

Unilever workers will never return to desks full-time, says boss

Jasper Jolly (The Guardian, Wed 13 Jan 2021)

The boss of Unilever, one of the UK's biggest companies, has said his office workers will never return to their desks five days a week, in the latest indication that coronavirus will transform modern working life.

5 Unilever, the third most valuable company on the London Stock Exchange, is the maker of brands including Dove soap, Ben & Jerry's ice cream and Marmite. It also owns Hellman's, Knorr, Lipton and Persil.

10 The pandemic has forced office staff to work from home in most of Unilever's main markets, including the US and UK. Factory workers in most economies have been exempt from stay-at-home orders.

Speaking on Wednesday at a Reuters conference, Jope said he did not expect office workers across western Europe and north America to return to work until at least April, and added that Unilever would use a "hybrid mode" of working between homes and offices after that. Permanent changes are expected for many of its 150,000 global employees, 7,000 of whom are in the UK.

15 "We anticipate never going back to five days a week in the office," Jope said. "That seems very old-fashioned now." He also said the pandemic had made it clear that the company did not need to be as hierarchical.

20 However, he added that Unilever was still keen¹ to return to offices after seeing a "slow erosion of social capital" as working from home prevents colleagues from meeting in person. Many business leaders have voiced concerns about lack of innovation and the impact on training younger staff when workers do not congregate.

¹To be keen to = to be motivated to

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