



December 2021 employment law round up

Mark Callaghan

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Earlier this month I had started to collect a [few articles](#) on the [various ways](#) in which companies would be changing or cancelling their Christmas parties this year. Two weeks later, I think almost all outstanding parties have been cancelled, and it rather feels as if there's a [slightly bigger story](#) going on (and it's not 2021's parties that are of interest!). It's been interesting to note what legal commentators conclude: that the first 'cheese and wine' party was [probably not](#), technically, a breach of the Covid-19 rules in force at the time, but that the second 'Zoom quiz' party [most likely was](#). Either way, my enthusiasm for talking about parties in this month's ramble has slightly waned, so I hope you'll forgive me for moving on.

One of the most interesting articles I've read recently reports that the average worker is only productive for just short of [three hours](#) per day. It also references Henry Ford's role in helping to establish the 40 hour work week, which he did in [1926](#) (having already caused a sea-change in labour organisation twelve years earlier by doubling his workers' wages). Ford's motivations were not altruistic; he recognised that shorter hours for manual labourers would lead to greater productivity. There are of course interesting parallels with the arguments that are now made in favour of a [four day work week](#) (or indeed, a [5 hour work day](#)): that there may be some way to maintain or increase productivity (as [the evidence shows](#) is possible) whilst reducing the amount of time people spend at



work overall. The New York Times had another convincing read on the subject this month.

Modern day leaders have been grappling with their own radical workplace challenges, of course, and it seems that there often remains a real disconnect between executive level managers and their more junior colleagues on the question of whether a return to the office is viable or not. Still, with the UK's Covid guidance now back to the familiar 'work from home if you can' the decision is out of many employers' hands, at least for the time being.

At least bosses can take comfort in the fact that they are unlikely to be as popular as the CEO who caught some bad press this month for firing 900 employees via Zoom. Even George Clooney, the freelance 'firing consultant' wasn't that cold.

Finally, and on the subject of freelancing, let me leave you with the pleasing fact (via Countdown's Suzie Dent) that a 'freelancer' was a term originally applied to a knight who offered his services (and lance) in return for payment, and was therefore free to follow the money.

Merry Christmas everyone, see you in the new year!