

# Boardroom Warriors v. Bedroom Warriors

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Blimey... just come off a call where it was mentioned that we've marked the third anniversary for Lockdown UK. Looking back, it's a blur viewed through a lens of horror / fondness / despair... but now that we're long out the other end, the time has arrived to ponder its impact.

All tragedies aside, and not making light of them – the international infrastructure and energy community navigated Covid in a stoic manner, coming out the other end (if indeed we are out the other end) in good shape.

Like many industries, the infra / energy sector proved resilient and innovative, overcoming WFH obstacles, remote document signing, delivering projects in far-flung lands without leaving home, and – generally – keeping the kettle boiling.

Taking a look at the progress over the last 3 years, it's been really rather impressive (see right) that global project finance maintained steady growth throughout the coronavirus years.

You know, that's pretty good. Hats off to you all, you really smashed it out of the park when it was most needed. Nobody in the spring of 2020 anticipated that would be the case.

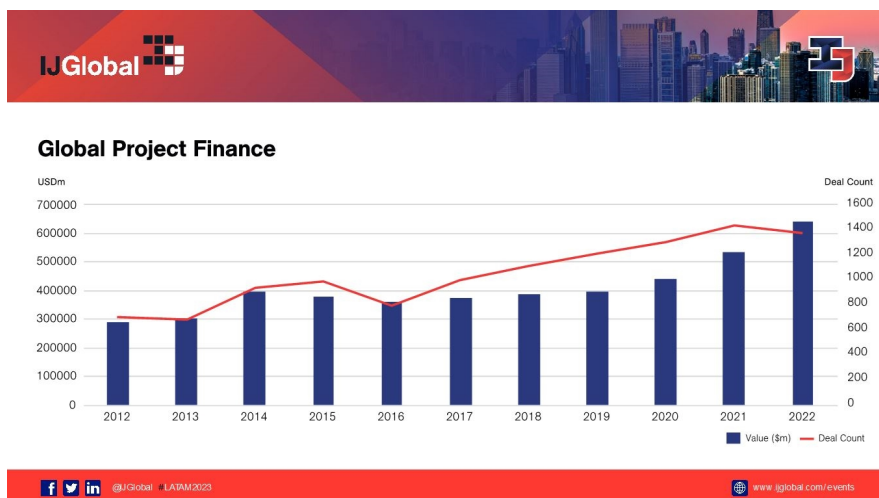
In those early days, most folk were too busy stockpiling lavatory paper and pasta, pondering relocation to Cornwall, and forking out an embarrassing amount of money on a dog – all while merrily continuing to draw a City salary.

Three years later – buying bog roll as required, still eating Italian most nights, having parted company with the £5,000 cockapoo, and commuting 5 hours a day – one has to ponder the future of work as essential skills are not passed on to the next generation of leaders who seem reluctant to emerge from self-imposed house arrest.

## Boardroom v. Bedroom

Prompted by a realisation that the 3-year anniversary – 23 March 2020 lockdown announcement – was marked yesterday, I reached out to a number of infra types to see how it had impacted them.

Responses vary dramatically, but certain themes remain constant... that it's having a negative, long-term impact on the soft skills that are so lauded by the older generation... but are we just being a bunch of fuddy duddies?



It rather puts one in mind of an [editorial from May 2022](#) that delved into the demise of a stable lending environment as we entered a world where debt would become a great deal more expensive and challenging to approve.

After sending out that Friday Editorial, an old chum told me that one of their team had been utterly bemused by it – because it didn't make sense to someone who had fewer than 10 years' experience.

And that's a good parallel for today's missive. If you had only known a stable lending environment – which had been enjoyed since 2010... you were in for a shock that would come as no surprise to those who had surfed the tsunami of 2008.

In much the same way, those who have rarely gone into the office (many seem to have no intention of gracing the premises) are never going "to get" what working is all about and this will likely hold back progress... which they will think is unfair.

Responses are split and – yes – it does seem to be a generational thing. Those of us with a few more grey hairs do tend to rate the importance of presenteeism (if you want to view it that way).

That is not the way those of us who have evolved our careers in a social and interactive manner view it, but it's clear that many of the thumb-thumping, texting brigade think that is exactly the case (and possibly they have a point).

One old chum – while recognising that the working world these days is "definitely better", opines: "People need to get with the programme and understand that doing 3-4 days in the office and working together is important for connectivity and efficiency."

However, this is swiftly followed by an appreciation of everyone being able to "enjoy the flexibility on a Friday and/or Monday" which "makes the weekend feel a bloody lot longer".

Another chum (this one with quite a few miles on the odometer) joins the fray: "Office attendance is significantly down on pre-lockdown – averaging 2 days per week – and maintaining team cohesion is a lot harder than before.

"However, work volume is up – as is productivity – but maintaining the balance between working from home and work being home requires some juggling."

It's true – hybrid working is entirely the norm and that is to be celebrated.

The flexibility this has granted for people with children is magnificent. For those with ageing parents or a sick family member, it is an opportunity to care for people in a way that makes such an amazing difference that it warms the heart.

But those are extremes.

For the majority of people up to, say, VP level – this is not so often the case and the decision to shun the office in preference of gracing St Albans with your presence is purely down to choice... a choice that some would say they will rue as they are bypassed by colleagues who build relationships and forge careers instead of just "doing a job".

Another source complains that office life is "still not back to normal" adding: "Companies pushed out flexible working policies that they are now having buyers' regret and struggling to address staff who are MIA."

For younger members of teams who live in shared apartments, surely the office is a better environment given many lack a dedicated home working space... but it pays not to underestimate the adaptability of youth and the benefits of a blurred background.

One chum who has been kicking around for a good long time is something of a convert: "What needs to change is an acceptance by the older, grey-haired crowd that hybrid working is here to stay and diktats on X or Y days in the office are not looked on kindly.

"We hire adults, depend on their work to make multi-million pound investments, but yet feel the need to infantilise them

by dictating days in the office.”

To this infra specialist mind, the younger crowd see through arguments like “it’s good for team building, morale, your career, etc.”.

The source says: “They can manage their own careers – thank you very much – and who says a couple of quality days in the office are not enough to foster a good team culture?”

“The older crowd probably get kicked out of their houses by partners who’ve had enough of them pottering about at home and they feel lonely at work without underlings to lord over.”

Ach – maybe there’s a bit of that going on. No actor likes to perform in front of an empty theatre.

But we all accept that (what people insist on calling) inter-personal skills are in decline. Broadly speaking, people leave school with limited communication skills and if they’re just out of university that’s compounded as they won’t have spent much time with other people learning social skills given the lockdown hell they went through.

They need to learn the fundamental skills of communication, dealing with people, building work relationships, negotiating deals without alienating the other side.

Full working weeks in the office will never return. Hybrid is, indeed, here to stay. But let’s not denigrate the benefits of the office environment and evolution of soft skills.

After all, it’s in your own interest career wise and technology-wise as if we keep on down this route, we’ll all be replaced by AI... and nobody will notice the difference.

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