

Bethany Brown

How do you think the legal sector will adapt to life after COVID-19?

The legal sector should not acquiesce in 'normality' when it resumes, instead the tenacious clutch to the traditional way of doing things that has been intrinsic in the law needs to be released. With the inevitable economic downturn on the horizon due to coronavirus, there needs to be a financial analysis of the benefits of large areas of office space. COVID-19 bullied lawyers into their homes and forced remote-working upon them, however even in the midst of a pandemic it has come to fruition that this may not be a wholly negative work dynamic.

By fostering remote working as the new post-pandemic 'norm', this allows for flexible working that can be integrated easily with any required in-office work: pathing the way towards an evolving corporate culture that places less emphasis on presenteeism and a hard focus on actual work engagement. However, there can be negative implications of isolation on mental wellbeing which will call for a more contemporary approach to mental health and wellbeing checks. Advantageously, office spaces could potentially be converted into areas that are focused on wellness and socialisation, with a preserved corporate function as meeting spaces. By fostering some proactive initiatives, the legal sector could successfully normalise remote working experiences alongside ensuring positive mentality.

A huge emphasis is placed on the face time had with one another, where it is possible to assist visually and demonstrably; this is especially prevalent for trainee's. As these effective relationships are typically developed in person, a must-do, adaptive mindset needs to be cultivated to promote efficient mentorship. Similarly, the sense of community that usually thrives through office interactions needs to be proliferated if undertaking remote work. A firm's individual values will have influence upon the actual steps taken to achieve these new advancements.

The already widespread interest towards expanding legal tech now becomes a necessity, COVID-19 has outlined the perfect opportunity for the innovation of AI in the legal sector to streamline processes such as documentation and practice management. This legal tech should be adopted en masse in the sector to diminish the role that is played by the reliance on hard copies of documents. Underutilized technological tools will become necessitated, with a heavy focus being placed on things such as Zoom calls and Google document sharing throughout lockdown. For those hoping to begin their legal career in the coming years, technological understanding and skill will be vital.

It is not enough to merely prepare these initiatives in anticipation of a future crisis, they need to be implemented to ensure a flexible way of working more generally in the legal sector now that it has seen to be possible. This may even make the law a more accessible profession to those with families and other obligations: though COVID-19 has been such a tragedy in so many ways it may have resulted in the evolution of the legal sector towards a more beneficial future.