

SHOULD YOU LET REMOTE EMPLOYEES STAY REMOTE LONG-TERM?



BY ERNIE SMITH / MAY 15, 2020
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Not everyone will want to rush back to your office the minute it reopens. Here are a few things to consider as you decide whether to extend a work-from-home option beyond the immediate COVID-19 emergency.

There's an obvious question being asked at the moment by many organizations that sent people home to work two months ago: Should we let all (or at least some) of these newly remote workers *stay* remote?

Some people thrive working in an office environment and may be eager to return. Many others may find the flexibility of working in a place where they feel comfortable and safe difficult to give up. As you start to think through your plan for reopening your office, here are some considerations that could influence your decisions about ongoing remote work:

Some employees like working from home more than others.

The response to remote work varies: Some employees love it, while others can't wait to get back to the office. But those who like it *really* like it: In a recent Gallup poll, 59 percent of respondents said they'll likely want to work remotely more often after the current crisis is over. "These fans of online work worry that they—and the country itself—will lose important benefits discovered during this unprecedented experiment in mass remote work," Maria Cramer and Mihir Zaveri wrote for the *New York Times*. "People who have never liked schmoozing with colleagues have found new heights of productivity away from meetings and office chitchat."

People working at home are only slightly less productive. A recent study [PDF] from the research and services firm Valoir found a 1 percent decrease in productivity, on average, among remote employees, and a 2 percent decrease among employees with children. Those who worked without anyone else in the house were 3 percent less productive. What's behind the modest decrease? The Valoir report suggests that it's social media, which may distract workers as much as two hours a day. But they tend to be spending more time at their desks to make up for it, about 9.75 hours per day. And the report notes that distractions would be an issue at the office as well. "Many workers said that remote work enabled them to reduce day-to-day distractions around the office including boss and coworker interruptions," the report stated.

Long-term remote work will require long-term adjustments by workers and employers. Making remote work permanent will require some mindset and policy shifts, writes *Forbes* contributor Enrique Dans. "For workers, it means understanding that the future will not simply involve balancing a laptop on your knees while sitting at the sofa, or clearing a space at the kitchen table, but redesigning the home to allocate an area to work, or not assuming, for example, that children will always be home," Dans writes. "For companies, it involves creating appropriate methodologies, using certain technologies—not necessarily those made under pressure at the beginning of confinement proves to be the best option—launching training for the workforce, or even considering covering some of the costs involved, from connectivity to the necessary infrastructure, which can go beyond just a laptop."

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