

**Analysis of Remote Work and Recommendations for Improvement**

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## **ABSTRACT**

With the growing popularity of remote work, more research and development of policies are necessary. This report analyzes the past and current state of remote work as well as the benefits and detriments, and concludes with recommendations for improving the success of remote work. The end goal is to answer the question, “how does the use of remote working benefit work performance and what improvements can be made for success?” This is achieved by reviewing available literature and developing recommendations for improvement based on the reviewed research. The results show that remote work can be very beneficial to employees and employers while having few drawbacks when offered through flexible schedules. This allows the worker to claim all the benefits of remote work, while still being able to enter the office for face-to-face interaction when necessary.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Working from home has become increasingly common over the past decade and is now a serious consideration for organizations and employees. With telecommunication technology making huge advancements, workers desiring more flexible schedules, and a huge push from the onset of COVID-19, the demand for remote work offerings has increased dramatically. As it becomes more widespread, the benefits, drawbacks, and lack of a guiding industry standard becomes more apparent.

The aim of this paper is to answer the question of how does the use of remote working benefit work performance and what improvements can be made for success? This will be achieved by analyzing the past and current state of remote work, looking at the benefits to employees and employers, considering the detriments, and compiling a list of recommended improvements to be successful.

## **REMOTE WORK**

### **Increased Usage**

Over the past decade, especially in the last year, the use of remote work has increased drastically due to many factors. Advancements in technology, increase in accessibility, societal trends towards remote work, and the recent COVID-19 pandemic have all contributed to remote work becoming the new norm. The US census bureau found that 9.5% of employees worked remotely at least once a week 10 years ago, compared to 2020 where 36% reported working from home at least once a week (Bayern, 2020). As a result of this increased use, the expected growth rate of full-time remote work over the next five years has doubled from 30% to 65% (Ozimek, 2020).

An increasing number of organizations are moving towards remote work or offering some form of flexible work scheduling. Most of the larger, recent trends in offering flexible schedules has been from the forced remote work experiment from COVID-19. Whether a company planned to shift to remote work or not, COVID-19 forced the hand of many into work from home situations (Ozimek, 2020). For example, Microsoft is allowing workers to voluntarily return to offices in stages rather than forcing them back into the office, Google is extending remote work into late 2021, Facebook will shift 50% of its workforce to permanent remote work, and Twitter has extended work from home policies indefinitely (Kazilbash, 2020). These large organizations moving to primarily remote work will likely set the precedent for other companies to follow in the future. Everything from work from home benefits to the percentage of the workforce working remotely will be set by example by these big players. Some other companies are taking it a step further and fully committing to a remote workforce. The largest software company in Canada, OpenTextCorp, is closing half of its offices since they need much less office space with their increasing number of remote employees (Kazilbash, 2020).

The advancement of relevant technology and increased accessibility of said technology has been a large driving force behind the gradual shift to remote work. Evolution of supporting technologies such as, mobile devices, faster internet, cloud services and technology, Internet of things, and network connectivity have driven the increase in remote work over the past decade and contributed to the success of remote solutions (Bayern, 2020; Kazilbash, 2020). Most baseline technology and software are easy to access for basically everyone and trivial to set up at home, even for the less technologically inclined. Webcams are cheap and easy to obtain, programs like Microsoft Teams and Zoom are simple to use and enable remote face to face communication for meetings, teaching, and team collaborations. All these technologies enable

work teams to meet and collaborate effortlessly while never needing to physically be at the office. These new technology developments coupled with the increasing demand for work from home can also drive further and faster development of more telecommunication technologies.

### **Changes in Opinion**

While the usage of remote work has increased over time, the public opinion of its effectiveness has improved as well. Remote work has not always been viewed as viable or cost effective by most organizations. Even during the forced remote situation due to the pandemic, some leaders refuse to acknowledge just how effective and beneficial remote work can be. Employers generally believed that workers would become too distracted at home without their managers constantly supervising them (Peek, 2020). Most believed productivity would suffer and employees would not be as effective and had the concern of how productive an employee can really be while working on their own (Peek, 2020). Many employees want to work remotely with a surveyed 37% saying they would change jobs for one that allows for remote work at least part of the time (Bayern, 2020). Recent trends and increasing demand from employees are forcing employers to seriously look at and consider enacting flexible work policies.

A decade ago, remote options were very rare, often only used to accommodate specific needs (Peek, 2020). Most remote work was only available to specific jobs. It was almost exclusive to low paying telemarketing or customer service jobs (Peek, 2020). This exclusivity was mostly due to the nature of these jobs being performed over the phone or email. For other jobs that required more team collaboration or face to face conversation with a customer, the technology just was not yet there for remote work to be viable or desirable by management.

The advancement of internet speeds and the rapid development of real time video conferencing over the past 10 to 15 years has enabled face to face team collaboration (Peek,

2020). These new technologies have made it possible for entire companies to function remotely, with some not even requiring a physical office (Peek, 2020). With this new technology came an increasing number of organizations looking at and trying remote work setups. The technology was worth checking out since it offered an easy way for entire offices to collaborate and a possible reduction in real estate costs among other potential benefits to employees and employers.

Many businesses now allow employees to work from home at least once or twice per week (Peek, 2020). In fact, 75% of worldwide companies have introduced flexible working policies and 83% of those have reported improved productivity as of 2016 (Hunter, 2019). Also, according to a survey, 56% of managers feel that the shift to remote work has gone better than expected (Ozimek, 2020). With more and more companies seeing the possible benefits of remote work, the public opinion improved and work from home has become more desired in recent years by workers and companies. Once employees and employers are more familiar with remote technologies, remote programs will become more common and successful. Over time, more and more companies can employ work from home friendly policies like paying for internet, required technology, etc.

### **COVID-19 Remote Work Experiment**

COVID-19 came along around the end of 2019 into the beginning of 2020 and made a large sudden impact on everyone's life. The pandemic forced a rapid and drastic change to how people go about their daily lives, especially in respect to how they work and learn. Lockdowns caused businesses to close or prohibit in person working (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). Companies and workers alike have had little time to plan proper remote strategies (Carroll and Conboy, 2020). Many of these strategies are short-term and reactive as opposed to being fully planned out

long-term solutions (Carroll and Conboy, 2020). Some take these short-term and not thought-out plans as indication that remote work is not effective, while it can be effective if done correctly. This has driven public opinion towards remote work down a little bit, however, most have seen that remote work is desirable as a result of being forced into it.

Pandemic changes have proven remote work is effective when done correctly; some industries have succeeded while others have failed. Regardless, organizations need to adapt to the new normal among the pandemic and into the future (Carroll and Conboy, 2020). 61.9% of hiring managers surveyed say their workforce will be more remote going forward (Ozimek, 2020). The shift towards remote work comes with a number of benefits relating to the pandemic and future possible crises. The forcing of the workforce online has caused employers to make their companies remote capable which will mean any future crises can be handled smoother since the infrastructure is already in place. Remote work also helps minimize unemployment from the pandemic. Many people have become unemployed, but remote work has lessened unemployment rates among jobs that can be done from home (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). Only certain jobs can be remote, but people with those capable jobs remained employed rather than losing them due to offices closing. Although the pandemic has been devastating to the world, it has proved to everyone that remote work is a trend that must be considered for the workforce as a whole.

Throughout 2020, COVID-19 caused a massive shift in the share of employees working remotely. According to a survey, 56% of participants were still employed (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). Of those 56%, 37.1% continued to regularly commute to work, 35.2% switched to remote work, 15% continued remote work prior to COVID-19, and 10.1% were laid off or furloughed (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). This all totals to about half of the workforce being remote during the

pandemic which is much more than the 15% before the pandemic. The table below shows the shift in the share of employees working remotely.

	Pre-COVID	Post-COVID
No remote workers on their team	46%	6%
Fully remote team	2.3%	20%
Share of their workers remote	13.2%	56% to 74%

Table from (Ozimek, 2020)

COVID-19 forced a large-scale remote work experiment that will have lasting change on the working world.

**Work Culture Changes**

Internal work culture is likely to change as well. Face-to-face meetings are now done through video meetings and stopping by someone’s desk is replaced by sending a chat message (Ozimek, 2020). Most of these at work habits of conversing in the break room, to dropping by someone’s desk, to sharing ideas in an elevator are gone, but will be replaced by other means of casual communication. Text chat makes for a good asynchronous way to communicate informally and casually talk with other team members (Hunter, 2019). Remote meetings will need to be more precise in asking the right questions for efficient time use. There is already a massive shift in work culture happening, but it appears that most workers prefer the new normal.

Workers are beginning to demand flexible working arrangements at their jobs. From a survey, 89% thought flexible work should become normal and 54% would move jobs to obtain a better work/life balance (Hunter, 2019). Employees are wanting more control over where and how they do their work and companies are going to need to start offering flexible options if they want to remain competitive when it comes to hiring. Many companies would not even have to



commit to full remote work but offer a policy that allows for a couple days per week (Peek, 2020). Most employees are simply calling for flexible options as opposed to total remote work, which is much easier to achieve for most companies. To move towards this new norm of some job positions may be reworked in how work is assigned and distributed. Tasks that can be done remotely might stay remote and possibly be outsourced as a result of distance no longer being a factor (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). Job positions may also be restructured to bundle remote tasks in one position and in person tasks in another (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). These changes can be viewed as either good or bad, but are proof that the traditional culture of work is changing with the prospect of remote work.

### **Effectiveness**

As the workforce trends towards remote work, its effectiveness needs to be assessed and proven for it to become viable and widely used. The stigma of remote work causing decreased productivity has been proven wrong on many occasions with all the new studies stemming from the large number employees going remote. A survey conducted by Airtasker indicated that employees are actually more productive when working remotely (Peek, 2020).

Workers are also noticing performance increases and feeling numerous changes in their workflow. A survey conducted by Chegg indicated 86% of workers found their productivity to be as good or better than their office work (Kazilbash, 2020). This increase in productivity is likely resulting from how different the work from home environment is. Remote employees work an additional 17 workdays per year, take longer breaks (22 minutes versus 18 minutes on average) but work 10 additional minutes per day (Peek, 2020). Also, office employees are unproductive 37 minutes per day while remote employees are unproductive 27 minutes per day (Peek, 2020). Time spent working tends to vary significantly as opposed to in office since there

is no commute time and employees tend to have more control over when they do their work throughout the day. Workers at home tend to be less distracted and more focused in their more comfortable at home environment. About 15% of remote workers reported their boss distracted them at work compared to 22% of in office employees (Peek, 2020). While not a significant improvement, less distractions leads to more focused and productive employees. Remote workers reported more work-related stress and difficulty in finding work life balance, however, the American Psychological Association said remote work can increase satisfaction when implemented correctly (Peek, 2020). While the days tend to be slightly longer and can be more stressful, employees have more job satisfaction and more control over their daily work. The effectiveness of remote work on general job performance is just one of the many benefits that it brings to the working world.

### **BENEFITS**

There are many benefits to making effective use of remote work. Whether it is just a flexible schedule offering or total work from home plan, making use of remote technologies can benefit everything from employee productivity and job satisfaction to savings on real estate costs. Remote work currently has a mixed public reception, but more people and organizations are beginning to see how it can benefit both employees and employers.

One of the main benefits for employees and a large argument in favor of remote is the high amount of work schedule flexibility and worker autonomy. Generally, workers have more freedom in daily work schedule, get longer breaks, and can decide within reason when to start and end their workday (Peek, 2020). Some organizations that have robust work from home policies offer their employees total control over their work hours if their work duties are getting done. Not all employees are productive first thing in the morning, some are most productive

midday or maybe even at nighttime (Faulds and Raju, 2021). As long as an employee is completing all their work and it is not hampering other workers or the company, they should be able to work when they want. Additionally, having the ability to take breaks whenever the employee pleases gives the employee more power to decide when they do not want to work. This greatly increased flexibility can lead to more time for child or elderly care at home (HRNews, 2021). Some people need to balance caring for a child, special needs, or elderly person with a full-time job and they need a flexible schedule to provide adequate care. All this added work schedule flexibility and employee deciding power makes for an increase in job satisfaction from properly implemented work from home programs (Peek, 2020). When done correctly, remote work can result in a better work-life balance and reduced stress both with work and at home (Abrams, 2019). Giving workers less supervision and more autonomy makes them feel more in control of their work lives and makes them more likely to feel less burnout at work. On top of the flexible schedule, worker autonomy, and job satisfaction, employees will deal with few unnecessary meetings and reduced in-office distractions (Ozimek, 2020). Remote employees are overall more productive due to working slightly longer days on average and being distracted less by office distractions (Peek, 2020). Furthermore, jobs that require significant problem solving need a high level of focus on the job to be productive, working from home can possibly mitigate some of the distractions of a shared office space (Abrams, 2019). A beneficial side effect to remote team collaboration being less personal and not directly face to face is a potential increase in worker participation. Less socially inclined personalities might be more likely to participate in team environments through remote work and text chat (Hunter, 2019). While it does not work for everyone, remote work enables many people to easily communicate regardless of social tendencies and even location.

With distance no longer being a factor in hiring employees, there is no longer concern for moving for a temporary position or promotion. Additionally, job opportunities increase significantly for employees looking for employment since they are no longer restricted by location, or by the skills they can offer. Avoiding unnecessary transportation and long commutes to work leads to other benefits for more than just the employee (Ozimek, 2020). Lack of transportation costs like gas, vehicle wear and tear, parking fees, public transportation, etc. save employees an average of \$6000 or more per year (Faulds and Raju, 2021). Less people commuting to work every day on the road leads to fewer vehicle related injuries and deaths. The environment benefits from less cars on the road as well, due to less emissions.

Employers also benefit from remote work programs as much as employees do. As mentioned before in the COVID-19 section, many of the benefits of remote work have been brought to light by the pandemic. Having remote options gives employers other options when it comes to major crises like COVID-19. With offices closing due to social distancing, remote work programs reduce the chances of being laid off or furloughed (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). Employers do not need to lay off large amounts of employees or find different places to staff them. Moreover, employees have less work stress wondering if they are going to be unemployed when another crisis like this inevitably happens again. In the same vein, remote work keeps employees socially distant and prevents spread of contagious illnesses. Not only COVID-19, but flu and other contagious diseases are less likely to spread when workers do not need to be in an office together (Peek, 2020). Having an existing plan and infrastructure for remote work in place prepares a company for any large-scale crises in the future, i.e., pandemic, natural disasters, etc. (Willcocks, 2020). For example, the e-commerce giant, Alibaba, had staff working remotely during the 2003 SARS outbreak which allowed them to be more prepared to work remotely

during the COVID pandemic (Bick et al., 2020). The likelihood of success in crisis response only increases when the organization and its employees have had prior experience with it. If more companies had well done, fleshed out remote work programs in place like Alibaba, the transition to all remote work during the current pandemic would have gone much smoother. Realizing the value of having a remote workforce can save a company on real estate costs and boost worker productivity.

Companies can save money on office spaces, by either downsizing or doing away with a physical office (Peek, 2020; Bayern, 2020). More employees can be supported in the same amount of office space with remote workers and opens real estate up to other uses (Bayern, 2020). With less employees in an office, buildings can be repurposed, parking lots can be downsized or removed, and storage areas are no longer necessary. Real estate can be repurposed to make better use of the extra space, such as co-worker spaces for collaboration or a showcase area to build customer relations (Faulds and Raju, 2021). Some firms have considered other options, like turning offices or facilities into educational spaces for schools, community centers or other related purposes (Faulds and Raju, 2021). Repurposing buildings not only saves the company money but also benefits the surrounding community and builds public reputation for an organization. Companies can also enjoy reduced overhead expenses for hiring new employees (Abrams, 2019). Desk space no longer needs to be planned out, supplying for employee dress codes, food for breakrooms, etc. no longer needs to be budgeted for. The only supplies an employee would need is either supplied equipment or possibly reimbursement for at home equipment purchases.

Some benefits are good for employees and employers. Remote work removes the requirement for potential employees to be within commuting distance. It allows for hiring of

employees from anywhere in the world, making location-based hiring irrelevant and enables more access to distant talent (Abrams, 2019). Furthermore, a company in a less desirable geographical location can more easily find talent to hire (Faulds and Raju, 2021). For example, if a company were based in a rural location, they could easily hire a talented individual from across the world that otherwise would not be possible due to distance.

All these benefits add up to lowered costs to companies, more productive and satisfied employees, crisis preparedness, and overall a more flexible workspace to attract new talent from anywhere in the world. However, all the benefits do not come without drawbacks. Most of these drawbacks can be negated with robust remote work programs, but some will always be present and must be taken into consideration when building a remote work environment.

### **DETRIMENTS**

Even with all the benefits of remote work, it is not perfect. There are a fair number of detriments to working remotely, especially if an organization chooses to go with completely remote instead of just a flexible schedule. However, the effects of the disadvantages vary from person to person and company to company. Most of the disadvantages can be remedied in one way or another.

A primary concern to having a remote workforce is technical issues. For someone working remotely, a power outage, internet failure, or computer hardware failure can completely take away the ability to get their job done and get paid. This is especially a problem if a company has no physical office to fall back on and the employee must take the day off or find another way to work. These technical problems can lead directly into another big concern with remote work, network security.

Network security quickly becomes a concern when an organization has a large amount of externally connected devices (Miller, 2020). These security concerns only increase as the remote workforce becomes larger and opens more vulnerabilities if any of those devices are insufficiently secured (Willcocks, 2020). Any number of possible connections to a company are possible that open it up to external attacks. Laptops, mobile devices, public networks, and at home network devices are a few examples of the variability of remote work. Some employees might even choose to work part of their workday at a public place like a coffee shop which introduces information security issues with the use of public Wi-Fi that anyone can access and eavesdrop on network traffic (Faulds and Raju, 2021). Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) and security devices can help alleviate concerns sometimes, but these solutions can be costly to maintain and do not completely protect against all the possible areas of attack. One possible scenario that is difficult to guard against is if an employee has roommates that can potentially gain access to the work computer and get a hold of confidential files or information (Faulds and Raju, 2021). While it is difficult to guard against all vulnerabilities, most companies that are prepared to go remote should be prepared to pay the necessary costs for employee equipment and software to safely work at home. Once security issues are dealt with, the issue of communication arises.

Being completely remote can bring its own difficulties and challenges to team collaboration environments. Getting in touch with other employees can be more difficult than just walking down the hall and stopping at someone's desk when employers do not equip their workers with adequate communication tools (Bayern, 2020). This lack of in-person contact can make it more difficult to collaborate and generate new ideas organically (Faulds and Raju, 2021). It is even more important to make sure the best video conferencing technology is used to permit

easy communication between employees. If employees have the means to get in touch with each other easily, like text chat or Zoom for example, the feeling of being socially distant will diminish. However, no matter what technology is used, it can still be difficult for opportunities to network and build relations with co-workers to arise (Abrams, 2019; Miller, 2020). Organic conversations in an elevator or in a break room become less common and more difficult to happen in a remote environment. Lack of social connections at work from exclusive remote work can have other downsides like increased employee turnover. Having less social connections with co-workers can make an employee feel less connected and have an easier time quitting and looking for employment elsewhere (Faulds and Raju, 2021). Many factors can lead to an employee leaving, but lack of social relationships and a poor work-life balance are two big contributors to a remote employee leaving.

While one of the benefits to remote work is an improved work-life balance, if a remote work program is not regulated correctly, a worse work-life balance can occur. Poorly done remote work programs can lead to higher stress levels and poor work-life balance with the boundary between work and home being blurred (Peek, 2020). Blurring of work and home boundaries leads to workers associating their homes with work obligations. This can intrude on family time, causing more conflict at home (Abrams, 2019; Palumbo, 2020). Mixing of work and home too much makes it hard to mentally distinguish between the two, and leads to burnout and poor mental health. Furthermore, remote workers tend to work more; about four hours per week more on average when compared to in office workers and there can be more meetings in the workday (Abrams, 2019; Faulds and Raju, 2021). Unregulated remote work can lead to more time spent working, whether it is paid overtime or not, and should be avoided for the wellbeing of the employee. Too much invasion of home life and high workload from remote work can



cause more family conflict (Molino et al., 2020). Work invading family time causes the worker to have less time and energy to devote to family activities and responsibilities, frustration with work can also bleed into family life. This lack of a firm work-home boundary can cause employees to experience exhaustion and burnout which leads to poor mental health and greater feelings of isolation (Abrams, 2019; Bayern, 2020). Employees can feel isolated mentally drained and feel the need to resort to a “game face” for video meetings (Miller, 2020). Poor mental health leads to further burnout and causes employees to have less job satisfaction, happiness with their job, and reduces their productivity. It is in the best interest of both the employee and employer to take every possible measure to keep employees productive and mentally healthy. Employees who already have poor job satisfaction due to the aforementioned factors are less likely to respond well to invasive performance tracking and unfair treatment.

Having a mix of work from home and in office workers might lead to management treating remote workers differently. Remote employees tend to get similar performance scores as in office workers, but received more negative feedback as opposed to their in-office counterparts (Faulds and Raju, 2021). This can cause remote employees to disengage more and become more likely to leave the company. Managers need to take care and make sure all employees get equal feedback and engagement in the company. Overlooking high performers is more likely when they are not physically in the office and can be viewed unintentionally as favoritism and discrimination at work (Miller, 2020). Employees that are remote do not receive as much credit for their accomplishments and credit for their work may go to a team member that is in the office. Tracking performance and work hours can be difficult for remote employees, especially if there was no means of tracking prior to going remote (Miller, 2020). Differences in location causes issues with treating employees equally and with that comes pay discrepancies. Workers

might not receive salaries that pay them enough for their location, pay is mostly based on the cost of living where the company is located versus where the employee is located (Faulds and Raju, 2021). To attempt to remedy performance and employee tracking issues, many employers have turned to invasive ways of tracking employees.

Increases in worker performance monitoring has negative effects on the employees like reduction in job satisfaction and worker autonomy. Monitoring technologies like, keyloggers, log in/out times, taking pictures with webcams, and even measuring how hard an employee works based on facial expressions made throughout the day have been used and explored to supervise employees. These technologies get very invasive and might make the employee feel that they are not trusted to get their job done. The camera-based technologies invade on personal life as well, since not everyone is comfortable with exposing their at-home life environment with work colleagues.

There is a lack of guidance from governments or policy makers on how to best adapt to new work practices (Carroll and Conboy, 2020). Without any gold standard to follow, many companies have tried what they think works and base the validity of remote work off that experience. These standards are necessary in the future to guide organizations into correct remote work practices. Handled correctly, remote work policies can remedy most of these detriments and increase worker productivity, job satisfaction, and benefit the employee and employer in many other ways.

### **EXAMPLE: TELEMEDICINE**

Remote work does not work well for every application, but in some cases, only benefits have been gained. The area of telemedicine has thrived since the COVID outbreak began. With trying to keep medical centers open for COVID patients and other serious conditions, many

places have turned to examinations over remote means. A specific example of physicians using remote technology to assess and diagnose patients is in Tai, Saudi Arabia.

The healthcare industry benefits from telemedicine in several ways. Direct communication between patient and physician is quick and easy and increases the quality and ease of care that does not require physical examination. Patients can save time and money from using telemedicine since they would no longer need to plan to commute to their doctor (Mubaraki et al., 2021). Telemedicine can improve treatments that do not require physical exams. Therapeutic intervention providing psychological support, appointment follow ups, medical reports, and medication refills (Mubaraki et al., 2021). When used on its own or together with in-person visits, remote health care is highly beneficial to the patients and physicians alike.

When used completely on its own, telemedicine suffers from some disadvantages of its own. Certain diagnoses can be difficult to correctly identify without physical examination and having the inability to use hands on experience to assess a patient (Mubaraki et al., 2021). Doctors could have trouble making correct decisions when they cannot physically see a patient's reactions to various stimuli. Also, some patients could have limited technological skills and not know how to access or use remote technology (Mubaraki et al., 2021). Not everyone has the same technological skill or access, so having the in-person still available is necessary to assure everyone gets the care they need.

Overall, telemedicine can be used to provide safer and sometimes faster medical care. Through its use, access to remote areas or during crises is made much easier and safer (Mubaraki et al., 2021). Telemedicine gains from many of the same benefits as office settings, but functions with almost no drawbacks when used in combination with in-person examinations when necessary. In the same way as other industries, remote solutions were tested in response to

COVID-19, but now that the capability is in place, the healthcare industry is prepared for future crises. Telemedicine should be used to enhance medical care rather than replace it. It will never, nor should it, replace traditional in-person care but it should be used to augment in person visits and improve the quality of health care in many different areas.

### **RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS**

With as widespread as remote work is becoming, the lack of any industry standards is becoming increasingly apparent. There is a lot of advice scattered throughout many different sources, but no central guidance from government or policy makers. The only real source to follow is companies and organizations that are succeeding with their remote policies, but those are not always public or easily accessible since businesses do not like to expose any competitive advantage they might have. Having solid guidance in executing a successful remote work program is important because when done correctly, remote working can increase productivity and morale. However, when done incorrectly, it can result in inefficiency and demotivate employees (Bick et al., 2020). The main points to pay attention to are work culture changes, performance monitoring, flexible schedules, employee technology, policy changes, benefits, teambuilding, and security.

Just shifting to remote work is insufficient and needs to be accompanied with a work culture change as well. Simply letting employees work from home with no other changes works in the short term but will suffer in the long term. The organization will need to make changes to how general communication is conducted, employee supervision, casual interaction among co-workers, and how performance is evaluated. Management strategies must change to allow more space and autonomy to employees. Managers often try to micromanage or over-control the team (Khetarpal, 2020). Employees and managers need to adapt to primarily interacting through chat

and video calls as well as have more trust in employees to get work done on their own time. As mentioned before, employees tend to function better when they are given freedom to when they can do their work and when they are trusted to get their work done without constant supervision. Changes to performance evaluation to look more at results instead of constant monitoring reinforces employees with a consistent goal to work towards and gives managers a better way to gauge performance (Abrams, 2019). A possible outcome could be offering remote work as a sort of incentive to hitting performance targets. An employee that wants to work from home would be motivated to hit certain performance goals to earn the right to work from home, boosting productivity and employee satisfaction with being rewarded for achieving their goals (Abrams, 2019). This sort of reward alleviates the concern of remote employees being less productive and gives the employees that want to work in the office the option to stay in the office. Gauging performance from results rather than small milestones takes away the pressure of being constantly monitored as well. However, for goals like this to be desirable, employers must offer robust and flexible remote work policies to their employees.

Employers need to consider the development of flexible work policies to remain competitive in the changing modern work climate. At the very least, flexible work schedules should be considered versus an all or nothing approach. Taking a hybrid approach eliminates many of the work from home disadvantages while giving increased flexibility to people who want it. For these flexible policies to be possible, normalized practices for remote policies need to be developed (Carroll and Conboy, 2020). Standards for software, hardware, and compensations offered need to be developed as a guide to organization looking to implement successful remote programs. Offering hardware and internet cost reimbursements and employee mental health programs for example. The results of a survey conducted on 527 organizations

showed more employers are reimbursing work from home expenses, updating paid-leave policies, offering flexible work schedules, and offering support for employees with child and elder care responsibilities (HRNews, 2021). Offering additional reimbursements and benefits like office supplies, electronic devices, internet services, online fitness classes, and one-on-one coaching from a wellness coach can help improve quality of life for employees (HRNews, 2021). Offering other resources to help employees with self-care and work-life balancing are crucial since it can be difficult to maintain these things when working remotely. Other changes to policies could include the way pay is calculated. Generally, pay is determined by the location of the employer, but this does not work as well for a remote workforce. Adjusting pay based on the employee's cost of living for their location incentivizes employees to work remotely and makes the company more desirable to work for. For example, a company located in Iowa likely would not pay enough for someone to live in New York. Some companies like Facebook already adjust employee salaries based on cost of living in the area where an employee resides (Faulds and Raju, 2021). Further changes to benefits not only helps better remote work but improves the general working world as well.

Almost all new benefits could improve life for in office workers as well. Encouraging the use of sick and vacation days is necessary as remote workers take less sick and vacation days than in office workers (Alipour, Fadinger, and Schymik, 2020; New Orleans CityBusiness, 2020; Willcocks, 2020). Workers have the mentality that since they are already home, they do not need to take a sick day and end up working through being sick. This can lead to further health issues if employees do not get the rest when they need to, and their quality of work will likely decrease while they are sick. Having more flexible schedules is another way to alleviate this problem as well as decreasing worker burnout and increasing productivity. Flexible schedules allow

employees to choose to work when they are personally most productive. If an employee is more productive at night, then they should be allowed to do so if their work is getting done in a reasonable time frame. More worker freedom also boosts morale and job satisfaction. However, with this work schedule freedom comes added responsibility on the employee to maintain their own work from home policies.

Remote work success goes both ways, however. Employees also need to develop their own routines, boundaries, and make additional efforts to engage with co-workers (Abrams, 2019; Limón, 2020). Many factors with remote work blur work and life together, but steps can be taken to draw some work-life boundaries. Creating a space at home just for work helps maintain the separation of work and home (Hope, 2020). This helps you mentally draw the line between work and home life. If all your work is done at your personal home computer desk, you are more likely to associate that with work and it becomes increasingly difficult to disengage from the always working mindset. Keep housework and work separate (Hope, 2020). Mixing housework tasks like cleaning and laundry during the workday will only extend the amount of time you are at work and further blurs the line between home and work. Maintaining a schedule and communicating that to managers, relevant colleagues, and family, is crucial to keeping that healthy balance (Limón, 2020). A solid schedule dictates the hours when you should and should not be working and further builds the boundary between work and life (Hope, 2020). All these practices aim to make working from home better for the employee and their family.

After family, team collaboration comes next in priority. Humans need some level of social interaction and a stronger co-worker relationship is built when team members know each other on a more personal level. Meeting and working with a team in person prior to working remotely garners more successful remote collaboration later (Hunter, 2019). The use of co-

working spaces allows remote workers the option to work in a shared space for team-based projects and tasks and addresses social isolation and team collaboration. Having these in-person spaces built for team collaboration gives employees the option to meet in a shared space when needed. Team building exercise alleviate some of the feelings of physical separation and build co-worker relations. Work relationship quality is more closely tied to relational closeness rather than physical proximity (Abrams, 2019). Personal connections among employees boost the team connection, so providing ways to facilitate conversations and idea sharing among colleagues is important. Building trust and work relationships through collaboration and work activities also relieves some of the disadvantages of remote collaboration and can bring relationship quality up to in person levels. Tasks like determining goals, team roles, and communication methods when the team is formed improves team effectiveness (Abrams, 2019). Having cross-functional teams with clear goals keeps everyone on the same course and improves team efficiency (Bick et al., 2020). Having these pre-determined plans for how and when to communicate and sharing leadership rather than having a traditional leader improves team performance when teams cannot be in regular face-to-face contact (Abrams, 2019). Furthermore, shifting leadership functions to the team rather than one person makes a project easier to manage and allows members with expertise in certain areas to drive the problem solving (Abrams, 2019). Strong team collaboration is just one part to a successful atmosphere for employees to work and build relationships in.

Long-term plans for remote collaboration must adapt to cope with the shift away from communal breakrooms and other in-person conversational areas (Kazilbash, 2020). Professional, working relationships are important for getting work done together, but casual relationships are also important. Playing games, dedicating parts of meetings to non-work discussions, and virtual happy hours are some examples of such casual activities (Kazilbash, 2020). Casual check-in



meetings fill the gap for much needed social interaction with co-workers. Seeing others' faces, talking about how everyone is doing, and other topics not related to work boosts morale and reduces some of the feelings of isolation and monotony. For example, Cisco has added some creativity in the past to break up the monotony of work meetings by having a meeting wearing superhero masks. The lighthearted nature of the act caused everyone to laugh more and have a little fun while at work (Khetarpal, 2020). Also, an e-commerce company called Flipkart, encourages parents to bring their kids to greet colleagues during meetings. It makes the kids feel happy and involved and creates a stronger personal connection among colleagues (Khetarpal, 2020). Employee mental health and good work relationships are integral to having a productive and positive work force.

Being mindful of company cyber security and technological capabilities are also very important. With so many external devices connecting to an organization's network, many security vulnerabilities arise. Strong security policies for employees need to be developed and investing in strong network security is highly recommended. For example, a Chinese insurance company called Ping An, addressed the issue with confidentiality culture, mandating training, and limiting data access to a need-to-know basis. Ping An uses watermarks on customer data and other sensitive information so any leaks are easily traceable (Bick et al., 2020). Other companies like Alibaba even have their own software for network and device security (Bick et al., 2020). Enforcing secure working policies for employees such as phishing training, data confidentiality, and ensuring employees have adequate technology increases data security and keeps the organization productive.

At the base of any successful remote work program is the right technology. Using the available technology correctly is crucial to having productive employees and facilitates quality

communication between team members. Having the proper technology at home to perform job duties is necessary, either supplied by an organization's IT department or purchase by the employee with possible reimbursement. Many office workers are accustomed to multiple or large monitor setups in the office, so just a laptop or single screen setup at home might not be sufficient (Limón, 2020). Some employees might not be able to afford the required technology, so a technology reimbursement policy is strongly recommended. Supplying the technology is only half of the issue, the available technology must be used correctly as well. Making proper use of communication technology like Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Slack, etc. in junction with good quality network connections and webcams greatly improves everyone's experience. The easier it is for employees to communicate, the more productive they are, and the less isolated they will feel (Bick et al., 2020). In addition to existing technologies, new technologies must be considered to improve communication and work success. Use of 5G, Wi-Fi 6, new VPNs, and new videoconferencing calls makes for better quality communication and team collaboration (Kazilbash, 2020).

When combined where applicable, all these recommendations make for increased productivity, worker morale, team collaboration, remote work preparedness, technological capability, and security. Furthermore, companies and employees can save money from having at least a partial remote workforce. Work from home is not one size fits all and will not replace in-office work in every industry, but it is becoming very prevalent in the modern work climate and must be considered to remain competitive.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Throughout this past decade, working remotely has seen a large increase in demand and improvement in public reception. Employers and employees are beginning to fully realize the

benefits working from home can have for them. In recent years, this is in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic forcing a massive remote work experiment with social distancing and closed offices. This experiment forced people to realize that remote work is a viable alternative to office work, and it comes with real benefits.

While there are many benefits to both workers and companies, there are drawbacks to consider as well. Remote programs done correctly result in better employee quality of life, worker autonomy, flexible work schedules, and increased productivity. Employers also benefit from cost savings from real estate reduction, expanded hiring potential, and crisis preparedness. However, remote programs done incorrectly result in poor employee work-life balance, blurring of work and life boundaries, decline in worker mental health, and more difficulties in team collaboration. Additionally, technical issues and increased security risks are possible. These drawbacks are mostly solvable with solid policies, but there is a current lack of general guiding policies and standards.

Without government or industry standards to guide remote policy, information for remote success is currently scattered and makes it difficult to form successful work from home programs. Many factors must be considered when forming a remote work policy. Work culture must shift to accommodate less face-to-face contact, rethink performance evaluation, offer flexible schedules to remain competitive in hiring, and develop standard policies. Employees must follow standards to be successful as well. Employees must create their own routines, boundaries, and social connections with family and co-workers. Extra effort is also needed for teams to collaborate effectively and the technology required to communicate must be supplied by the organization. Lastly, technological and security needs need to be accommodated to ensure employees can fulfill their work duties and new holes in network security do not arise.

Remote work is becoming a large contender in the modern work industry and its benefits must be considered if companies wish to remain competitive. Remote work has its benefits and drawbacks, but as an enhancement to in person work with flexible work schedules, there are only benefits.

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