increases if they go to the office.

There is some evidence that it might fall because, after all, by the time they arrive, they will have been through the process of commuting. They will be fraught as a result, and they will then face that commute home.

They will also suffer all the distractions that a workplace offers and for some people those distractions are enormously difficult to manage. There are plenty of people, able as they are to do their job, who do not like working in open-plan offices, who cannot stand the noise that they represent, who do not wish to go to physical meetings because of the threat that they pose to them, and they genuinely do feel threatened by such physical meetings because of the behaviour of others in them. There are people who simply need quiet or isolation to work to their best, and very few modern offices provide that opportunity.

So, the fact that there is a demand that everybody return to work suits those who are well suited to the office environment, those who, by and large, as a consequence, climb the greasy pole towards management. But it doesn't suit everyone. Not by a very long way. So, I think enlightened managers will continue to offer the opportunity to people to work at home.

But there is a much better reason why they should do so. And that is, quite simply, that we face the threats from climate change. And one of the biggest threats that we face is the emissions that arise from transport, and transport is used most often at peak times of the day when people are going to and from work. The rush hour is named precisely because so many people move, and if they didn't need to move, we would not need so much transport.

We would have lower emissions, we would have fewer cars on the road, and we might have fewer trains running. Who knows, we might have fewer buses, although there aren't enough of those it seems in most places at present. But, my point is quite simple. If we really care about climate change, and I do - and I think everyone should, because

it is an enormous threat to our well-being - we would not be investing in new transport systems to allow the ever-greater movement of people to and from work. Because we build transport systems to manage that peak, not normal levels of transport. And, if we did that, we would save vast amounts of carbon. Carbon on the construction of new transport systems, carbon emitted by existing and future transport systems.

Yes, of course, people will emit carbon when they work at home. I do not deny that. Of course, having people work at home will increase the amount of energy that is released within the home used as a workplace. So there is some degree of trade-off there. This I accept. But I do not think that tradeoff is nearly enough to undermine the case for reducing the transport to and from work as far as possible, simply for the reason of saving emissions.

Enlightened management would recognise this fact. If only companies were required to properly account for what are called their Scope 3 emissions, which would include the emissions made by their staff moving to and from work, and to reflect the cost of these in their accounts, which at present they are not under new international accounting standards, which are far too soft to do such a thing, then they would have to consider this issue as part of their financial reporting. As it is, they don't, and so they can get away with imposing this cost on people that they move and the cost on the planet of the emissions that result from those people moving.

It's time we took those emissions into account.

It's time we recognized the diversity of workforces and their need to work in different ways and in different places.

And it's time we stopped unnecessary transport so that people could work in the right place, at the right time to suit their needs and to suit the planet.

Management has got the demand to return to work wrong. It's time that we change this approach and allow the flexibility that will provide us with a future and an economy with productive people of the sort that it needs.