

WFH has been a disaster

Paul Nicolaou



Saying I told you so isn't considered good form, except perhaps if it's said about work-from-home and its pitfalls.

Three years ago, I said WFH would be a disaster for businesses, workers and productivity. I was hammered for daring to question what many saw as a new way of working that was here to stay. Young people, I predicted, would be hurt most by working remotely.

Significantly, it's young people who are now leading the pushback against WFH. They've also worked out that AI has accentuated the risk to their jobs.

Other WFH realities are becoming clear. How federal departments are paying out hundreds of millions of dollars a year on often unused office space.

Even newly installed Victorian

Premier Ben Carroll is deferring legislation to enshrine WFH for at least two days a week.

But the strongest doubts about WFH are coming from the young. An updated Hatch Hotlist Insights survey of 2000 young people found that 90 per cent want at least some time in the office. Nearly 70 per cent want three or more days and more than 25 per cent want to be there full time, double from just a year ago.

Hatch co-founder Adam Jacobs said Australians are more anxious about their careers and futures than ever.

The business community is worried about the future too. CBD businesses are still struggling with reduced foot traffic.

However, there are signs that the CBD's "people drought" might be coming to an end.

The office vacancy rate in

Sydney fell slightly in the past six months with major firms leasing more space, according to the Australian Property Council.

The trend shows the office market has entered recovery phase with incentives being offered to lease quality locations.

To add to the recovery, Premier Chris Minns and Transport Minister John Graham should consider 24-hour metro, heavy rail and light rail services at weekends.

Encouraging young people back to the city for work and leisure can only be a good thing for the economy.

Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney