Working remotely two to three days a week, the best option

Only 12% of workers want to work remotely every day. And when working remotely an optimal two to three times a week, employees' productivity and work quality are boosted by almost 20%.



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- **Only 12% of workers say that they would like to work remotely all the time and a mere 4% would like to work in the office every day.**
- **Working remotely two to three days a week increases performance by almost 20% on those days.**
- **Working from home reduces commuting stress by up to 63% but increases social isolation by up to 15%.**

Contrary to popular belief, only 12% of employees want to work remotely every day. This data point helps bust one of the great working myths which had gained traction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's one of many data points collected for "A Sustainable Work Model: Towards Remote and in-the-Office Work," produced by IESE Business School and the consultancy Savills Aguirre Newman. Led by professor Mireia Las Heras and coauthored by researcher María Barraza (both of IESE), the report draws on the work of collaborators Charo Sáez and Leyre Octavio de Toledo (both of Savills Aguirre Newman) as well as Júlia Gifra (of IESE). The goal is to offer a balanced look at the benefits and drawbacks of working remotely, taking on six myths that surround it and looking closer at employees' realities.

Myth #1: Everyone wants to work remotely all the time.

Only 12% of workers surveyed want to work remotely every day. Of this group, most are women (64%) with an average age of 39. Most are married or have a steady partner (70%), most have children (58%) and most have been working at their company for four years or more (56%). Among their reasons for wanting to work remotely every day, the top three cited are: to take better care of their families (61%), to save money by not commuting (48%) and to have time for a sport or hobby (48%).

At the other extreme are those who never want to telework, a mere 4% of the survey sample. The majority of them (61%) say they lack the means to carry out their work from home, while more than half say they prefer to be close to their team in the office (54%).

The reality is that most prefer something in the middle: working from home three days a week (the choice of 36%), followed by two days a week (the choice of another 32%) and then four days a week (9%). Contrary to expectations, age does not seem to play a role in employees' preference for working at home or in the office, the survey found.

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Myth #2: Everyone can work remotely.

Not every job can be done from home. There are many that require an in-person presence, including personal care positions (like hairdressers or dentists) and others that require physical manipulation (like car mechanics or cleaners). As for jobs in which the affective-social component is extremely important (like teachers), or for those that require immediate cooperation (like team-sport players), they lose part of their added value if they are always carried out remotely.

What's more, to work effectively, support from bosses, colleagues and domestic partners are all crucial. Indeed, remote workers who have their supervisors' support are 16% more likely to proactively customize their work (job crafting) and to feel positive emotions on the job. At the same time, remote workers with their partners' support are 16% more likely to feel positive emotions on the job. Meanwhile, coworkers' support is especially important for employees' job crafting (a 20% difference) and for achieving flow (a 15% difference).

Myth #3: Performance is lower with remote work.

The data busts this myth. When people work remotely for two to three days a week, an increase in productivity (up to 19%) and quality of work (up to 18%) on those out-of-office days are reported. In addition, the survey finds an increase of up to 10% in employees' pride in belonging to their organization and up to 9% in their willingness to do what the company or its customers need. In reality, partial remote work increases workers' dedication and commitment to their jobs.

Myth #4: Remote work hinders innovation.

Meeting face-to-face with colleagues or sitting down to have a coffee or meal together can increase interaction and creativity, but they're not the only ways. The data show that for people who are generally highly creative working from home helps them be a bit more innovative than being in the office (3% more for men, 1% more for women). That said, the opposite effect occurs for those who are generally not very creative: being in the office boosts innovation for them (5% more for men, 2% more for women). Therefore, it's not remote work in itself that facilitates or hinders innovation.

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Myth #5: There's no point to meeting in person. Everything can be done remotely.

Some of the most valuable aspects of meetings, according to employees, are eye contact (86%), efficacy in decision-making (83%), empathy (79%) and creativity (77%). Although most of these aspects seem to be achieved more easily in face-to-face meetings, efficacy is an exception: reaching 68% in online meetings, compared to 59% in face-to-face meetings. Perhaps this is why almost half of the employees (46%) prefer to carry out some, but only up to a quarter (1 to 25%), of their meetings in person. Meanwhile, only 2% want all of their meeting to be face-to-face.

In which meetings is physical presence deemed most important? Sales meetings with customers are ranked first (in 80% of cases), followed by innovation/co-creation meetings with colleagues (75%). At the other end of the spectrum, follow-up calls with clients (4%), routine work (8%), drawing up reports/presentations (9%) and studying issues in depth (17%) are rarely considered to require face-to-face time in the office.

Myth #6: Lots of time is wasted at the office.

In studies carried out by IESE and other institutions prior to the pandemic, there were no significant differences found in the number of effective hours worked per day remotely (7.50 hours in an IESE study) and in the office (7.42 hours). The reality is that the benefits of working remotely depend greatly upon an individual's capacity for self-management. That is, when out-of-office days are no more than 40% of the month's total, people who display a strong capacity for self-management clearly benefit more from remote work than those who lack it. According to the survey, strong self-managers experience more "pride of belonging" (500% more), have more energy at work (120%), show more willingness to do what the company requires (100%), and do higher quality work (50%), as compared with their peers who seem to lack the capacity for self-management, as measured by their supervisors.

The report highlights that working from home reduces commuting stress by up to 63% and multitasking by up to 21%, while it increases happiness on the job by up to 10%. On the downside, it can increase social isolation by up to 15%. Furthermore, the absence of time shared in person limits the trust and cohesion usually created by working on teams by up to 11%.

In sum, the study concludes that the ideal amount of time to carry out work remotely is

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generally between 40% and 60% (two to three days of the workweek). Above all else, the key is to be flexible.

Guide to not getting lost in the remote work/office work mix

Methodology, very briefly

The report is based on four different studies that survey a combined 3,450 workers from 11 different countries at the end of their workday to find out about their experiences on that day. The results compile data on more than 15,000 working days.

MORE INFO

Download "Myths and realities about remote and office-based work".

Read business cases from the Metro de Madrid, Oracle Spain, Bayer Barcelona and the Spanish Association Against Cancer (AECC).

Download a series of tests to help assess how to better take advantage of remote work.

Download the full study: "A Sustainable Work Model: Towards Remote and in-the-Office Work".

Enjoy a series of three videos highlighting some myths about remote work.

For an updated version of this article, see: **A sustainable work model: two to three times a week, the best option.**



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