**Summery**

**The new workplace**

Though the full lockdowns are gradually being released, we will still need to maintain social distancing in the short- to medium-term to control the spread of coronavirus. We may see the adoption of temperature checks or thermal imaging cameras in the entrance foyer of larger office blocks to send-home anyone showing signs of fever ([**although there are doubts over the actual effectiveness of such screening technology**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-52940951)). And workplaces previously using hot-desking will likely need to reconsider their arrangements. Bustling offices with multiple people using the same desk space would be hotbeds for transmission. Many businesses may also need to stagger work-shifts so that offices and factories don’t become too crowded and workers can safely maintain distancing. [**This is likely to cause a reduction of rush hour traffic**](https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200429-are-we-witnessing-the-death-of-the-car), with commuters no longer needing to all travel to and from work at the same time.

Even so, whilst social-distancing measures remain it’s likely that [**public transport such as buses, trains and tubes will be down to as low as 15% capacity**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-52579871). If even a small fraction of these displaced commuters have to resort to using cars, the traffic congestion in most major cities is about to get a lot worse. Several cities have imposed schemes to encourage people to instead [**walk or cycle to work**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53105020), and road space is already being reassigned – at least temporarily – to additional bike lanes and widening pavements. Electric scooters, currently banned in the UK, may also be legalised. ([***Read more about our collective love-hate relationship with electric scooters – and how sustainable they really are – here***](https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200608-how-sustainable-are-electric-scooters)). This would all have a notable benefit of improving the environment, and greener commutes would keep us healthier in the coming months as well.

But of course, this would only be for the days when you actually need to go into the office, and what we are likely to see continuing after the pandemic is many more office staff working from home. Such a system has demonstrably worked during lockdown, and so managers can no longer rely on the traditional arguments against allowing people to work from home. This could in turn lead to a shift in expectations and workplace culture, where employees are valued on how well they meet their deliverable targets on time, not how many hours they sit behind their desk in the office. [**So flexitime is likely to become much more common, and perhaps even the disappearance of the 9-5 altogether**](https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200312-coronavirus-covid-19-update-work-from-home-in-a-pandemic).

International lockdown and the effective suspension of civic and commercial activity across entire countries has thrust up a mirror on how our economic, social and political systems operate and forced the beginnings of a global conversation on how they may need to change. Covid-19 has revealed the shaky foundations on which much of what we take for granted in the developed world is built, from the intricately interwoven nature of globalised supply chains and manufacturing infrastructure to the [**just-in-time deliveries to supermarkets**](http://www.bbc.com/future/bespoke/follow-the-food/the-pandemic-threatening-bananas.html), as well as stark contrasts between nationalised healthcare systems and those financed by private insurance.

It’s likely that all of us experienced the imposition of lockdown as a shock to the system, whether it made us feel lonely or listless or anxious [**or driven to distraction by the family constantly under each other’s heels**](https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200414-how-to-maintain-relationships-in-self-isolation), or all of the above, all at the same time. As individuals, we've had to make changes – both big and small – to our everyday lives.

But while physically distanced, the internet and social media have allowed us to reach into each other’s homes over the past weeks. Social relationships for many seem not to have suffered. They have also allowed us to explore hobbies and interests we might never have had before – [**like the people turning to social media to solve real-life mysteries from their homes**](https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200612-how-to-help-the-world-during-lockdown).

While being enormously disruptive and painful, crises also invariably nurture the emergence of great common purpose, solidarity, creativity, and improvisation. And social media has opened little windows into how everybody else has responded and found their own coping mechanisms. Shortages of commonplace items, or difficulties in getting out to the shops or securing a delivery slot, or perhaps just that many of us have more time on our hands these days, has unlocked an inner creativity and resourcefulness that can be shared widely online.

This has manifested itself in different ways. Many of us are now taking a lot more time and consideration over cooking. Not just picking up a microwave dinner from the mini-supermarket on the way back from the office, but actually cooking for ourselves – carefully choosing a recipe, chopping and stirring ingredients, grinding spices – taking delight in the process of making a meal.

On an even more fundamental level, others have been experimenting with creating and maintaining a sourdough starter culture – of playing primitive microbiologist to select the right combination of microorganisms that can perform a miraculous transformation for you: taking nothing more than basic flour and water and turning it into a risen loaf in the oven.  A lot more people are also turning their hand to growing some fruit and vegetables for themselves in the back garden, or even just a few herbs in a small box on an urban windowsill. Parents have become embroiled in any number of different arts or crafts or maker projects, while home-schooling their children.

Many of us, in our own small ways, have become reconnected with something that is increasingly lost in hectic modern life – of making and doing things from scratch for ourselves, and realising how deeply satisfying and fulfilling that can be.

One of the main catalysts for this is the number of companies switching to working from home en masse and the number of people out of work because their shops or workplaces have closed – if only temporarily. Those people who might continue to benefit from the additional time they have at home will be those whose working lifestyles change irreversibly. This is likely to favour office workers over service industry workers, which means not everyone will see these time benefits equally in the future.