Housing –
Managing through change –
Remote workforce

A short summary by Virtual College

Introduction

Remote working is not a new concept; it's one that most businesses will be familiar with in some way. Whether employees are allowed to work from home whenever they want, or an exception to an in-office rule is made for the festive season or periods of bad weather, most companies will have some level of experience when it comes to dealing with remote workers.

However, the landscape of remote working is shifting, the modern office environment looks very different to how it did in the past, and housing as a sector is going through a period of uncertainty.

As technology and communication methods become more sophisticated, the need for staff to be in a physical office every day is severely diminished, and the benefits of home working become clearer.

## So what will the future office look like?

2022

A Virgin Media survey of business owners found that by 2022

60%

of office-based staff will frequently work from home.

Employees seem even more optimistic when it comes to the future of the home office, with a third of those surveyed by Office Angels saying they think commuting will be an archaic concept by the year 2036.

As we mentioned above, the past few years have seen the vast majority of organisations become more "remote friendly", but looking towards the end of this year, experts predict that the paradigm will shift towards companies that are designed from their conception to be mobile.
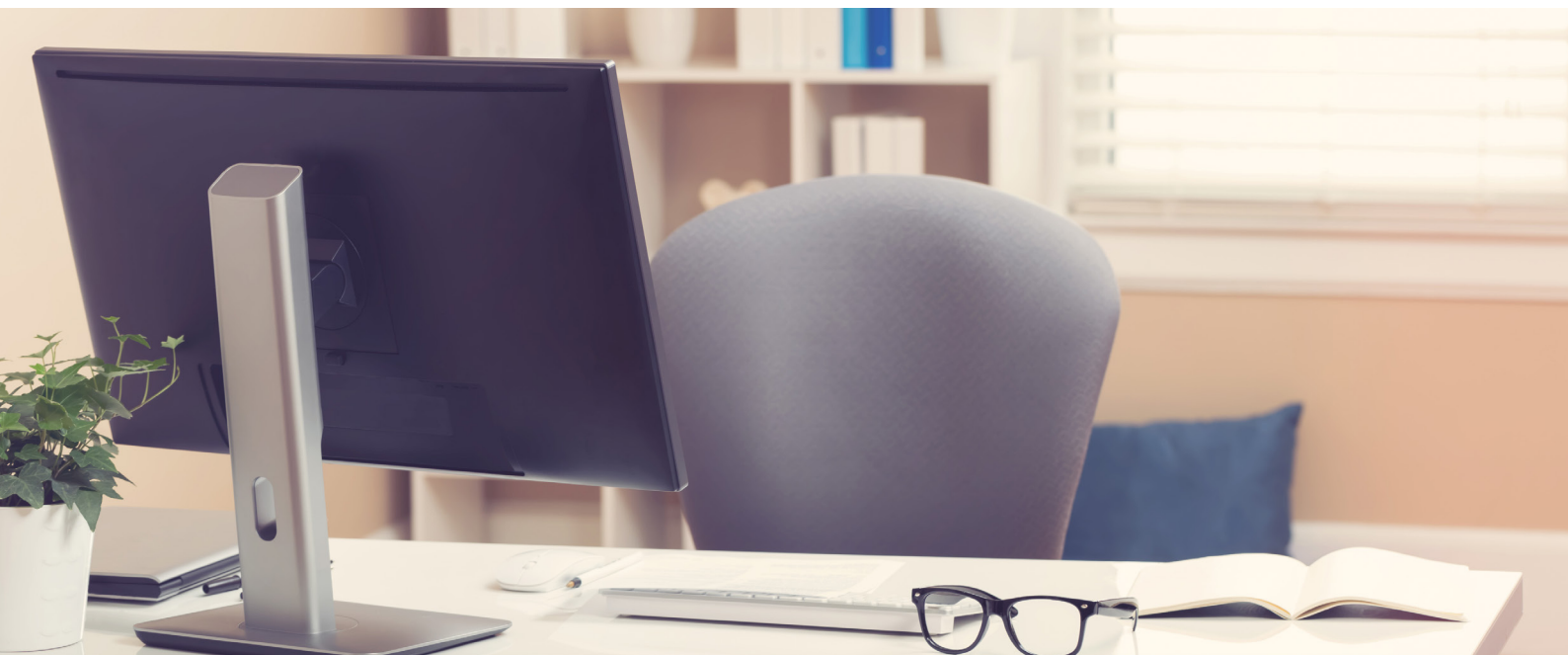
Writing for Fast Company, careers and technology journalist Jared Lindzon noted that the remote-first structure provides "a variety of conveniences".

He cited Josh Bersin, founder of research firm Bersin - an example of a "remote first" structure, who said business owners can "very, very easily" establish virtual companies today.

"Organisations really aren't companies, they're like networks of teams. Even big companies are being reorganised like this.

Everybody is working with a team that is somehow connected to another team, and that team may or may not be inside the company," he noted.

Why isn't everyone already doing it?

The benefits of offering remote working seem clear - so why haven't all companies already embraced the home office revolution? The simple answer is a lack of trust in their workforce, as well as some old fashioned ego.

Cary Cooper, professor of organisational psychology and health at Lancaster University Management School, said that while bosses would never admit they don't trust their workforce, "that's what it's about".

"They'll never say that, but that's what it's about. Managers want people in the office because they want to see their little empires there in front of them," he said.

"It's totally about trust, and the incompetence of managers who don't know how to manage people remotely."

Chief executive of Work Wise UK Phil Flaxton expanded on this, explaining that the "fear factor" for a lot of managers equates to "If I can't see you how do I know you are working?". He added: "Managers need training on how to assess a home-worker on their output, not their input."

Yet it's not just managers who have concerns about home office; this lack of trust impacts on how employees think about remote working too.

A survey from O2 found that more than a quarter of employees believe their performance is predominantly measured by the time they spend in the office rather than what they deliver.
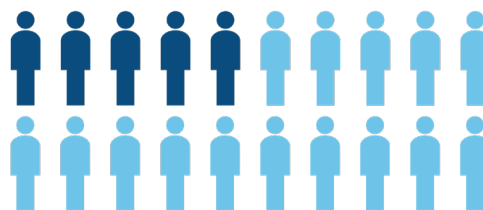
Mr Cooper explained: "Office workers worry that if they're not in the political arena, it might affect their ability to get a promotion.

"They feel they need to be visible and that their employer may question their commitment if they work from home."

Productivity

Despite these concerns surrounding productivity, a myriad of studies have suggested that the exact opposite may be true, and home working could actually significantly drive up both the quality and quantity of work delivered.

Home Working = ⬆ **Quality** ⬆ **Quantity**

Research by Inc. Magazine found that employees are almost twice as likely to work more than 40 hours a week.

Employees are 20 per cent more productive when tackling creative projects remotely.

13% 📞 An interesting experiment in which Chinese call centre staff worked from home showed that those operating remotely got through 13 per cent more calls than office-based employees did.

This meant that the company gained the equivalent of one extra workday a week from its workforce. It was thought this could be partly credited to a lack of in-office distractions. Furthermore, costs were cut on overheads, with money saved on office space and furniture.

+1

These findings appear to be backed up by a Stanford University study, which found that remote workers are 13 per cent more productive and work in a quieter environment than those that commute into the office every day.

Think of the health benefits

Higher levels of productivity aren't the only benefits of remote working. Indeed, the research from Stanford University found that remote workers take fewer sick days than their colleagues in the office.

Researchers at Penn State University also claimed that when employees are handed the flexibility to determine where and when they work, they gain an extra hour of sleep a week and are subsequently more attentive and alert during working hours.

Health benefits are hardly a surprising effect of remote working. More sleep, less exposure to germs, no office snack table and more time to fit in exercise are all benefits of working from a home office.

Recruitment

Improved recruitment isn't the most loudly touted of remote working benefits - but think about it! Without having to tie employees down to certain locations, the pool of talent for employers to choose from becomes much bigger.

Research from online freelance marketplace Upwork suggested that finding and onboarding a new staff member to work in a physical office takes an average of 43 days. This is compared to a mere three days for positions in which the employee can work from home.

"Companies who are looking for an edge, looking for the best talent, and they see they can hire someone in three days, that's where you see companies building remote-first workforces," says Rich Pearson, the senior vice president of marketing and categories at Upwork.

"Communication tools are the bedrock to enable this, but we're seeing some inspiration in how companies are being formed."

Morale

It's no real surprise that people with more freedom and flexibility in their working lives are happier and more engaged with their employer - but there are solid stats to back this up too.

Commuters were more likely than telecommuters to feel dissatisfied with daily activities, according to research from the Office for National Statistics. Interestingly, this statistic remained the same, no matter how much they were paid. This indicates that companies can't always make up for a good level of work-life balance with high levels of compensation.

Work-life balance

Indeed, the importance of a work-life balance was shown in a Swedish study which found that couples are 40 per cent more likely to get a divorce when one partner commutes more than 45 minutes each way.

The bottom line

So we know that productivity, health, morale, recruitment and work-life balance can all be improved through the adoption of remote working - but what does this mean when it comes to cold, hard cash? After all, that's what CEOs are going to want to know about.

Well, according to an analysis by Global Workplace Analytics, a typical business can save **$11,000 (£7,591)** per person per year by allowing them to work from home **50%** of the time.

How to set up remote working

Implementing a remote working policy isn't as difficult as one would imagine - particularly if an organisation is already using BYOD.

Education is needed for both managers and employees in terms of how the system will work. Clear rules and regulations must be established if it is to work effectively. If there's a day in the week companies want every employee in the office, for example, these rules must be made clear. Similarly, if there's a cap on the number of days any individual is permitted to work from home, it is vital that this message is hammered home so the system can't be abused down the line.

Managers need to be trained in how to manage remotely, and how to communicate effectively when not face-to-face. It is also important to check that those employees who will be working remotely have the set-up to do so; for example, speedy broadband and a solid phone line.

Companies may also want to set up new productivity tracking tools to reassure managers that work will be delivered as much as before.

Furthermore, managers will also want to look at activities, socials and other ways they can carry out team bonding, now that colleagues won't necessarily be seeing each other all day.

Thanks to the growth in popularity of remote working there are plenty of resources both online and off on many aspects of the subject, including training for both managers and employees.

https://jell.com/blog/10-stats-that-will-change-the-way-you-think-about-remote-work/
http://www.theguardian.com/money/work-blog/2014/apr/30/what-happened-to-remote-working
http://www.fastcompany.com/3052836/the-future-of-work/6-ways-work-will-change-in-2016
http://is4profit.com/how-to-manage-employees-who-work-from-home/

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