Teleworking: Transforming insights into progress

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Covid-19 has significantly altered the way we think about work, the workplace, and the workforce. Even the word 'workplace' suddenly seems outdated. But crises can often be catalysts for change. The experience gained during this pandemic reveals opportunities and accelerates our transition into the future of work.

In my recent column Inner Workings: When a global health crisis hits home, I announced a survey the ESM conducted in September to look into how extensive, pandemic-related teleworking affected our staff and our ways of working. Today, I can reveal some of the findings of this survey and explain how this will feed our plans for our 'new normal' at the ESM.

The pandemic game changer

As a modern and caring employer, teleworking is not new at the ESM. We already allowed staff to work remotely as needed by equipping them with mobile devices and ensuring our systems and network were duly prepared – even for an extended telework scenario.

As a crisis-resolution mechanism 'ease with uncertainty' is one of our organisational values. Yet, the sudden transition from one office building to a network of homes has not been without challenge. As we move from an emergency reactive phase to developing a longer-term plan and vision for our 'future of work', it is worth learning from our experience and understanding the connection between where people work and how they feel and perform.

It is important to determine what is preferable, from what is now recognised as possible, as we prepare for our 'new normal'.

Survey takeaways

I was greatly reassured to learn that staff in general think the ESM is managing the crisis well and feel safe. Most staff report a positive experience and even productivity gains from teleworking. Still, the pandemic remains extremely volatile and we need continued focus to adjust quickly to the evolving circumstances.

There is little doubt that uncertainty around the outcome of the pandemic is taking a toll on the mental and emotional wellbeing of our people. Our survey, conducted before

prospects for a vaccine grew, identified that worries for oneself, friends and family, social isolation, and concerns for the impact on the global economy are of the utmost concern. In addition to our primary objective of keeping our staff physically safe, ensuring mental health and wellbeing is therefore a priority for our leaders.