New Survey Shows How Attitudes about Working From Home Are Changing

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Initially after the COVID-19 pandemic hit, corporate employees nationwide were forced to pivot from working in an office to working from home. The good news is, the adjustment period in the majority of cases was short and relatively painless. Most technical challenges were quickly overcome by identifying the right app or piece of hardware that would ensure productivity as we physically separated from our usual office tools and colleagues. Security issues were also expediently addressed.

Now, with several months of home office experience under our belts, the question looms how will this successful "roll out" of the work-from-home model impact company protocols moving forward, and how radically will the traditional office environment shift as corporate America slowly reopens for business.

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The answer has come easily for some major companies. First out of the gate was Twitter who announced it wouldn't be reopening its offices until September 2020 and was giving its employees the choice on whether to go back in when it does, or simply stay home working remotely. Facebook soon followed suit, offering its employees the opportunity to work from home on a

permanent basis.

Our company was interested in taking the pulse of work-from-home employees. How did they feel about working from home? Were they ready to return to the office, or would they rather stick with remote access? Using the services of Survey Monkey, our company polled 1,082 US-based remote workers between the ages of 18 – 65 about their work-from-home experiences and how they felt about eventually returning to the office when restrictions were lifted.

We made sure to survey a wide array of employees, polling everyone from staff and clerical workers, up through managerial levels, all the way up to senior managers, C-suite occupants, as well as company CEOs.

While opinions were mixed in some areas, mostly relative to the importance of face-to-face communications with colleagues, certain trends did emerge that suggest that employers will be facing a revolution of sorts when they soon re-open their company doors.

Let’s explore some of the dominant trends.

Employees are wary about returning to the office

Of those polled, 38% claimed they were nervous about returning to work and were waiting anxiously to see what safety modifications would be put in place. An additional 6% feared their company would force them to do so, even if they wished to stay remote.

There’s genuine concern about what practices will be adopted to make employees safer while at work, and how those practices might affect both comfort and productivity. Concepts like alternating workforce shifts, re-designing the open-office concept, modifying HVAC air circulation and the use of meeting

rooms are all areas of consternation.

Many report being more productive working remotely

39% of our survey respondents found that they are more productive working remotely. And a large number (42%) said that in the future work-from-home will eventually replace physical offices. While this might at first seem wishful and prescient thinking, the remote model has been working for a number of start-ups ventures for years now. It’s indeed interesting that the office managers who were happy to embrace open-office layouts and bring-your-own-device policies have been so reluctant to adopt a work-from-your-own-space reality.

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Those who reported NOT feeling more productive while working from home pinned the blame on not having the same resources available (21%) and too many distractions in the form of kids and chores (17%).

Despite many employees feeling they’re just as if not more productive at home, our survey highlighted at least one clear role the office plays: enabling and fostering connections between coworkers. A significant 60% of survey respondents reported finding it difficult to maintain work relationships while working remotely, and 28% said they missed interacting with coworkers face-to-face, despite being more productive at home.

Generational and job position divides

Interestingly, many of the responses did not reflect typical

assumptions about the different age groups.

For example, younger respondents (18-29), who are generally considered to be technophiles, were more likely to say that remote work would **not** replace physical offices (41%), while their older, and presumably more technophobic colleagues (45-60) were more likely to say that it would (45%).

Another interesting divide: Senior-level employees reported feeling less stressed and taking a greater number of breaks throughout the day than did their junior-level counterparts. Senior-level managers also said they are more productive at home compared to clerical and staff employees who reported not having remote access to the resources they need to be effective.

Takeaways

The traditional office as we once knew it is no more. The COVID-19 pandemic was a catalyst for many societal sea changes and on the jobs front, remote work suddenly proved itself to be a far more viable option than corporations had ever considered it.

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While in-person office work will continue to have its place moving forward in the post COVID world, the open office/cube farm real estate model will have to undergo significant and costly changes in order to make conditions safe. A fusion of remote and in-person work will become the new normal, particularly as businesses reassess the wisdom of carrying expensive leases during an economic downturn.

Does your business have a strategy for workspace options once it’s time to re-open?

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