

Coronavirus got you working from home pain in the neck

How well businesses function with large number of employees could have a lasting impact on our approach to work.

MATTHEW BROOKER 9 March, 2020 11:11 am IST



People wearing masks walk at Central district in Hong Kong, China | Paul Yeung | Bloomberg

The banging comes first, followed by the screaming. I could try to ignore it and carry on, but proximity to family is supposed to be one of the reasons for working from home. My one-year-old son knows there's a corner on the other side of the door that needs a merry bashing with his hands. I always, steering him toward an old desktop rather than my work laptop, and toddles off in search of fresh excitement.

Like hundreds of other employees in Bloomberg's Hong Kong bureau, I've been working from home for the past several weeks. How long exactly is it going to last? I'm not checking. With no clear separation between the home and work, they bleed into each other. There's a constant sense of extended hiatus. Like the employees of **Casablanca**, we are waiting, waiting for that plane (or subway, rat

back to the office.

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Technique after an episode of severe back pain. I credit that training consciousness with keeping me free from any serious problems since I was in worse shape now without that awareness? Quite possibly.

The size of Hong Kong apartments compounds the physical and mental strain. Working at home, I tend to move less than I would in the office, where the coffee machine or the meeting room requires a journey of at least a few minutes. My apartment is bigger than average, at just under 800 square feet (77 square meters), so it takes me only a few seconds to walk from one end to the other.

There have been days at a time when I haven't gone out, having no contact with myself to any more risk of infection than necessary. This has left me somewhat detached and fuzzy on occasion.

I've realized how much I relied on the daily, small social contacts that are essential for journalists. Journalists can be strange animals: often lone wolves, whose job is to pry themselves into the affairs of other people. Maybe we need that contact more than most of us would readily admit. While our team holds a video conference, my gut feeling is that working from home isn't good for team building. It's a poor substitute for face-to-face contact, though how much is necessary is debatable.

One friend at a bank in Hong Kong is working alternate days in the office and from home, a way of thinning out the number of desk-based employees and cutting down on the risk of infection. Perhaps that could become a permanent model for some companies if they are persuaded.

Now, the good news: just as I was finishing up this column, we got word that we might be able to return to the office next week. And if you'll excuse me, I have popcorn. Casablanca's on, and I always did love that **film**. -*Bloomberg*

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