Working from Home: Lessons Learned Over the Past Year

A presentation of the Twin Cities Telework webinar series

Thursday, February 25, 2021
Agenda

▪ Telework along the I-494 corridor
▪ National attitudes toward telework
▪ Today’s challenges for teleworking
▪ Support for teleworkers
▪ Planning for the future
▪ Questions
Telework along the I-494 corridor

February 2021 Commuter Survey | February 1-15

- Distributed to 4,038 commuters
- 472 responses received
- 12 percent response rate
Telework along the I-494 corridor

- 65 percent of respondents are teleworking today, compared to 3 percent this time last year
- 48 percent of respondents think they will return to the worksite – at least part-time – in three to nine months
- 75 percent of teleworkers use computers provided by their employers; 53 percent use computer monitors provided by their employers
- 64 percent of teleworkers currently use their personal cell phone to conduct company business; 8 percent receive a monthly stipend for cell use
The pros and cons after nearly a year

Challenges to telework:

▪ Feelings of isolation: 44 percent
▪ Poor communication with coworkers: 38 percent
▪ Feeling stressed: 24 percent
▪ Helping children: 17 percent
▪ Poor communication with managers: 13 percent

Positives of telework:

▪ Saving time on the commute: 77 percent
▪ Saving money: 61 percent
▪ More time with family: 50 percent
▪ More productive: 40 percent
▪ Fewer distractions: 37 percent
National attitudes toward telework

- Extreme teleworking
- July is the new January
- Productivity
Telework during COVID-19

• Extreme teleworking ... not the normal situation for teleworking
• Everyone in the household under one roof
• Working
• Home schooling
• Providing childcare
• Cooking and baking
• Stressed by the pandemic
July or later is the new January: More companies delay return to the office

• From Ford to Microsoft, white-collar companies are increasingly extending working from home through summer.

• Target, Ford Motor and The New York Times said they, too, had postponed the return of in-person work to summer and acknowledged the inevitable: The pandemic isn’t going away anytime soon.

• Google was one of the first to announce that July 2021 was its return-to-office date.

• Uber, Slack and Airbnb soon jumped on the bandwagon.

• One year into the Covid-19 pandemic, Salesforce is rolling out plans to let employees work remotely on a permanent basis.

Executives are ready to ramp up return to the office in 2021; employees say not so fast

- Executives expect to return to the office faster than employees. By July, 75% of executives anticipate at least half of the office workforce will be back on-site. This compares with 61% of office workers, who expect to return to the office for at least half of their time by July.

- **Returning to the office won’t be simple.** The rollout of vaccines is raising confidence in returning to the hybrid office, but uncertainties remain about how to bring employees back safely, as well as how to align workforce scheduling with school re-openings or when to resume business travel.

- By January 2022 only 2% executives anticipate ever being at 50% capacity again, while 18% of employees anticipate not returning to 50% time.

Examples of Microsoft’s communication to employees

Excerpt summarized from Microsoft’s blog:

The pandemic has raised questions about what employees can expect in the future, so Microsoft has offered some guidance to employees on their thinking about work flexibility. Flexibility can mean different things, there is no one-size-fits-all solution given the variety of roles, work requirements and business needs.

Guidance includes:

- **Work site (the physical space where you work, e.g. office, center, home, mobile):** Recognize that some employees are required to be onsite, and some roles and businesses are better suited for working away from the worksite than others. However, for most roles, working from home part of the time (less than 50%) now standard – assuming manager and team alignment.

- **Work hours (the hours and days when employees work, e.g. workday start and end times, full- or part-time):** Work schedule flexibility is now considered standard for most roles. While part-time continues to be subject to manager approval, guidance is meant to facilitate an open conversation between a manager and employee regarding considerations.

- **Work location (the geographic location where you work, e.g. city and country):** Similarly, the guidance is there for managers and employees to discuss and address considerations such as role requirements, personal tax, salary, expenses, etc.
Key findings from Cisco’s October 2020 report

Nearly 9 of 10 workers say they want more flexibility and autonomy over where and when they work, according to new research from technology company Cisco Systems. Cisco Vice President Gordon Thomson told Reuters that companies must reconfigure how they operate to help meet the new demands of workers, prioritizing effective communication and collaboration.

Working from home: the new normal

- 58% will work 8 or more days each month from home (post-COVID)
- 98% of meetings will include participants joining from home (post-COVID)
- 98% share frustrations with video meetings when working from home
- 77% of larger organizations will increase work flexibility while 53% will shrink office sizes
- 89% of employees cite frustrations with in-office experiences

THE RISE OF THE HYBRID WORKPLACE A Global Survey of Executives, Employee Experience Experts, and Knowledge Workers

FlexJobs Survey, September 2020

51% of survey respondents indicate that they have been more productive working from home during COVID-19, and 95% of respondents say productivity has been higher or the same while working remotely.

- Fewer interruptions (68%)
- More focused time (63%)
- Quieter work environment (68%)
- More comfortable workplace (66%)
- Avoiding office politics (55%)

Many respondents also said that their personal lives have improved.
- 79% said not commuting was a reason why their lives were better
- 72% enjoying the lack of commuting costs

Given that 36% of respondents reported round trip commutes of two or more hours, it’s not surprising that the “found time” has made workers happier, more productive employees.

Another 73% said that they had a better work-life balance thanks to working at home. The additional balance gave them:
- More time with their family/children (46%)
- More time with their partner (42%)
- The ability to take care of their pet(s) (37%)

FlexJobs Survey, September 2020

- 65% of respondents want to become full-time remote employees post-pandemic, while 31% would prefer a hybrid work arrangement, with some of the days at home and some of the days in the office.

- Thirty percent of respondents aren’t waiting for the pandemic to end to make the switch. They’ve already requested to continue their remote work arrangement post-pandemic—and have been approved!

Today’s challenges to telework

- Mental health
- Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)
- Working parents
For all the positives that remote work has brought, there are people who miss the office. Specifically:

- 49% said they miss seeing their colleagues
- 14% stated that they miss water cooler chats
- 11% reporting they were lonely
- 7% cited “distracted” as a reason for missing the office
- 12% worried about the impact remote work would have on their career
- 20% of workers say they find it difficult to “unplug” when they work from home
- 37% of respondents said that they miss “nothing” about the office, and only 4% would prefer to return to the traditional office full-time

FlexJobs and Mental Health America Survey

Employed workers are more than three times as likely to report poor mental health now versus before the pandemic.

https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/flexjobs-mha-mental-health-workplace-pandemic/

*76% of surveyed workers are working remotely
FlexJobs and Mental Health America Survey

While only 51% of the surveyed workers say they have the emotional support they need at work to help manage their stress, they do believe there are ways employers can help staff navigate workplace stress and support mental health.

- For 56% of respondents, having flexibility in their workday was overwhelmingly listed as the top way their workplace could better support them.
- Encouraging time off and offering mental health days were tied for second and third at 43%.
- 28% felt that increased PTO and better health insurance were the next best ways to provide support.

https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/flexjobs-mha-mental-health-workplace-pandemic/
Seasonal Affective Disorder and Teleworking

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) impacts about 5 percent of adults in the United States, according to the American Psychiatric Association. It’s most prevalent in the fall and winter months; shorter days, less sunshine, and cold weather forcing people indoors is what typically leads to symptoms of SAD.

The Mayo Clinic says, “If you’re like most people with SAD, your symptoms start in the fall and continue into the winter months, sapping your energy and making you feel moody.”


https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20364651
Teleworking and SAD

Working remotely may allow flexibility with your schedule.

You can also avoid the temptation to eat unhealthy office snacks by filling your home with nutritious foods that can improve your mood.

You can add a lightbox to your home office to reduce SAD symptoms and increase your energy without distracting anyone else.

While working from home this winter can help make you more productive, it’s only effective if you stick to a consistent routine.

Tips on coping with SAD

“Instead of approaching this winter season with fear and trepidation and dread, we just need to prepare ourselves as much as possible,” says Jeff Gardere, board-certified clinical psychologist and associate professor at Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine in New York City.

- Wake up at a normal time
- Get some light
- Find a way to be comfortable outdoors
- Prep your indoors: Since you’re inside more than usual, it’s important that you “refashion your environment” to better suit your needs
- Exercise: No, really
- Find a hobby

In the Women in the Workplace study, conducted in partnership with LeanIn.Org, it was found that the effects of the COVID-19 crisis have exacerbated gender disparities and their implications for women at work, especially for mothers, female senior leaders, and Black women across America.

In addition to being laid off and furloughed at higher rates than their male counterparts during the pandemic, women are considering downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce altogether at staggering rates.

Many companies need to do more to address challenges employees are facing during COVID-19.

Consistent feelings at work in past few months, % of employees¹

¹Question: In the last few months, which of the following have you consistently felt at work?

Parents’ role

Impact of Covid-19 on parents' work routine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have had to modify my work routine to adapt to my caregiving responsibilities</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I work outside of core hours to balance other family responsibilities</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>55%</td>
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**CURRENT WORK ENVIRONMENT**

- Exclusively remote: 38%
- Mostly remote and going to a physical workplace on occasion: 24%
- Mostly in a physical workplace and working remotely on occasion: 12%
- Exclusively in a physical workplace: 26%

Of those working remotely in some capacity, 91% report that they spend time working from home as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

https://www.catalyst.org/research/impact-covid-working-parents/
Support for teleworkers

- Morale and collaboration
- Consider stipends
- Burnout and Zoom fatigue
What can managers do to support employees?

- Show empathy and be available
- Stay connected with communication and meeting tools
- Recognize the impact of isolation and loneliness
- Encourage online training: This is a great time to encourage employees to sharpen their skills with online training
- Check in with your Employee Assistance Program or HR to confirm their availability and to coordinate support for employees

Ideas to boost morale and collaboration

- Birthday celebrations
- Water cooler get togethers
- Virtual ice-breakers
- Virtual Town Hall and having a Q and A
- Weekly small group chats, communication weekly with company personnel
- Managers check in, happy hours, pet days, and more virtually
- T-shirts, Incentive PTO, remote worker games, weekly leadership team meetings, regular employee communications, saying thank you often and being visible

* Survey of over 150 executives, in-house attorneys, and HR professionals from clients of the law firm Blank Rome. The responses came from C-Suite executives, in-house attorneys, and human resources professionals from a diverse array of businesses across various industries and geographies conducted from April 18 to April 24, 2020.
Remote work stipends

A remote work stipend is a sum of money given to employees for them to use to access perks.

A remote work stipend can be used in one or both ways:

- To purchase office equipment, a coworking pass, coffee, and anything else that makes their remote work locations comfortable, productive, or successful. It can be a one-time equipment stipend, or an on-going one.
- To purchase general perks that an on-site team has access to such as food, health and wellness, learning and development perks.

https://www.compt.io/remote-work-stipends-perks
Remote work stipends

Further details on what they are:

- Stipends can be given out on a monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, or annual basis.
- It is comprised of taxable and non-taxable items. Taxes can be grossed up by the employer or employees can cover the taxes.

When setting up a remote work stipend, there are two approaches:

- You can set up a stipend to help them build their remote work environment; or
- You can set up a general perk stipend that gives your team access to personalized perks. If you’re a hybrid company, you can craft this type of stipend so that you support your remote people and on-site people equally.

https://www.compt.io/remote-work-stipends-perks
Red flag warnings of Work from Home fatigue

Burnout Red Flag #1: Avoiding Work

Burnout Red Flag #2: Declining Performance

Burnout Red Flag #3: Apathy or Exhaustion

Burnout Red Flag #4: Inability to Disconnect

Burnout busters

- **Set Office Hours**: Implement office hours by silencing notifications and activating an out-of-office response outside of certain time blocks.

- **Take Time Off**: A little counteraction goes a long way.

- **Have a Hobby**

- **Update Your Job Description**: If you’re feeling stuck in a rut, steer yourself out of it.

- **Tell Your Team**: Hiding your concerns will only make them worse.

Why are video calls so draining?

In part, it’s because they force us to focus more intently on conversations in order to absorb information.

The problem isn’t helped by the fact that video calls make it easier than ever to lose focus.

“Zoom fatigue” stems from how we process information over video. On a video call the only way to show we’re paying attention is to look at the camera.

If we are with several people online at the same time, we are simultaneously processing visual cues from all of those people in a way we never have to do around a conference table.

https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-to-combat-zoom-fatigue
## Techniques to combat Zoom fatigue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Take</th>
<th>Take a few moments before clicking “Start” to settle and ground your attention.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take</td>
<td>Take the time to truly greet whoever is in the room with your full attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce</td>
<td>Reduce onscreen stimuli.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose</td>
<td>Choose “speaker view.” In Zoom, one can choose Speaker View or Gallery View, you might opt for Speaker View so that the one person who is speaking has more of your attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block</td>
<td>Block self-view feature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resist</td>
<td>Resist the urge to multitask. Try to take measured breaks between sessions. Build in breaks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make</td>
<td>Make virtual social events opt-in.</td>
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[https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-to-combat-zoom-fatigue](https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-to-combat-zoom-fatigue)
[https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/351091#:~:text=To%20combat%20the%20Zoom%20fatigue,smoothly%20as%20the%20last%20one.](https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/351091#:~:text=To%20combat%20the%20Zoom%20fatigue,smoothly%20as%20the%20last%20one.)
Techniques to combat Zoom fatigue

<table>
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<th>Switch</th>
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<tr>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>For external calls, avoid defaulting to video, especially if you don’t know each other well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create</td>
<td>Create an itinerary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switch up</td>
<td>Switch up your set up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remind</td>
<td>Remind yourself periodically that this is a new place between presence and absence that we will have to learn how to accommodate as we go forward into the uncertain future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let</td>
<td>Let’s see if we can simultaneously refrain from high expectations without dismissing the clear benefits of online communication.</td>
</tr>
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https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-to-combat-zoom-fatigue
https://www.mindful.org/zoom-exhaustion-is-real-here-are-six-ways-to-find-balance-and-stop-connecting/
https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/351091#:~:text=To%20combat%20the%20Zoom%20fatigue%2C%20smoothly%20as%20the%20last%20one.

Let's see if we can simultaneously refrain from high expectations without dismissing the clear benefits of online communication.

Remind yourself periodically that this is a new place between presence and absence that we will have to learn how to accommodate as we go forward into the uncertain future.

Switch up your set up.

Create an itinerary.

For external calls, avoid defaulting to video, especially if you don’t know each other well.

Switch to phone calls or email.
Planning for the future

- Policies and contracts
- Program guidelines
- Stay on top of trends
The next thoughtful steps

- Develop formal standards for teleworking post pandemic
- Develop return to the workplace guidelines
- Remember that the future is hybrid in location, hours and geography
- Consider a stipends program for the acquisition of ergonomic tools for the home office
- Remember that not all employees will want to be remote all the time
- A one size fits all will not accommodate work in the future
- Consider hoteling if it makes sense
- Think about a sustainable future in the sense of office productivity and an environmental perspective
Are contracts, policies or guidelines necessary?

Yes!

- To be safe
- To accommodate large numbers to telework
- To not fall into the legal pitfalls
- To be transparent
- To make sure the solution works and continues after Covid-19
What are some important legalities to consider?

- Wage and hour laws
- Workers’ compensation
- Occupational Safety and Health Act
- American Disabilities Act
- Family and Medical Leave Act
- Discrimination and retaliation issues

Are any of these a show-stopper? No. They have not been.
Develop program guidelines

- Worker’s compensation and liability
- Available resources
- Technology
- Insurance
- Workspace
- Non-telecommuters
- Goals
- Selection criteria
- Arrangements
- Frequency and Scheduling Issues
- Communication needs
EMBRACING REMOTE WORK

The COVID-19 outbreak led to a surge in remote work, but indications are that the practice will remain popular with companies after the pandemic is over.

- 82% of company leaders intend to permit remote work at least some of the time.
- 47% intend to allow employees to work remotely full time.
- 36% say they’re willing to hire workers who are 100 percent remote and live anywhere in the U.S. or internationally. (Just 12 percent were receptive to that approach before the pandemic.)

Sources: Gartner Inc.; The Conference Board.

SHRM: Several major trends will ripple through companies until at least 2025

More employees will work from home.

The world should start returning to “normal” in 2021 as the COVID-19 vaccine is distributed. The new normal won’t include nearly as many office workers commuting daily to a company facility. A large majority — 82 percent — of executives say they intend to let employees work remotely at least part of the time, according to a survey by Gartner Inc., a Stamford, Conn.-based research and advisory firm. Nearly half — 47 percent — say they will allow employees to work remotely full time.

Workers will demand better treatment for themselves and their communities from their employers.

Thousands of workers at companies such as McDonald’s, Target and Amazon, as well as at numerous hospitals, staged strikes this year to protest unsafe working conditions amid the pandemic.

Such actions followed two years of employee demonstrations over various issues — though not pay — signaling that employees expected more from their employers. Last year, Amazon employees walked out over the company’s climate policies, while Wayfair workers left company facilities over sales of furniture to immigrant detention centers in the U.S.

Overall, work stoppages totaled 25 last year, more than triple the amount in 2017, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

SHRM: Several major trends will ripple through companies until at least 2025

Technology’s rapid transformation will continue, forcing companies to rethink how to integrate people with machines.

The pandemic forced employers to adopt more digital and automated solutions practically overnight, as organizations sought to severely limit—or end—human interaction to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

The McKinsey study found that 85 percent of companies accelerated the digitization of their businesses, while 67 percent sped up their use of automation and artificial intelligence. Nearly 70 percent of executives say they plan to hire more people for automation roles, while 45 percent expect to increase hiring for positions involving digital learning and agile working.
Telework resources through Commuter Services

- A copy of the February 2021 Commuter Survey
- Commuter telework resources
- Employer telework resources
- Twin Cities Telework webinar series
- Coming soon: Twin Cities Telework website
- Coming soon: Twin Cities Telework newsletter
Questions

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