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# Human Capital Trends

Future of the workplace

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# Human Capital Trends in conversation with Patrick Mischo and Magali Maillot, Allen & Overy Luxembourg

## **The Journey of Allen & Overy Luxembourg – Balancing Flexibility, Collaboration, and Purpose in the Post-Pandemic Workplace**

The pandemic is presenting companies with existential challenges, especially with regard to their own workforce. Deloitte has sought to talk to HR professionals to discuss how organisations can take concrete action in times of disruption. Our new series, the Human Capital Trends Conversations, complements the major Human Capital Trends Report, which attracted more than 10,000 executives in 105 participating countries.

In the wake of the pandemic, the world witnessed an astonishing shift in the way we work. Remote work became the norm, blurring the lines between office and home. However, as the dust settled and organisations sought to re-establish a sense of normalcy, companies have been trying to stand out in their approach to embracing the changing dynamics of the workplace. We had the opportunity to speak with our clients from Allen & Overy Luxembourg who shared their journey and insights on the future of the workplace.

This interview was conducted by François Bade, Partner at Deloitte, with Patrick Mischo, Office Senior Partner, and Magali Maillot, HR Director of Allen & Overy Luxembourg.



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### François Bade

The pandemic has accelerated the need for organisations to rethink the concept of the workplace, with virtual and hybrid work environments becoming more prevalent, with one of the biggest changes related to the workplace being that there is a wider choice of where, when and how we work. What were the challenges you faced related to the workplace post covid and what did you put in place to overcome them?

### Patrick Mischo

Post-pandemic, the main challenge was to get people back to the office. Recognising the need for flexibility, we aimed to strike a balance between in-office collaboration and the new-found benefits of remote work by implementing the '60/40 policy', allowing up to 40% remote work for residents in Luxembourg. Whilst generally a positive and welcomed development, one obstacle that emerged was the attachment to the comfort of working from home. During the pandemic in particular many employees

had experienced the advantages of working from home (including, saving time and no longer having to do the daily commute).

To incentivise employees to return to the office, we focused on restoring social cohesion. We organised various social events, as we understood the importance of the 'fun factor' in bringing people together. This approach not only boosted morale but also allowed us to demonstrate our commitment towards our people – we wanted them to feel like they

belonged to a community. In particular, face-to-face events allowed lawyers and employees who joined the firm during the pandemic to create and reinforce their internal networks. While presence in the office is on the rise, there is still some room for improvement.

Now in terms of the concrete application of the hybrid work policy, we also acknowledge the specific challenges that hybrid work might bring to day-to-day collaboration. Recognising the diverse needs and working styles of our various teams, we allowed each team to decide their own approach. We believe that there is no 'one size fits all'. We encouraged autonomy and empowered teams to make decisions that best suited their work processes. As an example, some teams decided that once every week or every two weeks, there should be a day when everybody comes in.

It is of crucial importance to address the challenges arising from the new ways of working, including how to foster effective communication, how to mitigate potential biases leaders may have towards office face time and how to enhance team spirit and collaboration. To this end, we will soon launch dedicated training sessions designed specifically for leaders and their teams, aimed at encouraging participants to leverage the benefits of hybrid work models, enhancing team collaboration, and optimising collective performance in a flexible and adaptable manner.



### Marie-Cécile Legrand

In an era where organisations are battling for top talent and seeking to create workplaces that attract and retain the best and brightest minds, the concept of differentiation has become paramount. In addition to this level of flexibility that you granted your people, how else do you think you are differentiating as an organisation that people want to work for and collaborate with?

### Patrick Mischo

We emphasise the interlink of purpose-driven initiatives and employee-focused practices. We believe that aligning our actions with meaningful causes, such as diversity, equity and inclusion, pro-bono work, supporting charities, partnering up with institutions like the Museum of modern art Luxembourg (MUDAM), and sustainability, not only drives positive societal impact but also acts as a powerful magnet for attracting and retaining top talent.

The rising generation of young professionals, in particular, places great importance on work purpose and growth opportunities.

### Magali Maillot

We are also differentiating ourselves by proactively and concretely working on our Future of Work project. Our firm's approach is holistic and carefully considered, rather than opportunistic; we take a long-term and global view of the firm's operations and how best to optimise

these. We consciously choose to pursue certain initiatives, such as implementing flexible work arrangements, that align with our values and make sense for the overall well-being of our people. While the human aspect of the Future of Work project was crucial, we also recognised the need to work on other important and interconnected aspects: the workplace itself (namely, how we can adapt it to the new ways of working) and how we can harness the power of technology, including the use of AI, to make our work processes more efficient.

“Our aim is to build spaces that foster agility, networking, creativity, and collaboration. We want our workplace to be different from and better than home, ultimately enticing employees to come to the office.”

**Magali Maillot, HR Director Allen & Overy**



### **Barbara Caltabiano**

When it comes to the future of the workplace, ways of working have changed as a consequence of the pandemic. How do you think that your organisation' strategies, policies, and actions have adapted since the pandemic? Can you tell us more about the sustainability aspect?

### **Patrick Mischo**

Since the pandemic, we have made significant efforts to adapt our strategies, policies, and actions to align with the evolving landscape of work environments. One notable aspect of our approach has been the implementation of the flexible work policy described above, which helps our lawyers and employees to strike a balance between work and their personal lives.

In terms of sustainability, we have embarked on a project that aims at defining our local sustainability strategy and in particular how the Luxembourg office can contribute to the A&O global objective of reducing its absolute carbon emissions by 50% by 2030. This project might serve as a case study for other offices within the firm, with the potential to create a blueprint that can be replicated in other offices of the firm,. The goal of this project is also to raise awareness and foster a debate among our people. Their involvement – in particular, their

views on what matters to them from a sustainability perspective and proposals on initiatives that could be implemented- has been crucial in enabling the firm to define the scope of our sustainability policy. By creating this dialogue, we hope to generate concrete actions that will be widely accepted, as we realise that changing habits (especially when it comes to sustainability) is particularly challenging when it impacts personal routines.

### **Marie-Cécile Legrand**

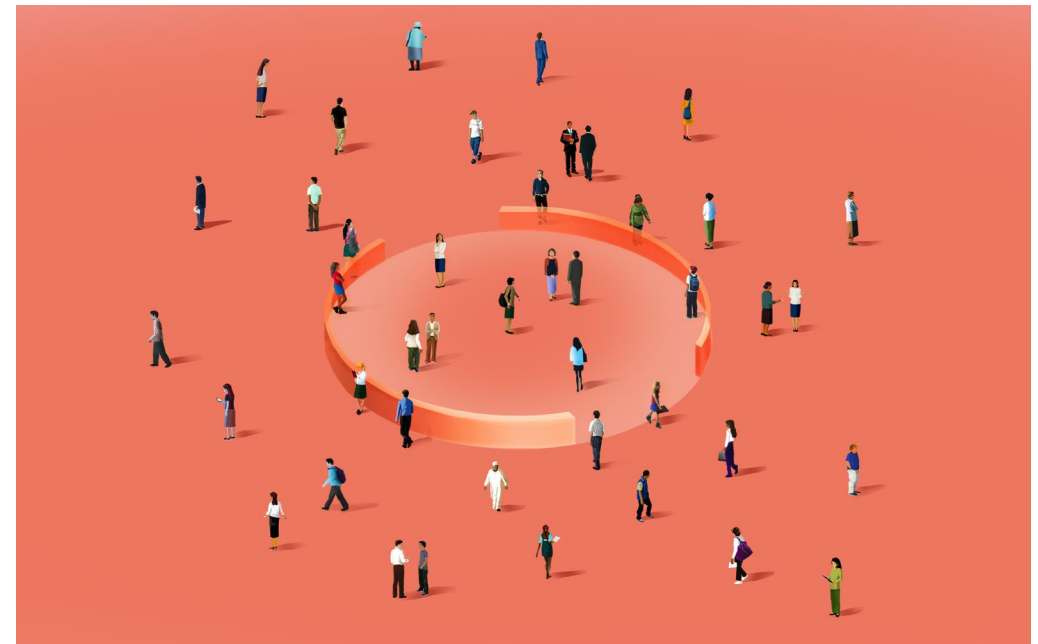
Gathering employee feedback and acting on that feedback is one of the cornerstone of any Human Resources strategy. How did you proactively gather and assess the sentiments of your employees during and following the pandemic?

### **Magali Maillot**

To begin with, we recognise the importance of understanding the aspirations and expectations of different generations within our workforce. We have invested significant time and effort into listening to the desires of our employees, particularly the new generations. It is essential to strike a balance between the aspirations of our firm and those of our people. By taking the time to truly understand their needs, we believe we can create deeper alignment with business goals and foster a positive work environment.

To gather feedback, we organised workshops, which were the result of a year-long effort involving our employees. These workshops provided a platform for open discussions with HR staff. Each team had the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations, sharing their experiences and insights. These interactions were instrumental

in understanding how our teams were coping with the new work environment and identifying areas that required further attention and improvement. Especially during the pandemic, we were praised for our empathetic approach and prioritization of the human side of work. It is crucial for us to keep maintaining this empathetic perspective as we move forward.



### **François Bade**

The office of the future requires organisations to consider a different purpose to the workplace. Organisations faced the daunting challenge of re-establishing the office as the beating heart of teamwork and Allen & Overy understood the intrinsic value of face-to-face interactions. How has your conception of the purpose of the “workplace” changed and how are you adapting your real estate consequently?

### **Magali Maillot**

Different conceptions about going to the office emerged. The goal is to meet and collaborate, not just perform tasks that could be done individually at home. Brainstorming sessions, technical briefings, and certain types of work flourished when conducted in a shared physical space.

With regards to our real estate strategy, while our firm moved into its current premises shortly before the start of the pandemic, it is fair to say that our office is not perfectly suited for an hybrid work environment. We identified a number of issues that require adjustments, for instance the need to adapt the layout of our meeting rooms, or to have better suited areas

dedicated to focus. Our aim is to build spaces that foster agility, networking, creativity, and collaboration. We want our workplace to be different from and better than home, ultimately enticing employees to come to the office. To adapt our office space accordingly, we are currently reinventing our spaces to make them more attractive and aligned with the culture we aspire to build. This includes designing new areas that encourage collaboration, innovation, and team cohesion.

### **Marie-Cécile Legrand**

As a consequence of your flexible work scheme, have you perceived an improvement of the work/life balance across your workforce?

### **Magali Maillot**

We have observed mixed results regarding the impact of our flexible work scheme on the work/life balance of our workforce. While there are some positive aspects, it is important to acknowledge that challenges and individual experiences vary.

In our case, being based in Luxembourg, the proximity to family and friends has made life easier for our employees, especially for those

who commute from neighbouring countries. Before the pandemic, we noticed a higher attrition rates among individuals coming from abroad due to homesickness. However, with the implementation of flexible work arrangements, we have seen a gradual improvement in their ability to balance their personal and professional lives.

For parents, in general, flexible work arrangements have proven to be beneficial. It enables them to better juggle their family obligations and professional commitments. In addition, we would like to highlight that we are deeply committed to fostering an inclusive and family-friendly workplace environment, which has led us to offer additional compensation on top of the country's statutory government allowance to our people who take parental leave.

It is also important to recognise that the blurring of boundaries between personal and professional lives is a common challenge for all of us. While the flexibility offered by remote work has its advantages, the lack of clear separation between work and personal spaces sometimes can make it difficult to truly disconnect from work.

Finally, as a firm, we recognise the inherent challenges in harnessing the full potential of new ways of working and effectively embedding them into our work practices, which requires significant efforts. As we refine our approach, we will remain responsive to the evolving needs of our people and will seek to facilitate a healthier integration of personal and professional responsibilities.

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