

## POST PANDEMIC REMOTE WORKFORCES

As businesses start to re-open, many are contemplating a longer term, post pandemic standard of allowing employees to work from home. Google has raised the possibility of a permanent shift in workplace policy that would see remote work as the new norm. Many others are following suit.

Google initially planned for its remote work arrangement to end June 1<sup>st</sup>, but has now extended that deadline to the end of the year, at minimum. Facebook is also allowing remote work to continue for the remainder of the year. Twitter and Shopify have both announced they will allow work from home arrangements to continue indefinitely.

A recent Statistics Canada survey found that 4.7 million Canadians who do not usually work from home did so during the last week of March. When you include the people already working from home, four in ten Canadians were working from home that week.

### Potential Upside of Remote Work

Businesses are recognizing that it's not necessary for people to be in the office, dressed in business attire, to be productive or meet the bottom line. There may be some advantages to a smaller or non-existent office space.

Advocates of remote work say that it encourages work/life balance, can result in higher productivity, and increased employee satisfaction, loyalty and engagement. For employers, overhead and office costs may be reduced, and the ability to attract talent may be increased.

Work from home eliminates an employee's commute, freeing up time for personal and family life and reducing the potential stress caused by commuting. It may also enable employees to work more efficiently as time spent chatting with colleagues or at unnecessary meetings is greatly reduced.

Potential candidates may be more inclined to work for organizations that offer work from home options. Remote work may also expand an employer's candidate base by attracting candidates who live outside of the business's local area.

Indirectly, there are a number of other benefits of remote work. There are positive environmental impacts resulting from fewer people driving to/from work. There are also lower accident rates due to reduced traffic. Additionally, there are more options for where employees live since the location of their home is not as directly tied to their place of work.

## Potential Disadvantages of Remote Work

Working from home comes with a stigma around how much work an employee is actually performing away from the office. Other concerns with remote work include feelings of isolation experienced by some employees. Those who thrive on in person interactions and office culture may struggle. Recognition and interest in promotions also comes into play. Working remotely may not provide the opportunity for an employee to showcase their work or catch their supervisor's attention.

Remote work may also lead to employees not shutting off from work – the practice of leaving the office at quitting time becomes challenging when an employee isn't physically leaving the office. This extension of hours and blurring of boundaries between work and family life may be unwelcome by some employees and may lead to burnout.

From a logistics perspective, the number of people suddenly working from home has placed pressure on networks and secure servers that do not have the bandwidth to handle the number of employees logging on at the same time. In addition to technology challenges, not all employees have optimal work spaces, leaving them to set up office in their kitchens, living rooms or bedrooms, which may not be sustainable from a functional or ergonomic perspective.

Remote work also dampens spontaneity. Some of the best ideas come about informally. An impromptu brainstorming session in the lunchroom or stopping by someone's desk with an idea isn't possible in a remote work situation. These types of interactions are less likely with video conferencing, and it is even less likely that individuals will call or Zoom someone with a spur of the moment idea.

## A Hybrid Approach

Pre-pandemic, IBM, Yahoo, and Best Buy, amongst others, reversed work from home policies. In IBM's case, company profits had fallen, and news reports indicated that leadership felt that employees would be more productive working onsite. Further, these employers may not have provided remote workers with proper or sufficient training and resources to be productive at home. Supervisors may not have received training for managing and monitoring remote workers. Or, as Yahoo claimed, it just wasn't the right model for them at that time.

Despite the challenges, a number of employers continue to offer employees a blend of working at the office and from home, splitting their time between locations. The mix of working from home and the office provides both the social interaction and uninterrupted focus time benefitting both employers and employees. Post pandemic, this hybrid model may be the path employers return to, or implement, to take advantage of the benefits offered by both models.

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## QUESTIONS?

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## SOURCES

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