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WORK FROM HOME

Does Working From Home Actually Work?

Studies suggest remote working could be the solution both employers and employees had been looking for



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Vaibhav Joshi

ENTREPRENEUR STAFF

Features Writer, Entrepreneur Asia-Pacific

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‘Working from home’ conjures up different images in different peoples’ minds. For employees, it’s a dream situation, a restful day spent in the comfort of their own home without the boss breathing down their neck. Employers view it more as a nightmare, picturing no work getting done as employees while away the day watching TV. So the question remains, is working from home a viable option? Science has its say.

Does It Actually Help?

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How does working from home impact employee productivity? Stanford professor Nicholas Bloom and his team attempted to provide an answer in their March 2013 paper entitled ‘Does Working from Home Work? Evidence from a Chinese Experiment’. The subject of their research was Chinese travel agency CTrip, where call centre employees who volunteered were randomly assigned to work from home or in the office for 9 months.

Bloom revealed in his findings that remote working led to a 13 per cent increase in performance, with a 9 per cent rise in minutes per shift and a 4 per cent increase in calls per minute (attributed to a quieter working environment). Home workers also reported improved work satisfaction, experienced less turnover and took fewer breaks and sick days.

The success of the experiment prompted CTrip to offer the remote working option to the whole firm and allowed the experimental employees to re-select between the home or office. Over half of them switched, leading to gains almost doubling to 22 per cent. This highlights the benefits of learning and selection effects when adopting modern management practices like WFH.

Similar research was carried out by Flex+Strategy Group in which 595 full-time FSG employees were surveyed. It revealed that remote working actually improves

communication, creativity, productivity, and engagement when employees are properly trained in how to operate in a work from home situation.

“Organizations that blame flexibility for their performance challenges risk missing out on the very business gains they’re trying to achieve,” said flexible workplace strategist Cali Williams Yost, CEO of the Flex+Strategy Group in a press release. “The flexibility is not the problem. It’s that organizations don’t know how to use the flexibility and remote work strategically to transform their business.”

No Office=No Stress? Not Quite

Having established the benefits of remote working, it’s important for organisations to identify which employees would thrive in this situation. Most employees would view working from home as the opportunity to work stress-free, but recent research conducted by researchers at Baylor University suggests otherwise. Published in *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* in June 2018, their study looks at the impact of remote work on employee well-being and offers several options to tailor remote working opportunities to be as useful to the organisation as possible.

"Any organization, regardless of the extent to which people work remotely, needs to consider the wellbeing of their employees as they implement more flexible working practices," the researchers wrote. They studied 403 working adults, measuring their autonomy (the level of a worker's independence), strain (defined in this study as exhaustion, disengagement, and dissatisfaction) and emotional stability.

“If something stressful happens at work, a person who is high on emotional stability would take it in stride, remain positive and figure out how to address it. A person low on emotional stability might get frustrated and discouraged, expending energy with those emotions instead of on the issue at hand," explained lead author Sara Perry in a press release.

The research found that working from home seemed to suit those employees reporting high levels of autonomy and emotional stability the best, with employees reporting high levels of job autonomy with lower levels of emotional stability appearing to be

more susceptible to strain. Apparently working from home isn't the stress-free mini-vacation it seems!

Simply put, an employee that gets easily stressed out at work is more likely to get stressed out at work as well, which is why managers need to make sure to make adequate resources available to them if the need arises for them to work from home. On the other hand, emotionally stable employees were much more suitable candidates for work from home opportunities.

Work From Home Is Here To Stay

Whether your company embraces it or not, remote working is growing at a remarkable rate. A study released by Switzerland-based serviced office provider IWG in May 2018 found that 70 per cent of professionals work remotely at least one day a week, while 53 per cent work remotely for at least half of the week.

"If you offer workers the chance to work where they need to be, and not where they are told to go to, it completely transforms their view of the company, they are more productive," said IWG Chief Executive Mark Dixon in an interview to CNBC. "If they can work at an office near to where they live or near to where they need to be, it's totally transformational."

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