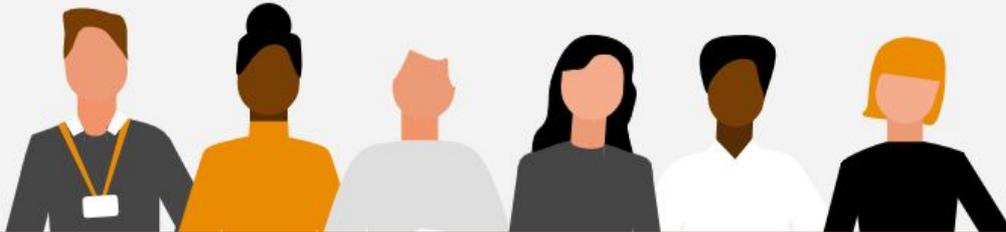


Trends & market insights



PwC Saratoga research: The realities of virtual working

The world has changed and employees are having to embrace virtual working whether they are ready or not. Whilst the cost benefits and productivity gains are visible, we explore the long term impacts.

- Whilst we have proved that we can be 'productive' whilst working virtual, are we losing the magic
- **Senior leaders** are taking the burden and not necessarily getting the same level of support
- We **can't go backwards** so we need to get practical on managing aspects of virtual working
- **Understanding diversity** is more important than ever to truly unlock the benefits for everyone

““ *Feels like we are all in this together...*

““ *I miss that time when you need to get together - to brainstorm something or bang something out together...*

““ *I feel very isolated, I feel very low...*

84%

of employees feel able to **perform their role** just as effectively when working remotely

82%

of line managers feel able to maintain a good routine and **healthy work-life balance whilst only 69%** of senior leaders feel the same

30%

of managers believe they have lost a sense of '**connectedness**' within their teams and **38%** of employees missed human interaction

39%

of senior leaders do not agree that they are **recognised for doing things** well whilst working remotely

PwC Saratoga research: The “magic” is harder to find

The most complex business problems often can't be solved alone. They require collaboration and creativity to bring different perspectives together. Whilst we now know that working from home can be an effective way to get the basic jobs done, there is a risk of becoming siloed and losing our 'mojo' to solve big problems.



Silo working

Whilst many report being able to focus on tasks better working from home, far more report missing human interaction and and face to face connections with colleagues and teams.

“Video calls cannot fully recreate informal face to face interactions...”



Collaboration and creativity is harder

1 in 4 employees do not agree that they are delivering the same level of customer service. Many comments reference struggling with true collaboration in a remote environment which may stop us delivering to our more complex customers or clients.

“There is nothing like the value of facetime and face to face workshops...”



Connectedness can be found

73% of employees still feel connected with their teams, this reduces slightly with seniority. We know that people are finding unique ways to connect with teams which is providing a united response, however beyond COVID-19, this would likely change.

“Feels like we are all in this together...”

We're unlikely to see a return to people simply turning up to an office to sit together. In the future, we need to think about picking the moments when you really need a small number of people to come together to solve a specific problem. We'll also need to consider how we create the right engaging and immersive experiences online to bring to life the culture of an organisation for the virtual world.

42% Report missing human interaction whilst working remotely

“We can do our jobs remotely... but it's more in our DNA to talk things out face to face”

“Virtual working impedes creative process and harder to run interactive working”

10% Report finding it easier to focus whilst working remotely

“Being able to work in silence with no office chatter aids focused work.”

PwC Saratoga research: The new normal: we can't go backwards

Virtual working allows companies to offer their employees more flexibility and give them more control over their daily schedule. Having truly unlocked the power of virtual working, we're now not only going to have to work out how to manage it but re-create our EVP to harness its value.



The personal upside

There is almost unanimous agreement on the benefits of remote working, including greater flexibility, no commuting and more free time as a result. This is contributing positively to employee wellbeing

"Saving 3 hours per day by not commuting which allows me to exercise more and spend more time with the kids..."



Practical issues

If we move to virtual working on a permanent basis, a number of practical issues need to be addressed. 18% of employees mentioned issues such as failing technology, ergonomics and space as the things they liked least about remote working

"Backache..."

"Lack of ideal 'workspace' equipment..."



The strategic opportunity

This situation came about through crisis - but as companies plan for the future, they should consider how they can harness the strategic value of virtual working.

"Even though we officially always work flexibly, you're still expected to be in the office... At home, I can fully work flexibly...whatever works for me..."

With virtual working likely to continue in some format for the foreseeable future, we need to rethink entirely the bio-rhythms that would work in this new world. This means doing something radical that not only supports the reconfiguring of office spaces or technological solutions, but also reimagines the culture of an organisation in a way that works in a semi-virtual world.

84% feel they are able to work as effectively remotely

Employees reported enjoying a number of benefits of working remotely:

1. Saving time commuting
2. More time for hobbies and interests
3. More control over flexible working

77% feel they are able to maintain a good routine and work life balance

1 in 10 say ergonomic issues are what they like least about working from home

PwC Saratoga research: Senior leaders are struggling

Leading dispersed virtual teams is hard work. From creating shared goals, to managing conflict and providing more detailed direction - the skills, time and patience of our senior leaders is being put to the test. The risk of disengaging this critical group is bigger than ever, as they continue to battle the frontline of virtual working.



Engagement is falling

Our Senior Leaders scored lowest on both the ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance and feeling recognised whilst working remotely. These are dangerous signals of falling engagement of this population.



Human connection is a powerful leadership tool

Despite 72% of senior leaders still feeling connected, many reference the lack of interpersonal interactions as a main barrier. It has been largely removed from their leadership toolkit.



Reduced productivity

86% of senior leaders feel they can deliver their role remotely, but many suggest that leading remotely is less productive and more time consuming. Coordination takes longer and more focus is required on task design and process, as well as goals.

"Feels very intense and difficult to step away..."

"More tired as greater brain power used communicating via video..."

"That time when you need to get together - to brainstorm something or bang something out together..."

"My calendar is completely full every day. What used to be a brief discussion has turned into a 1 hour virtual meeting..."

Leaders are doing a good job at navigating their people through the crisis and maintaining engagement levels. Whilst we have proved that we can be 'productive' whilst working virtually, senior leaders are taking the burden and not necessarily getting the same level of support. This means remembering that leaders are human and need recognition too through informal channels and not just reward.

31%

of senior leaders feel less able maintain a healthy work-life balance when working remotely... compared to **23%** of the general employee population

Challenges that senior leaders in particular are facing include:

1. Productivity and motivation
2. Lacking human interaction that face to face working provides
3. Maintaining work / life balance

41%

feel recognised when they do something well whilst working remotely

PwC Saratoga research: Diversity matters

The virtual working environment presents new challenges for introverts and extroverts alike as the difference feels more extreme than ever. We must ensure that we are aware of how our new working conditions are impacting different facets of our workforces and are adapting accordingly.



Tale of two halves

Extroverts are more likely to find their voice on a crowded call whilst introverts thrive spending time alone. It's more important than every to know your teams and know how they work.

"I much prefer this to an open plan office..."

"Living on my own, so [am] more isolated"



All minds engaged

We've encouraged diversity but the challenge is around how we ensure that everyone is engaged in the virtual setting.

"Home-life distractions make it harder to focus on work..."

"Struggle to switch off from work..."



Falling through the cracks

Regardless of the size of an organisation, employees may feel the burden of being lonely at work. This is likely to be exacerbated by remote working, creating more opportunity for people to fall down the cracks.

"I feel very isolated, I feel very low..."

This crisis has forced us to blur the lines between home and work in a way that we've never seen before. It has also highlighted extremes in personality and diversity, from the ways in which people think to how they react to and manage change. Long term success will be about listening to our people and responding to their individual needs making sure that we don't lose the value of difference and diversity in the process.

45%

employees reported missing human interaction

1 in 10

reported a sense of greater productivity whilst working remotely

1 in 5

Employees feel a reduced connection with the organisation or teams as a result of remote working

1 in 5

report that working remotely allows them more time to spend with their families.

1 in 4

suggest remote working is negatively impacting work life balance in some way