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Remodelling approaches to work

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Remodelling approaches to work – Analysing and discussing current issues

Paul Jenkinson



Wie hat sich die Arbeitswelt seit Corona verändert (Stichwort Home office)?
Wie beeinflussen neue Technologien die Arbeitswelt, insbesondere im Bereich
Bewerbungsverfahren (und was bedeutet eigentlich quiet quitting)? Mit diesen und
weiteren Fragen beschäftigen sich die Schülerinnen und Schüler in der vorliegenden
Unterrichtsreihe. Sie setzen sich außerdem mit dem Thema „work/life balance“
auseinander und sprechen über diversity and discrimination am Arbeitsplatz.

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Competences and skills:

By engaging with several texts, students train their **reading, analysing and interpreting competences**. Furthermore, they enhance their **speaking skills** by expressing views orally and participating in discussions. Students also practise their **listening and viewing competences** by working with two videos and one audio. Finally, students train their **writing skills** when dealing with several composition tasks.

Overview:

List of abbreviations:

A Analysis**LC** Listening comprehension**M** Mediation**PR** Presentation**VI** Working with a video**D** Discussion**LVC** Listening/Viewing comprehension**P** Working with a picture/cartoon**T** Working with a text**W** Writing

Topic	Material	Methods/Skills
1: Re-thinking the workplace	M1–M3	A, D, LVC, T, VI, W
2: Employment suitability	M4–M6	D, LC, T, W
3: Reassessing talent young and old	M7–M9	A, D, LVC, T, VI, W
4: Work-life balance	M10–M12	A, M, P, PR, T, W
5: Business practices	M13–M14	A, D, P

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Facts

The pandemic hit societies hard. For many, people and businesses alike, it meant new ways of working had to be adopted more or less overnight. Home office was the main answer, but it came with problems ranging from where one could work (the kitchen table or the bedroom), sharing a limited space with a partner who also had home office, having conference calls whilst the children were screaming to inadequate Internet speeds.

Despite all the negative factors relating to remote working, many people discovered they could actually work from home with little or no need for their offices. In addition, a flexible workday was more family friendly especially regarding younger children. Money and time were also saved by not having to travel to work.

Companies, though, had issues to face. They had expensive offices and needed to persuade contented homeworkers to return to them. Furthermore, social interaction had been missing, which is necessary for team building, work relationships and gaining quick answers to minor problems. Subsequently, a compromise developed in the form of hybrid working: employees could divide their week between the company office and home office. However, empty desks meant wasted space, resulting, in some cases, in hot desks, which employees dislike since they lose their personalised office space.

Parallel to the pandemic upheaval, young people, Generation Z in particular, were analysing their work-life balance and were finding the “life aspect” was increasingly lacking. Being away from the daily treadmill, many people re-evaluated their former office practices and became critical of them. There was a realisation that if one had a flexible working day, remote working or a four-day week, childcare became far easier and there was less stress and more leisure time. Totally remote working also meant one was not committed to living in expensive city suburbs.

Diversity and inclusion have been issues for many years, but these usually concern ethnicity or gender. There are similarly ones, though, that are just being recognised. The glass ceiling has overshadowed a class ceiling, whereby positions are filled from a limited number of institutions: favoured private schools and the elite universities of Oxford, Cambridge and those in the Russell Group. Regional accents, particularly from the North or the Midlands, are viewed unfavourably and hinder careers.

As a result of all these factors, home office, a hybrid working week, work-life balance, inclusion, diversity and discrimination, hidden and otherwise, the world of work looks primed for change.

Notes on the material

Topic 1 concerns workplace developments that have arisen during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. It provides a report from PricewaterhouseCoopers, one of the global “Big Four” professional services firms, assessing possible changes in the workplace culture. After working with the text, students are tasked with considering the implications of remote working. The video deals with changes in the world of work and requires note taking whilst watching, from which a written comment regarding the current workplace situation, and the need for change, is called for.

You are well-qualified, experienced, good at your job and decide to make a career move. But you are constantly having rejections and no interviews. **Topic 2** offers an insight into why this happens and awakens young people to the reasons. The newspaper article explains how algorithms and artificial intelligence are used to select job candidates without any human involvement. The listening text concerns how employers search social media for information about job candidates. A short vocabulary exercise is provided prior to working on the audio text. Afterwards, students demonstrate their writing skills by formulating an application for an all-expenses-paid year abroad. The applications could be critically discussed to recognise statements that are positive and strong, and those that are not.

A rethink of how talent is used is the theme in **topic 3**. The article considers ageism in the workforce and how older workers are viewed, together with myths and stereotyping surrounding them. Students must formulate explanations to statements, and they are then provided with work-related issues to write about. Euan Blair saw that in finance almost everyone was white, male and came from a privileged background, and employers were continuing to select people from a limited pool who frequently lack the necessary skills. In the video, Blair explains why he started his successful Multiverse business as an alternative to university with the aim of creating a diverse group of future leaders. The worksheet contains a multiple choice task and an opportunity to write about education relevant to employment.

Topic 4 looks at the issue of achieving a good work-life balance: that balance, however, frequently tips towards work rather than leisure time. Students read an article in support of a four-day working week and the reasoning behind that opinion. Tasks involve answering questions relating to the text and describing and analysing a cartoon. Issues concerning remote working are given to be discussed. After completing the tasks, students are asked to express views on their preferred working model. One recent development is a situation called “quiet quitting”: people doing their jobs as written in their contracts and for the stated number of hours but nothing more. A German text concerning this phenomenon is provided for students to mediate.

Topics 5 includes two cartoons which reflect on business practices and people’s attitudes. Students are asked to describe and analyse the cartoons and, in each case, they are given a quotation to reflect upon and relate to the scenes. Finally, they are asked how they would react to given situations when considering employment.

Topic 1: Re-thinking the workplace

How the pandemic can change workplace culture for the better

M1



The Covid-19 pandemic has had tremendous and swift effects on workplace culture. The global lockdown and travel bans have upended assumptions about the nature of work and corporate interactions. People have discovered that they don't have to be in an office, that they can get most things done remotely. They do not need to commute to work. Others have gone from jet-set to home-bound with little effect on their business. As they adjust to operating during a pandemic and prepare for the recovery, organizational leaders need to consider which culture changes they want to retain and which they must counteract.

The rapidity of these changes is a problem. Organizational culture is defined by the collective norms of behavior exhibited by the individuals within an organization. Generally, workplace culture does not change very much or very fast. Rather it adjusts slowly, over a long period of time in response to an accumulation of multiple small encouragements and the occasional epiphany. This year, however, organizations globally have abandoned their fundamental working premise, "how things get done around here," sometimes in a matter of days. Take the accelerated adoption of digital tools, which can give the misleading impression that a physical presence in the office is unnecessary. Certainly most professional jobs can be done remotely. Modern collaborative technologies – videoconferencing, screen-sharing, digital shared file storage, simultaneous multi-authoring of documents, digital whiteboards, smartphone chat groups – are freely available and sophisticated. Organizations have dropped the dogma that "it's just better to do it face-to-face." Except that face-to-face still matters because it creates rapport and trust. When you are with a person you can build a relationship and read their non-verbal cues. Just being there shows that you made the effort to come. Similarly, people find meaning in their daily rituals of getting ready to leave home, commuting, grabbing their cup of coffee, and filling their water bottle before sitting at their desk. So while it is a trap to just show your face at the office, and a mistake for

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