BBC LEARNING ENGLISH
6 Minute English
Covid-19: The office after lockdown

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil
Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Sam
And I'm Sam – still working from home, as you can hear. But for many, the return to the office has begun.

Neil
And to make things safe, new thermal cameras are being installed in some workplaces. They measure body temperature to screen for coronavirus.

Sam
After weeks of working at home the return to the office is slowly getting underway in a number of countries.

Neil
But workplaces are having to change in this coronavirus era. Lots of companies are rushing to install technology to make offices and workplaces safer. Sensors that monitor our movements, smartphone apps that alert us if we get too close to workmates and even devices that take our temperature could all become **the new normal** – that's a phrase we hear a lot these days, meaning a previously unfamiliar situation that has become usual and expected.

Sam
In this programme we'll take a look at how this technology works and ask if it really is the answer we're looking for.

Neil
But first, today's quiz question. The thermal cameras I mentioned screen for coronavirus by recording skin temperature in the area of the body which most closely resembles the internal body temperature - but which area is that? Is it:
a) the eye
b) the ear,   or

c) the nose

Sam
I'll say a) the eye.

Neil
OK, Sam. We'll find out later if you were right. Now, as employees slowly return to work, tech companies are busy finding ways for them to do so safely. One such company, 'Microshare', is managed by Charles Paumelle. He spoke to BBC World Service programme *Tech Tent* to explain a possible solution.

Charles Paumelle
The technology that we are offering is using **Bluetooth** wristbands or tags that people are wearing within the workplace which detect **proximity** events. When the proximity event has been recorded its been saved by the company in case they need to, **further down the line**, retrace the steps of a certain person who has been declared as infected and inform anyone else they may have been in contact with.

Neil
One important way to control coronavirus involves contact tracing. This means that someone who tests positive for the disease informs everyone else they've been in contact with. Microshare's system for this uses **Bluetooth** - technology that allows computers, mobile phones and other devices to communicate with each other without being connected by wires.

Sam
Employees wear **Bluetooth** wristbands which register when workers come into close **proximity** – how near a person is to another person.

Neil
Anyone who has been close to a workmate will then know they have to take action if that person is found to have coronavirus later **down the line** – in the future.

Sam
Wearing wristbands, monitoring data on smartphones and being recorded by cameras – it all feels like quite a big invasion of privacy, doesn't it?

Neil
It certainly does, and although some argue that such measures are necessary in these unprecedented times, others are worried about the possible consequences. Here's human rights lawyer, Ravi Naik, with a warning:

Ravi Naik
From a human rights perspective, you have to try to ask, are you trying to use tech **for tech's sake** – is this actually going to facilitate an understanding of who is safe to go back to work or not? And if not, what's the necessity of this because it's such a significant interference with basic human rights. There has to be a high level of **evidential justification** to deploy this type of technology and I just don't think it's there.

Neil
Ravi questions whether these devices will actually help identify who can return to work, or whether the technology is being used **for its own sake** – an expression meaning doing something because it is interesting and enjoyable, not because you need to.

Sam
Ravi's work as a lawyer involves finding proof that something is right or wrong. If people's human rights are being interfered with, he thinks there has to be **evidential justification** – explanation of the reasons why something is the right thing to do, based on evidence. Like the evidence from screening body temperature…

Neil
…which bring us back to today's quiz question. Remember I asked you which part of the body is scanned by thermal cameras to measure body temperature.

Sam
And I said a) the eye.

Neil
And you were absolutely right! There's a small area of the eye close to the tear ducts which is the most accurate part of the skin for measuring body temperature.

Sam
Well, there you go.
We've been discussing how thermal cameras and other workplace devices being used to prevent coronavirus are becoming **the new normal** – a previously unfamiliar situation that is becoming normalised.

Neil
Some of these devices are wristbands with **Bluetooth** – technology allowing computers and smartphones to communicate remotely without wires. They can

identify work colleagues who have been in close **proximity** – in other words, near to each other.

Sam
That will be helpful if one of them tests positive for coronavirus further **down the line** – at some point in the future.

Neil
The coronavirus pandemic has caused massive changes in workplaces around the world but some critics are concerned that contact tracing technology is being used **for its own sake** - because it is interesting and enjoyable to do, rather than being absolutely necessary.

Sam
And since much of the new tech invades personal privacy it should only be introduced with **evidential justification** – explanation of why it is the right thing to do, based on evidence.

Neil
Unfortunately, that's all we've got time for, but remember join us again. Bye for now!

Sam
Bye!

VOCABULARY

the new normal
previously unfamiliar situation that has become usual or normalised

Bluetooth
technology that allows computers, mobile phones and other devices to communicate with each other without being connected by wires

proximity
something or someone being near to another thing or person

down the line
at some point in the future

for its own sake
done because it is interesting and enjoyable, not because it is necessary

evidential justification
reasons why something is the right thing to do, based on evidence