

ESPI IREC – S06

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Title: Are the COVID-19 footprints fading? analysing changing work patterns and office space use dynamics

Abstract: Sentiments about hybrid working have changed in line with the waning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Organisations are increasingly driving a return-to-office (RTO) mandate which questions previous perceptions about the role of the pandemic in reimagining office space use and the environmental, social and economic consequences. Using data from two waves of Knight Frank's (Y)OUR SPACE (2021 and 2023) survey, this paper employs probit and OLS models to analyse recent office space demand dynamics. We compare the influence of business strategies and work patterns on office space use expectations- during the peak of the second lockdown and 2 years after. The results indicate that the COVID-19-driven hybrid working induced a reduction in office space quantity and an inclination to space upgrade (quality). We further observe that the post-pandemic footprints are not fading, although the nature and magnitude of the impact are changing in comparison to the expectations when the pandemic was at its apex. Additionally, office space flexibility does not appear to be a priority in organisations' future workspace strategy. Our results imply that economic factors remain core priorities in future workspace strategies while environmental and social factors remain secondary. These insights extend the literature beyond the economic drivers of workspace use to environmental and social factors.

Upcoming full paper in September.