

Coffee was the theme of the UnWork Series this week. Coffee has arguably become the social glue of the workplace in recent years, and with many of us spending much more time at home than we're used to, the moments of pleasure in our daily routines seem even more important. It's more than just a caffeine hit – it gives us an excuse to gather and can even help give structure to the day. With that in mind, we wanted to understand the wider trends around coffee and coffee drinking now and in the future.

Sasha Tinson from UnWork was joined by Jean-Baptiste Coutant from Nespresso to discuss coffee in the workplace – and beyond. Here are the top ten takeaways from the discussion:



1. Quantity to quality: People used to just grab a cup of coffee – it was more of a habit, or a mechanical instinct. Now, people are tailoring and refining their tastes becoming experts, paying more attention to what they drink and what the origins are, which has implications for what's on offer when they return to the office.
2. Decaf trend: There's a longstanding association between decaf coffee and poorer flavour, but this just means that the manufacturing process was poor. With a trend towards health and wellbeing, customers should be provided with a quality decaf option.
3. Food pairing: Most people think of coffee as a standalone or, at most, will pair it with something sweet. However, if you pair the aroma profiles – just as with wine – there's a huge range of potential. If you're ever offered coffee alongside langoustine by a Michelin chef, accept! Value proportion and purpose. Food that is grown local or from a sustainable source.
4. Sustainability: Our impact on the world has become even more apparent in recent months, and sustainability will be an increasing concern. This relates to both the countries of origin and locally – even coffee grounds can be valorised after use if disposed of correctly, and consumer are much more likely to purchase from sustainable brands in the future. Companies that aren't on this journey will suffer in the longer term.
5. Looking to the future: While many are considering increased remote working, there is a potential impact on engagement and cultivating a culture of innovation. The ideal may be

the middle ground – balancing flexibility, autonomy and work/life balance with coming together to create and share.

6. **Engagement and wellbeing:** A 2018 study found that 75% of UK workers felt that high quality coffee at work was an indication that their wellbeing mattered to their employer – if you don't get the smaller perks right, it can undercut investments in the bigger ones.
7. **Personal resilience:** Regular breaks in the working day are important from a productivity, wellness and resilience perspective – particularly when working from home, it's easy to get straight into work and not take time to decompress. It's important to get away from the desk and to connect with colleagues on an informal, social basis as well as work calls.
8. **Social glue:** There's been a strong trend towards creating spaces to lure people in with high-quality and food offerings where a traditional reception area might have been. This can be a level for powerful cultural change – for example, senior leaders having regular drop-in sessions, opening up communication with more junior employees.
9. **Employee value proposition:** Bringing people back to the office who are comfortable at home could be a challenge. There's also an increasing range of potential competition, with hospitality businesses increasingly looking to compete as spaces for drop-in work. Workplaces will need to provide the best value proposition to bring increasingly mobile employees back together.
10. **Building your brand:** A company's coffee offering has the potential to help shape its external image as well as making employees feel valued – offering high-quality hospitality to guests will say a lot about the company and how it looks after people.

There's an increasingly aware and sophisticated audience for coffee – a poor quality coffee offering is one of our most frequent complaints during client engagements, to the point where people actively leave the office rather than spending time in the building, cutting down on potential serendipitous encounters. Although there are going to be significant short term concerns around congregating over coffee, we think we will see a return to the centrality of coffee and amenity offerings, particularly where companies have moved to more mobile workstyles and the office becomes a place to congregate and collaborate than the primary location for individual work.



UnWork, part of WorkTech Academy, is a management consultancy and research house focused on the future of work, and the collision between people, property and technology. Providing specialist advice to companies to catalyse innovation and develop the ideas and concepts for new ways of working backed by robust data sets and an evidence-based approach. Alongside its advisory projects, it provides research and forecasting including futures reports and white papers.