

Working Remotely Is Here to Stay



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The COVID-19 pandemic has not only reshaped the world around us, but also our lives. Even after the pandemic is gone, many of these changes are expected to stay with us to some extent. Among them is our more vigorous embrace of remote work.

The **employees** who in the last year switched from office work to remote work, mostly from home, have undergone profound changes in not only how and where they do their job, but also how they balance work with private life. Many of them report being happier now with their new work-life balance. They claim to be more productive at their work and more satisfied with the relationship they have with the employer. Also, they report having more time with their spouse and children.

On the other hand, employees reminisce about the daily commute to work, when they had time to reflect on their lives, read a newspaper, or grab a latte from a coffee shop. They also hanker for day-to-day social interactions, like stepping out for lunch with co-workers or clients. Some still miss daily dress-ups and makeup application. For others, the current situation is saving time and resources. Still, one must not forget the benefits of human interaction and being physically active – aspects that are lost during the pandemic.

At the end of the day, most office employees want to keep working remotely, at least one day a week, even if this means a challenging blurred line between work and social life at home. However, striking a balance between office and remote work seems to be the most optimal path for many employees. Such an attitude is a signal to employers and policymakers. Some are ahead of the others in addressing this new expectation from the employees.

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The **employers** are aware that the work environment is much more than a computer and a desk. Hence, many of them provide office equipment to their employees working remotely and proactively address technical, security, and privacy challenges of creating the work environment, interactions, and archives that would be as digital as possible.

With the application of remote work, the employer's duty of care – in relation to providing a safe place of work that extends to an employee's home if that is her place of work – does not extinguish. At the same time, employers are challenged with identifying practical and pragmatic solutions for not only managing employees' critical



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skills, resources, and their contacts with colleagues, customers, and other partners, but also for oversight over employees who work remotely. For many employers, this moment is an opportunity to, on the one hand, improve the employee experience, and, on the other hand, to increase flexibility and agility of the organization or the business. Consequently, many employers have started to revise their internal policies on communication, interaction, and workflow while emphasizing building a culture of trust within the organization.

Finally, to address this new perspective on a balanced office-remote work, the **policy-makers and legislators** are called upon to make changes to the nation's legal frameworks. Not every country is like Finland, which already has a remote work law. Other governments are playing catch-up, as they draft and debate bills on remote work and flexible working hours. The provisions in those bills are not only about how many days in a week an employee works remotely, but also what equipment the employer is legally bound to provide, what expense

claims the employee is entitled to, and how to address the health and safety considerations of an employee. However, it can take years for such bills to become law. For this reason, employers are advised to take their own steps in setting up company policies and guidelines on remote work.

Working remotely is here to stay. It is on us to find the best path forward to build a better environment for further reinforcing its advantages, and at the same time remedying its drawbacks.



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