future of australian workplace

PUZZLE

contents

the future of workplace

What is the future of the Australian workplace?

It's the question we ask constantly. Of ourselves. Of our clients, our colleagues. There's lots of research, our own included, which confirms the remote working experience was a 'success' and people want more flexibility in the future*.

But what does 'more flexibility' really mean? How do we harness the lessons of the remote experience, and what are the long-term implications for people, place and technology?

We'll try to answer those questions in a practical way. By moving beyond the theoretical, the 'thought leadership' and instead sharing a couple of contemporary client case studies which explain what some organisations are doing right now. Two very different organisations, for whom 'future ways of working' mean very different things.

Whilst these case studies highlight diverse organisational solutions, they are both grounded by things we consider to be universal truths:

- No matter what the future holds, the approach to developing workplace strategy is unchanged. Good strategy is bespoke. It's grounded by data and insights, accepts there is no 'one size fits all', considers the objectives and aspirations of the organisation and puts people at the centre

- Forward thinking organisations, able to adapt to a rapidly changing landscape, which build resilience and flexibility into working environments (place, people policies, technology) will be well placed for the future

- Experimentation will uncover better solutions. Prototype. Assess. Iterate. Be prepared to try, fail, learn, succeed

- Flexibility is a continuum | 'more flexibility' will mean radically different things to organisations

- People want to have a say about their future. Ask them. Explore the different needs which are met by the office and home environments, and the desired employee experience

This is an exciting and rare chance to learn from the remote working experiment, strategically consider the desired employee experience and design a workplace future which makes sense for your organisation.

Katherine Divett
CEO, Puzzle Partners

91%
more or as productive working from home

87%
**want to split time working at home + office**

the flexibility continuum

Puzzle's flexibility continuum identifies a range of different workplace types, with varying degrees of flexibility, from cellular offices as the least flexible, all the way through to truly agile workplaces. Organisations may span multiple workplace types.

Recently, Puzzle evolved its workplace continuum to offer a theory about the future of workplace, a model of unprecedented flexibility.

This is a workspace where people exercise true agility, working anywhere, anytime. The emergence of suburban co-working spaces or satellite offices, close to home, and 'touchdown' facilities in head offices. Convenient places to escape home when necessary, to connect with colleagues and access utilities. We call it 'your space'

The two clients we're about to profile will both be working 'more flexibly' in the future, and they are at very different places on the continuum.
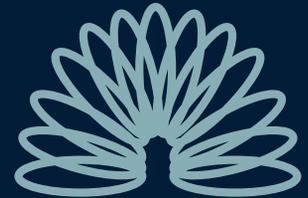
Where will organisations be on the flexibility continuum in the next three years

- **Over half of the survey respondents described themselves as working in an open plan (plus) environment today**

- **Over 60% of respondents predicted a shift towards increased flexibility within the next three years**

- **Survey findings indicated that an agile work environment will become the dominant choice when considering workplace strategies**

*Source Puzzle Five Under Five

workplace flexibility continuum

your space

Unprecedented flexibility. Work anywhere, anytime.
Emergence of satellite, suburban co-working spaces. More 'touch-down' facilities
in central offices to allow colleague connection and access to utilities.
Harness workplace technologies to connect and collaborate remotely.

co-working spaces

Organisations share a variety of spaces
with other businesses.

agile working

People are empowered to work where, when and
how they choose, using a variety of work settings
inside and outside the office. Harness workplace
technologies to connect and collaborate remotely.

activity based working

A variety of unassigned individual
& collaborative settings to suit
different tasks and workstyles.
Teams tend to be based within hubs
or neighbourhoods. Enabled with
technology that allows seamless
movement between spaces.

hot desking

Standard workstations,
unassigned. Bookable
meeting rooms. Limited
variety of settings.

open plan +

Allocated workstations.
Some offices. Meeting rooms.
Some breakout spaces.

cellular

Lots of offices.

considering the
employee experience

The appeal of flexible working isn't new. But the emergence of 'home' as a viable workplace, or as another setting in an agile environment, has obviously been accelerated in the past 12 months.

Understanding what will attract people to the office versus the needs met working in remote locations, including home, is important when grappling with future ways of working and the purpose of place.

For the clients you are about to meet, understanding the employee experience was at the heart of their approach to future ways of working.

our studies find	what that means
Workplaces with inviting social hubs foster better connections	With more people working from home, social hubs will be essential for employee connections, relationships and maintaining a sense of community.
Team proximity among the most important aspect to employees	When in the office, teams want to sit together. When remote, people want to connect easily. Providing the right technology and adjustable spaces and settings will support employees to work with whomever, whenever, from wherever.
Finding a place to meet is one of the most common sources of frustration	We need to understand the when, where, why and how of people's meeting and collaboration routines, and ensure there are the right meetings spaces available – size, bookability, functionality, visual and acoustic privacy.
Noisy environments have the biggest negative impact on productivity	The proliferation of virtual meetings has the potential to amplify background noise. People need enough quiet and private spaces for focus and concentration.

**Top 3
reasons to work
from home**

No commute **91%**

Flexi schedule **80%**

Work life **60%**

**Top 3
reasons to work
from the office**

Connection **69%**

Collaboration **63%**

Infrastructure **63%**

*Source Puzzle workplace surveys

*Source Puzzle Five Under Five

hybrid working

case study 1 | hybrid working

the client

Financial Services | international
Project scope | all Australian workplaces

the opportunity

The organisation is navigating a path towards a 'new normal', leveraging the lessons from the remote working experience and defining its future ways of working.

They captured staff insights through survey and consultation. What they learnt is that the remote working experience has been positive and productive, and in future, most people want to split their time between working in the office and at home.

The Executive considered the feedback and agreed a hybrid approach will define their future ways of working. Essentially, people can split their time working between home and the office, where the home environment is safe and meets WHS standards.

On the Puzzle flexibility continuum, they will span open plan (plus), activity based working and agile workplace types.

The changes will impact around 1200 staff nationally, with a mix of 'in office' and 'mobile' roles. Their workplace designs are slightly different in each of their centres, with some more equipped for agile working than others.

Puzzle worked with our client to develop the strategy and future working model, capture staff insights, develop the principles and standards, and supported the implementation program.

84%

want to split time working at home and the office

*Source Puzzle workplace survey, designed for the organisation.

case study 1 | hybrid working

boundary conditions

The Executive acknowledged that at the corporate level, no single policy or program would fit all circumstances and combinations of remote and onsite work or consider the unique requirements and roles of each team.

Instead, they developed a set of principles and standards, which created an equitable framework and clear expectations for how people should work.

The principles centred around the 'non-negotiables' of organisational performance, the employee and customer experience.

The standards addressed the operational considerations such as how many days people need to be in the office, team connection, consistent and effective collaboration and communication.

Within this framework, teams had the autonomy to define the norms for how they will work together, support each other, and contribute to the organisation's performance.

Top 3 reasons to work from office

Connection **72%**

Collaboration **61%**

Team building **55%**

*Source Puzzle workplace survey, designed for the organisation.

case study 1 | hybrid working

implementation

Puzzle worked closely with our client partner to develop a broad implementation program, focused on the key areas of people, place and technology, to help people transition to new ways of working.

people

Executive, senior leader and team facilitated workshops to develop Team Commitments, which were aligned with principles + standards, and documented how teams will work together in future

Hints and tips for leading dispersed teams

Diverse development program to enhance leadership, teaming and technical skills required in a hybrid environment

place

Activities to ensure safe working environments, including COVID-safe office practices, WFH guidelines + checklists, cash contributions to improving home set up

Storage analysis, reduction and clean-up

Improvements to work settings to better support agile working, with a focus on in-office collaboration and team connection

technology

Technology enhancements to support more VC and digital connections, enhanced features in virtual platforms and desk booking solutions

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People look to their leaders in times of change and agile workforces demand different things from leaders. People need to be trusted and empowered to deliver the best organisational outcomes. And outcomes, not presence become the benchmark for measuring performance.

- Create a sense of common purpose, which connects with people

- Set clear performance expectations

- Open up to your people and they'll open up to you

- Listen, allow time for questions

- Invest in relationships

- Build digital confidence and capability

- Adapt communication styles to team preferences

- Involve high performers in leading the team – encourage them to be coaches and mentors, particularly to new starters

- Demonstrate decisiveness and resilience, during times of change and complexity

case study 1 | hybrid working

some insights from our experience
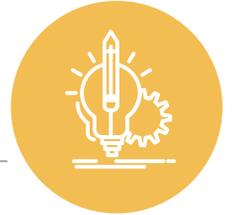
equity vs equality

Teams don't need to work in exactly the same way for it to be 'fair'. An 'equitable' framework, which allows teams to design how they will work together, whilst still adhering to the standards and principles, will deliver the best organisational outcome. There is no 'one size fits all'.

get on the same page

Take time to align leaders, particularly to reach agreement on where decisions will be made and the degree of autonomy teams have to apply principles and standards. A standard of 'minimum days in the office' can be applied in many, many ways.

rome wasn't built in a day

It will take time to embed new behaviours. Design the ways teams will work together. Create formal and informal feedback loops. Make a plan, document team commitments and review them regularly. Test. Learn. Refine.
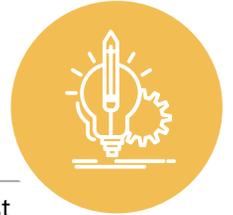
get your story straight

Invest time upfront developing a clear story about the desired employee experience, what connects and binds people, the performance expectations. Create a sense of stability, cohesion, identity and belonging.

case study 1 | hybrid working

some insights from our experience

culture + connection	Maintaining culture and team connection is the biggest challenge. Agile working demands a different kind of leadership, to ensure a common employee experience, to avoid a situation of a dominant 'in office' culture, a scenario of the 'haves and have nots'. Ensuring consistency of experience is critical – consistent development and promotion opportunities, consistent meeting + collaboration experience, consistent and well understood communication protocols – regardless of where people are located.
emily post was on to something	Meeting and communication etiquette has never been more important. Engage teams in designing the protocols. Cameras on or off. Directing 'traffic'. Making decisions in the 'room', not the corridor. Is it IRL, virtual or both. When are other channels more effective. These are all important considerations. Great team communication is the foundation for great team performance. It can limit meeting times and emails and reduce the potential for a 'communication gap' when people are working across multiple locations.
make the most of time together	We know team proximity is important, and people are driven back to the office for social connection and collaboration. Carefully plan how and when teams will spend time together in the office.
are you OK?	Team wellbeing is always important and when we spend less time together, we may miss some of those important visual or non-verbal cues which tell us how someone is doing. The 'just because' call can be a great way to let people know you're never too far away.

case study 2
flexible work hub

case study 2 | flexible work hub

the client

Federal government department

the opportunity

As part of a broader strategic agenda to create a more dynamic and flexible workplace, the department is piloting a flexible work Hub. The Hub is an alternative and convenient workspace, close to where staff live, with access to department networks and tools.

Currently, portable devices are not provided to staff, many need to access a secure network, so working from home isn't commonplace.

The Hub was designed as a viable remote working option, easily accessible to where people live.

On the Puzzle flexibility continuum, the department's workplace types are open plan (plus) and now elements of your space.

Puzzle partnered with the department to evaluate the Hub's effectiveness and to ensure these insights are considered in future Hub designs and locations. The study aimed to understand:

- Hub performance, including the facility, equipment and workplace experience
- staff usage patterns and purpose for visiting the Hub
- opportunities for improvement
- value and benefits to inform the design of future flexible working hubs to service other locations

about the Hub

The Hub opened in late 2020, with 400 staff registered as potential users.

It was designed with a variety of work settings, to support different workstyles and tasks, and as a means to test and trial which settings are most utilised in a Hub environment. Settings include:
- Workstations, some with secure terminals
- Focus rooms
- Open, collaborative workspace and meeting tables
- Formal meeting room
- Kitchen | breakout
- Print utility area
- Working with children room
- The building is also equipped with end of trip facilities
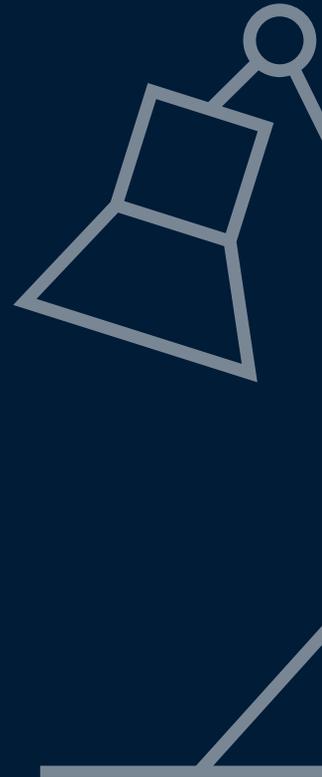
99%

overall satisfaction

99%

perceived productivity

case study 2 | flexible work hub

The Hub is located outside of the CBD, on the opposite side of the city from many of the existing department workplaces, and central to a high concentration of staff homes.

how and why people are using the hub

The main reason for people attending the Hub is reduction in travel time, followed by access to tools and technology unavailable at home, the ability to better manage work and life responsibilities, and a third said they are better able to focus than at the office.

On average, travel time is cut in half, by as much as 30 minutes per day.

Proximity to home and the availability of end of trip facilities has also seen an increase in people walking, running or cycling to work.

When people attend the hub, 60% attend for a full or half day, rather than just 'drop in' for a few hours.

The duration of stay can be attributed to people's overall satisfaction with the Hub, including:

- Availability of workspaces
- Ability to concentrate
- The right technology which is reliable and easy to use

People are attending primarily to complete individual focus or semi-focus work, and to access other available infrastructure, including utility spaces, and the secure network. A well-equipped kitchen/breakout space further enables attendees to remain for long durations.

In essence, people attend the Hub – and stay for the duration – because it's convenient to home, it has the workspaces and tools they need, it's conducive to concentration and productivity and it's clean and quiet.

94%
live in a 10km radius

88%
individual focus work

case study 2 | flexible work hub

opportunities for improvement

Based on these insights, how, when and why people are using the Hub, the following will be considered for future Hub spaces:

- Monitoring and modifying availability of workpoints with access to the secure network

- Re-purposing under utilised spaces, such as the formal meeting room and open meeting spaces, to allow for more focus rooms and acoustically treated spaces for private phone calls, to suit how people are using the Hub space

- Secure network capability for video and conference calls

- Extending access hours

- Identifying local long stay parking options, public transport, as well as promoting end of trip facilities, so people can better plan their commute and consider more active modes of transport where feasible

- Induction into the new space, as well as agreement on how the spaces are to be used and shared. Managing behaviours like re-setting spaces, noise and distractions, and so on, are critical for a harmonious work environment, and as more people avail themselves of the Hub

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It has made managing my work-life balance easier and increased my time available for both work and home responsibilities
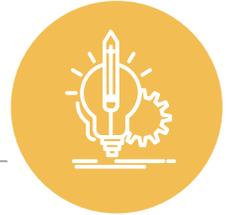
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case study 2 | flexible work hub

some insights from our experience

purpose of place

Understanding the needs met by the Hub space, versus other work environments is crucial. In this instance, the Hub is a 'hybrid' in terms of the advantages it delivers. On one hand, it's a proxy for working from home and meets many similar needs, including ease of commute, work/life balance and access to quiet/private spaces for focus work. It has the added benefit of providing much needed infrastructure, tools and utilities – one of the key reasons people favour a physical workplace. In many ways, it can be best of breed.

the essence of great workplace strategy

- It's purpose-built to meet the needs of the organisation

- It celebrates experimentation - prototyping, testing, learning and incorporating insights into future design

- It tangibly engages people in the future of workplace, by allowing them to experience and provide feedback on the Hub

- It's a great example of flexible resilience – a means to re-imagine the workplace footprint, with satellite sites designed to meet different needs, which can be delivered quickly and easily refined over time

- The flexible work Hub experiment, enables the department to define what 'flexible working' means for them, how it supports their operations, the constraints of the nature of their work. And to deliver a variety of workplaces and a unique employee experience

About Puzzle Partners

Katherine Divett

CEO

Katherine draws on more than 20 years experience leading teams through transition and transformation to genuinely engage stakeholders, understand the complexities involved in their workspace journey and support them to achieve their strategic aspirations.

As a senior property executive within large corporations, including General Manager of Planning and Property, Insurance Australia Group (IAG), Katherine has led major organisational transitions, from company-wide business model reforms through to innovative property projects, including flexible working.

Founded in 2003, Puzzle Partners (Puzzle) is privately owned, and is one of Australia's leading workplace consultancies.

Puzzle has collaborated with architects, project managers, builders and removalists to deliver more than 1,100 workplace adventures, with clients representing all business sectors and levels of government.

We're passionate about changing the world, one workplace at a time, and offer services in the areas of workplace strategy, change management and transition.

To find out more or to contact us

Visit: [Puzzle Partners](#)

Call: 1300 478 995

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The benefits of space which support future flexibility + resilience for organisations have never been clearer than now

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