

Shaping the modern workplace:

Exploring the role of food in destination offices





Let's get started!

Over the past few years, workplace experts have been evaluating hybrid working models. But the restrictions from 2020 meant we were able to witness the largest workplace experiment in our generation. As a food service provider, we see this is an opportunity to shape the future of the office lunch.

Some key trends have emerged. Based on a global, multi-phase [survey](#) conducted by Sodexo and Harris Tracker that tracked employee sentiment with waves in April, June and October 2020, we saw that:

- 56% feel positive (enthusiastic or relieved) about returning to their pre-pandemic workplace
- 85% want the option to continue working remotely and at a higher frequency
- 63% are concerned about their health & safety at the office or when they return to the office

The latest Ibec [Returning to the Workplace 2021](#) report found that of the Irish businesses currently adopting hybrid working due to lockdowns, 81% will continue to do so, once restrictions are lifted.

We can see that the WFH workforce has become more comfortable in their non-traditional workspaces and would like to retain this flexibility in the future. This has led employers to ask questions like: **how can we maintain workplace culture? How will we provide a better experience in the workplace? How can we adapt our services to the new normal?** We at Fooditude have drawn on our own experience to identify a few key trends that can help make the return to the office successful.



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4 themes workplace managers should keep an eye on

We've been in workplace catering since 2005 in the UK, so our experiences have taught us what to look out for when predicting change. Here are 4 themes we think workplace managers should keep an eye on as offices start to reopen:

- [1. Increased focus on wellness](#)
- [2. Demand for workplace culture](#)
- [3. The flexible office](#)
- [4. Genuine sustainability](#)





Increased focus on wellness

For a year, the hot button question for anyone working in workplace or facilities services has been “when can we return to the office?” and “how will we make people feel safe?”.

Under plans to start reopening the economy in April 2021, the Irish government has announced that work from home restrictions are likely to remain in place until August or September. Companies like Google and Indeed in Dublin have, however, started to prepare for a [return to the office](#), with plans for a more hybrid way of working that incorporates at least 3 days in the office. While the dates for return may still be uncertain, it seems likely that when employees do come back, they’ll be concerned about their wellness and workplace safety.

“The challenge will be to keep that trust going once employees return to the office”

Even before the pandemic, employee wellness was regarded as essential to business and organizational success; it impacts how engaged employees feel, how productive employees are, and eventually the bottom line. [Gallup](#) found that **businesses with the most engaged employees had 17% higher productivity and 21% higher profitability**. As we head into a period of economic uncertainty, these statistics stress how important it is for workplaces to focus on employee wellbeing and safety initiatives.

Global research by integrated services provider Sodexo and Harris Interactive has shown that trust is the new corporate currency. Despite some concerns over personal and family health, the research showed that over 8 out of 10 respondents are confident their organizations will create a safe environment once they return to work. The challenge will be to keep that trust going once employees return to the office – and keeping the canteen an infection-free zone will be part of that mission.





Taking a break for a meal can boost your team's wellness

Lunchtimes (and other meals too) will remain essential to physical and mental wellbeing once employees return to the office. Taking breaks ensures we rest our mind, refocus and come back to complex tasks with renewed vigor. A dedicated lunch break helps us avoid unhealthy snacking and be more [mindful](#) of what we are eating.

The chance for employees to take a proper lunch break has always been vital to keeping them motivated and productive. [Ruchika Tulshyan](#), an expert in diverse and inclusive workplaces, says: "I'd be willing to bet that more organizations could benefit from greater team effectiveness, and normalizing lunch is a great place to start, whether it's to reduce stress and burnout, encourage team-building, or foster an organizational culture that doesn't equate overwork with productivity". Many companies will realise that by offering their employees a nourishing meal at work, they'll be sending a strong message that their wellness is a priority.

While lunch may be a great opportunity for social interaction, these days it could also be viewed as a potential safety hazard. A closer relationship will be needed between facilities and catering to ensure that all lunch areas are safe and not overcrowded. A good workplace food service provider will have drafted plans for efficient distancing and other measures to keep employees safe on their return.

At Fooditude, to ensure employee safety, packaged food is accompanied by an app that makes contactless deliveries possible and eliminates queues. We conduct stringent risk assessments ahead of operating our pop-ups and buffets to ensure contact points are minimized without compromising service standards. Visible safety measures and PPE will put customers at ease and allow them to focus on conversations with their colleagues.

"Taking breaks ensures we rest our mind, refocus and come back to complex tasks with renewed vigor"





Demand for workplace culture

While remote working has benefits, we shouldn't forget that there are also benefits for employees working in the office. A report from [Cushman & Wakefield](#) articulates that "impromptu collaboration and serendipitous discussions play a key role in creativity and innovation, highlighting the need for office space".

The Talent Leaders Pulse Report shared by [Sigmar & AON](#) said that creating and maintaining social capital is one of the biggest challenges for leaders right now. Chats with colleagues on the way to meeting rooms, the casual discussions about industry trends over lunch and other similar office rituals are important. These seemingly inconsequential moments between employees have the power to trigger creativity and innovation within a company. Video calls don't always create the same organic flow of ideas that happen when colleagues meet face-to-face.

50% of employees struggle to connect with their company's culture while working from home during COVID-19

Source: [Cushman & Wakefield](#)

Working remotely for a year has had a degree of detrimental effect on workplace culture. [McKinsey](#) research says that more than **20% of the workforce could work remotely three to five days a week as effectively as they could if working from an office.** With productivity and geography no longer a concern, companies are embracing a hybrid / flexible way of working. But remote employees may not be exposed to, or may lose, some of the beliefs and rituals reinforced by a physical space and that could be diluting workplace culture. Companies will need to find creative ways to make workplace culture thrive in this new hybrid / flexible office.





How the office lunch can help boost your workplace culture


“Breaking bread” is one of the oldest social rituals there is. At work, sharing meals provides a platform for businesses to reinforce their brand and strengthen their culture. Providing food for employees could be just what your employees need to reconnect and feel part of workplace life once again. Working lives will also be considerably different than before the pandemic. We feel that food service providers that understand the powerful connection between high quality meals and workplace culture will thrive.

“Providing food for employees could be just what your employees need to reconnect and feel part of workplace life once again”

Companies such as Google, Pentagram and Netflix have long used this strategy to make their canteens into a relaxed and creative space. [Micheal Beirut](#), one of the biggest names in the design world, speaks positively about lunchtime at Pentagram: “Even though we all sit in an open plan office, our teams often don’t get to spend

time with one another because of our structure: each partner has a group that functions autonomously. The lunch period provides a chance for everyone to sit side by side.” We feel that within the ‘new normal’ of flexible office working, meals shared between employees can make their time in the workplace feel more like a special occasion. Whether it’s through high-quality catering or other initiatives, it will be necessary for companies to make their offices a destination where employees want to be.





Here are a few examples of how our catering service has boosted our client's workplace culture:

- Daily changing menus that get teams talking - inspired by the latest food trends, international cuisine and seasonal ingredients - sparking conversations and nourishing teams
- Special pop-up food events that are inspired by diverse street market foods and create a sense of occasion in the office or can be viewed as a reward
- Marking diverse celebrations and cuisines from around the world and recognizing different cultures to represent an inclusive workplace - eg. important dates in the client calendar with bespoke menus, such as Thanksgiving, Founder's Day, Cinco de Mayo, Diwali etc.
- Hiring front-of-house staff with real social flair and alignment to the client company culture - who become part of the team and are dedicated hosts making lunchtime a relaxed, fun experience



“Front-of-house staff with real social flair and alignment to the client company culture”






The flexible office

Working 9-5, 5 days a week in an office is a thing of the past. Instead, we are likely to work in a hybrid way that incorporates the office, the home environment and third locations such as co-working spaces. Services, such as Sodexo's [Vital Spaces](#), are already being developed for a future of hybrid workplaces. Julie Ennis, CEO, Corporate Services Sodexo UK & Ireland comments, "**The Covid-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on the workplace as we knew it, but that transformation was already underway**". This change in working patterns will mean that workplaces will need to be physically reconfigured to be more open plan and better suited for collaboration. Offices will be transformed into destinations that are flexible, creative and social with fluctuating headcounts each day.

[CIPD Ireland](#) has found that 70% of organizations will facilitate more employees to work remotely after COVID-19 than before the crisis, and only 14% of respondents stated that they would not facilitate it. Ibec [Return to Workplace 2021](#) study found nearly **73% of companies in Ireland expected hybrid working to increase in the next 2-3 years**. Companies have clearly recognized the benefits that flexible working has allowed – like access to a wider talent pool and a real opportunity for becoming more inclusive. These shifts in work patterns will eventually align with the physical workplace. Companies like [Google](#) are already reorganizing their real estate and introducing hi-tech solutions to work better with their new hybrid models.



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Corporate Services
Sodexo UK & Ireland



[HR News](#) reports that their office consultants are getting more enquiries for offices located on the fringes of cities as people opt for workspaces closer to home to avoid public transport and busy areas. In fact, the close relationship between business and city centres looks to diminish after the pandemic, with Dror Poleg predicting in the [New York Times](#), "some work spaces in central employment districts may become housing, and some housing in residential areas may become work spaces."

In addition to the new hybrid working models, it is also key to consider how employees feel once they are back in the office. The Sodexo and Harris Interactive research shows that half of the employees (48%) want a variety of food choices at affordable prices and **1 in 5 employees were annoyed by the lack of lunch options available upon their return to the office.** Taking into account that 74% say food delivery services for live virtual employee meetups would be an effective benefit to keep them engaged and motivated while working remotely, imagine what it could do for actual in-person meetings. Isn't the power of delicious, healthy food amazing?



The need for flexible workplace catering

With daily changing headcounts and companies moving to the fringes of cities, established workplace caterers will need to embed flexibility into their business models. Luckily, we have been perfecting our 'cloud kitchen' catering model since 2005; it's a well-established and flexible catering offer that can meet the changing food needs of your business.

Maybe we're biased, but we believe our model is the future of workplace catering. Food is prepared in our off-site kitchen and delivered to the client's site. This leaves clients with plenty of flexibility to cater to changing

headcounts while adapting to hybrid working. We provide assurance on quality standards as we've invested in the very best equipment to ensure that the food arrives fresh.

The biggest benefit is not having to waste space, investment and fixed costs on an onsite kitchen which may see little use. This means that old kitchen areas can be transformed into flexible spaces for social distancing and collaboration. **If offices do transform into spaces dedicated to creativity and collaboration, then lunchtime could become the secret weapon in increasing the flow of innovation.**



Genuine sustainability

Sir David Attenborough kicked off 2021 with a [message of hope](#), inspiring everyone to take the opportunity to protect the planet from climate change disaster. He stated that “[this could be a year for positive change, for ourselves, for our planet and for the wonderful creatures with which we share it](#)”.

The threat of climate change will continue to accelerate. The amount of CO2 in the atmosphere is reaching [record levels](#) every year, even though there was a 6% drop recorded in Ireland in 2020 with the COVID pandemic. The three parties in Ireland’s current coalition government have an [official commitment](#) to reduce the country’s greenhouse gas emissions by an average 7% per year, adding up to 51% by 2030. They have promised to enshrine in law a target to reach net zero emissions by 2050, in the government’s first 100 days in office, and deliver a “green” economic recovery to the COVID-19 crisis. This will of course impact what will be expected of workplaces as we come out of the pandemic.

It’s not just the government that will be putting pressure on businesses. The 2020 [Deloitte Global Millennial Survey](#) found 61% of millennials and 63% of gen Z agree that employers should be reducing or limiting their impact on the environment. [Employees will become increasingly aware of companies attempting ‘greenwashing’ with nice sounding but underwhelming environmental policies and products.](#)



So how does this impact the office lunch?

Attitudes are changing everywhere. Sustainability is a major priority at board or department level for 80% of companies, according to a survey conducted by the [Facilities Show](#). So, when a workplace manager is tasked with rebooting their catering services after the pandemic, caterers with a genuine record of sustainability will be sought after.

When choosing a caterer, you could look out for a history of working with local, artisanal farms and suppliers, use of environmentally friendly packaging, reducing food waste, a commitment to reducing carbon emissions or even great engagement within the local community. If a caterer has a proactive sustainability agenda, then they likely have accreditations and/or management systems in place. Look out for green business certifications and memberships that they hold from groups such as [Origin Green](#) - [Bord BIA](#), [The Planet Mark](#), [The Sustainable Restaurant Association](#), [B-Corp](#) and ISO 14001 - to name a few!

A company that offers environmentally friendly catering and has its employees sharing sustainably made meals together demonstrates that it takes corporate social responsibility seriously. Ultimately, people now want to work for a company with wider purpose and shared values.

At Fooditude, we have gone to great lengths to ensure our food is sustainable. We cook all our meals from scratch and put a lot of thought into writing seasonal menus and sourcing as many local ingredients as we can. We have pledged to reduce our food waste and our carbon emissions. Where possible, we reduce the use of single-use disposables and where unavoidable, we use sustainable packaging.

“Ultimately, people now want to work for a company with wider purpose and shared values.”



That's all folks!

Office life is evolving and companies need to be ready to adapt quickly to new ways of working. We have seen how wellness, workplace culture, flexibility and sustainability will shape the offices of the future. Providing food that aligns with these emergent themes will be crucial for the successful re-introduction of catering services.

We know that good food will keep employees energised, engaged, and feeling safe. It's up to caterers to ensure their offer meets the needs of their clients in the new world of destination office spaces. Whether you're introducing food to the office for the first time or re-evaluating your current offer, remember to look out for a caterer that can provide a flexible offer, underpinned by real sustainable accreditations and a people-focussed approach that shows they care about the people they're serving.

Whatever the future might bring, we are looking forward to energizing our clients' employees with nourishing and safely prepared meals. After all, there's no better way of saying 'welcome back' than a fresh tasty lunch cooked from scratch.

**Book a meeting
with us!**



About Fooditude:

Fooditude is a contract catering company famed for bringing food and fun into the workplace. We do not occupy kitchen space on site, instead we operate a delivered-in model, where food is prepared in our central production kitchen and dispatched to client offices in temperature-controlled vans. On site teams receive and display this food creating a convivial atmosphere at lunch, then pack it down returning the space for communal activities.

For offices that do not necessarily want to offer a buffet lunch, Fooditude offers a packaged lunch solution - 'Fuel by Fooditude'. Fuel customers can enjoy a monthly changing menu of 'food to go' style packaged lunches delivered straight to the office via an app. These lunches can either be fully sponsored by the company or subsidized. Fooditude also operates an events arm that can cater to a wide range of events from a pop-up lunch, snazzy cocktail reception to a sit-down formal dinner.



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