

Home is where the work is

Author: Rob Williams . October 2021

We've both been home-based for decades, so can certainly attest to more creativity, greater flexibility, and increased *quality* of output. Working from home (WFH) has finally become widespread, thanks to the need for social distancing. But three months in, how are employees finding remote working? Here, @TestsSchool and @DenisBarnard take an in-depth look at what WFH actually involves – and how to make it work for you.

Office space savings are a no-brainer

For organizations that have a conventional office set-up, WFH makes good sense, as at least 15-20% of the existing roles can easily be based remotely. In city locations, this will mean huge office savings – plus reductions on costs such as furniture and infrastructure. That's even taking into account the expenses associated with setting up the WFH workforce.

What's the downside?

So far so good. However, there are serious considerations to a successful WFH policy. What initially seemed a wonderful opportunity for many has proved to be a source of depression, exhaustion and general malaise.

It's become apparent during the lockdowns around the world, that many people are simply not comfortable or happy working remotely for any sustained period. Many confess how much they miss the office for a variety of reasons – from the social interaction with colleagues to the inability to separate home life and work. Others struggle to motivate themselves when not surrounded by colleagues. For these people, removing the commute and the distractions of an office environment is not doing them a favour at all, incredible though it might seem to others who have relished the increased flexibility.

It's incumbent on every employer to assess beforehand whether potential WFH employees are going to be suited for those conditions. If not, then continuing their workplace presence will result in greater job satisfaction.

The Six Pillars of WFH

The recent experiences of some of our colleagues and connections have moved us to formulate a series of six overlapping considerations – both physical and psychological – which must be met by any WFH candidate and their employer to ensure effective home-working.

1. How work-friendly is your home environment?

If your desk is shoved against an inside wall in the spare room with all the family junk, you will hardly be motivated. A dedicated, comfortable workspace is an essential requirement to successful long-term home working.

- Is the area surrounding your home a reasonably quiet one?
- Do you have a suitable space in the home to assign as a workspace? Suitable furniture? Working at the kitchen table with a chair designed for 30-minute meals is not at all ergonomic and will result in injury.
- Is the area well-lit?

2. How up to date is your home tech?

Technology considerations are key, as without suitable computer equipment and connections you won't be able to WFH at all!

- Is your broadband of sufficient speed and bandwidth suitable for supporting your work activity? Has your employer offered to pay for this?
- Is your computer sufficiently powerful to WFH? Some software requires a newer operating system and if you're downloading a lot of high spec files you will need a powerful computer. Consider, also, the correct height and size of your screen to prevent posture problems.
- Does your employer have a process allowing you to access shared work files remotely? The pandemic has proved to be a tough road test for some organisations, as not all software systems have been up to the mark.

3. Can you manage domestic distractions?

Let's put all those exciting Amazon deliveries to one side and focus on bigger-picture distractions, which will be different for every homeworker. Anyone currently home-schooling children knows how

difficult it is to manage childcare and a full-time job WFH! Others may be facing the equally demanding task of caring for elderly relations. One of the positive things to come out of lockdown is the shared acknowledgement and acceptance that we all have responsibilities outside of work – we’ve all become accustomed to children popping up in Zoom meetings!

One of the main attractions of home working is that, in most cases, the work can be done any time of the day. This gives the employee the ability to shape their working day around their domestic responsibilities – whether it be taking a break mid-afternoon to walk the dog - or working at night while your children sleep. The key is to ensure that you have that headspace each day to focus fully on your highest priority work commitments.

4. What are your working hours?

Contrary to perception, people who work from home often work overly long hours. Homeworkers must resist the urge to be contactable 24-7. Or find themselves checking work emails on the weekend. This is not sustainable in the long term, and there is a duty of care upon the employer to ensure this doesn’t happen. The move to WFH will hopefully do away with the old workplace culture of presenteeism, and employees will be judged solely on output each day rather than hours spent at their desks.

Where the role allows, the hours of work should be agreed upon between the employer and the worker. These would make allowances for things like the school run, hospital visits and so on. Access to the business systems would be approved for these hours – perhaps with a contingency time – and access outside of the agreed hours would be subject to approval. Regulating the number of hours that it is possible to work is an essential measure to protect the employee’s health, and, by extension, the organisation’s duty of care and liability.

5. How will WFH affect your well-being?

Once your home office is set up, your technology is up and running, and your working hours are agreed upon, there’s still your own well-being and mental health to manage. WFH means spending a lot of time with yourself. It requires a robust appreciation of how you can best maintain your own emotional well-being.

Managing your own work schedule and maintaining high-quality output is key to your work success. Self-motivation and taking the initiative are even more vital in lockdown. Both qualities are needed to keep your home life in shape when WFH, too. Over the longer term, we recommend building your

resilience with plenty of regular exercises, a healthy diet and adequate sleep.

6. How will WFH affect your working relationships?

Most home workers experience a few initial, halcyon weeks, basking in the flexibility and autonomy that WFH offers. No more office politics, or annoyance when someone eats the yoghurt you put in the shared fridge. However, this can become a double-edged sword – because many who work from home miss the support and camaraderie of regular interaction with their colleagues.

- Now that your manager can no longer see you, can you ensure that you remain motivated?
- How can you maintain healthy working relationships with your colleagues?
- Are your team's new working arrangements clearly communicated?
- How can you ensure that junior staff receive adequate support and training?

Without the opportunity to have casual chats with colleagues while making a cup of tea or impromptu conversations in the lift, home workers must make conscious efforts to keep their colleagues updated. Clear and regular communication is essential to maintaining a good relationship with colleagues at all levels.

The post "Home is where the work is" was first published by Rob Williams here <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/home-where-work-rob-williams/>

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