

INDUSTRY SURVEY



THE PANDEMIC WORKPLACE: IMPACT ON CAREER DECISIONS

March 2022



FOUNDED IN 1993

THE WORK-FROM-ANYWHERE REALITY

Challenges Ahead for Hiring, Retaining and Building Teams

The dominant preference to continue the flexibility to “work from anywhere” is just the tip of the iceberg.

Camaraderie and building critical relationships for career progression are at risk.

98%

Prefer **remote or hybrid**

64%

Deterioration of **camaraderie** cited by almost two-thirds

54%

Deterioration in building **critical relationships** cited by more than half

44%

Concerned about future **career progression**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The global pandemic forced most of Corporate America to rapidly adopt remote officing and flexible schedules. The significant changes in work routines – which many expected to be transient at first – have become entrenched. Workplace flexibility is the norm for a large segment of the workforce, including the consumer marketing and market research professionals we surveyed.

This survey reinforces trends we initially identified in our previous survey of managers,* but with a twist.

- The glimmer of the silver lining that remote work would contribute to greater productivity seems true.
- But living for nearly two years in the “work from anywhere” world has had a game-changing impact on career decisions.

The most important takeaway is that the full force of how this professional paradigm shift will affect the talent pool *is yet to come*.

The undeniable and dominant preference to continue the flexibility to “work from anywhere” expressed by 98% of respondents – is just the tip of the iceberg. There is a double-bubble surfacing in the talent pool.

- The near-term bubble relates to retention and recruitment challenges when decisions around office flexibility are implemented.
 - Only 2% prefer to return to the the office full-time
- The long-term bubble relates to evidence that camaraderie and building critical relationships necessary for advancement are at risk.
 - Deterioration of camaraderie being cited by almost two-thirds (64%)
 - Deterioration in building critical relationships cited by more than half (54%)
 - Concern about future career progression cited by nearly half (44%)

This “double bubble” is one of the most significant challenges that leaders will face as they seek to retain, hire and build their teams with talented professionals.

As the “work from anywhere” reality keeps evolving, it requires that leaders cultivate the skills and best practices to build their teams effectively by offering career options and opportunities that will never look quite the same.

*“The Pandemic Workplace: Impact on Team Culture, Recruitment and Retention”

Best Practices for the “Work from Anywhere” Reality

Leaders must be adaptive in their people management skills and team development practices.

To recruit and retain top talent, they will need to be more intentional in assessing fit.

Evaluate these Issues:

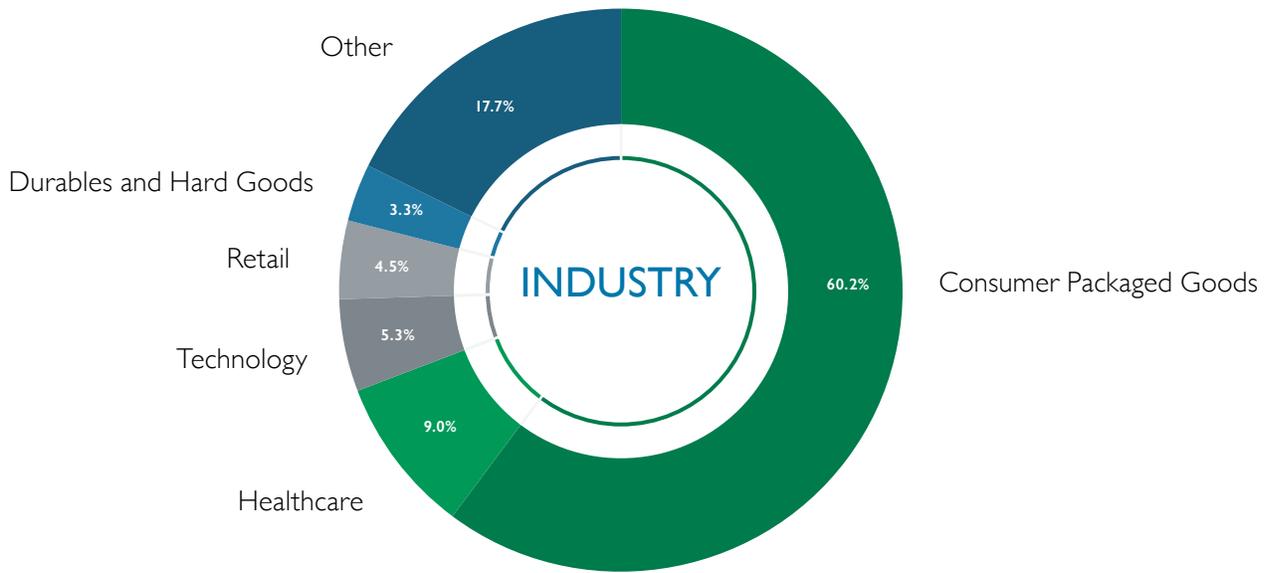
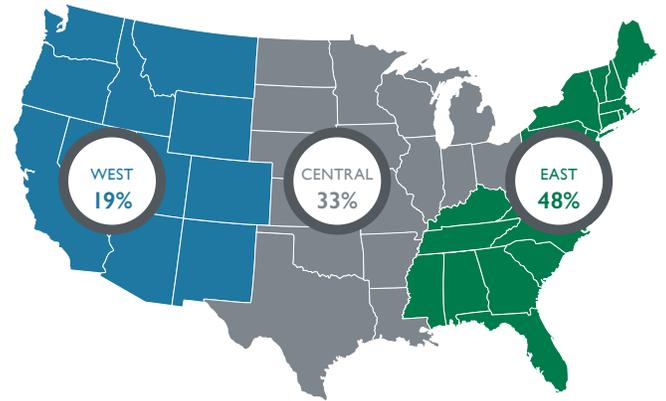
- Do you have an objective view of your team culture and how remote work has changed it?
- Have you assessed what qualities and attributes you value in team members now that your team is dispersed?
- Have you previously relied on the onsite interview to provide a “gut-level” sense of fit and career advancement potential?
- Is your current reference checking process cursory or robust enough to probe for candidate fit?
- Have you assessed and prepared for changes ahead that will require you to build (or rebuild) your team?
- Are you aware of new talent pools that will open (and close) based on your current and future officing requirements?

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

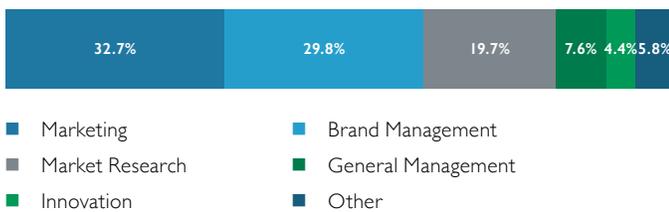
The Pandemic Workplace Survey reports the perspectives of people who typically worked with their teams in corporate office settings before the pandemic and primarily in the marketing and consumer insights professions. This is an important distinction to note, because the survey is not intended to represent service, manufacturing or other employees who do not have the option of working from home.

The survey was conducted in October 2021. The 1,242 respondents work predominantly in the consumer packaged goods industry.

Geographic Location



Job Function



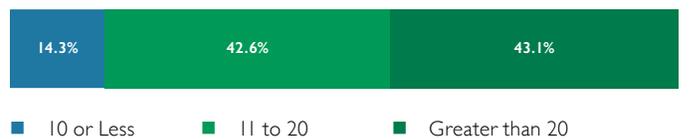
Company Size (US-Based Employees)



Time in Current Role (In Years)

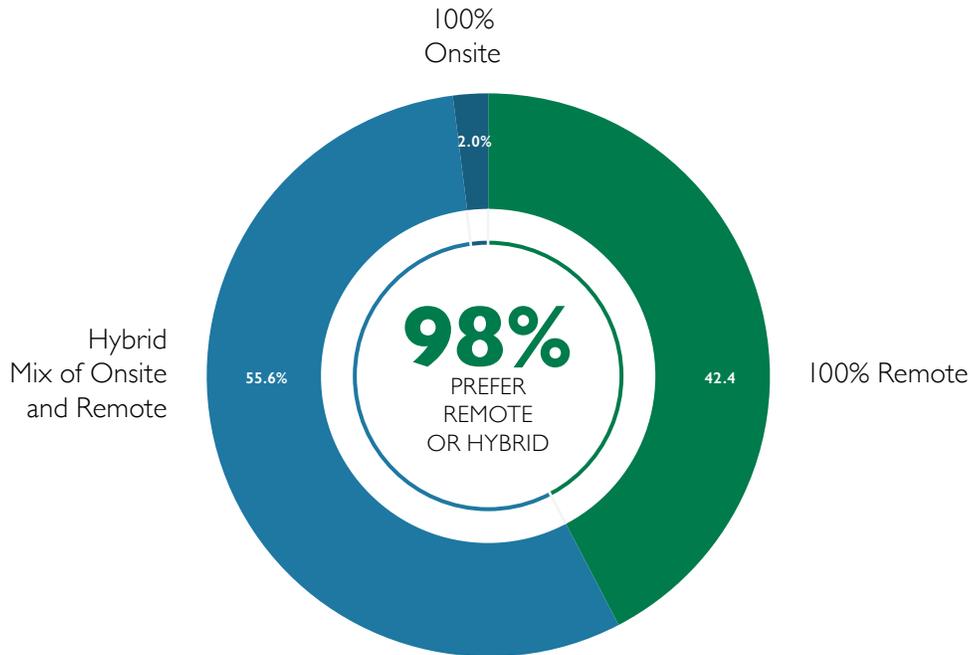


Total Work Experience (In Years)



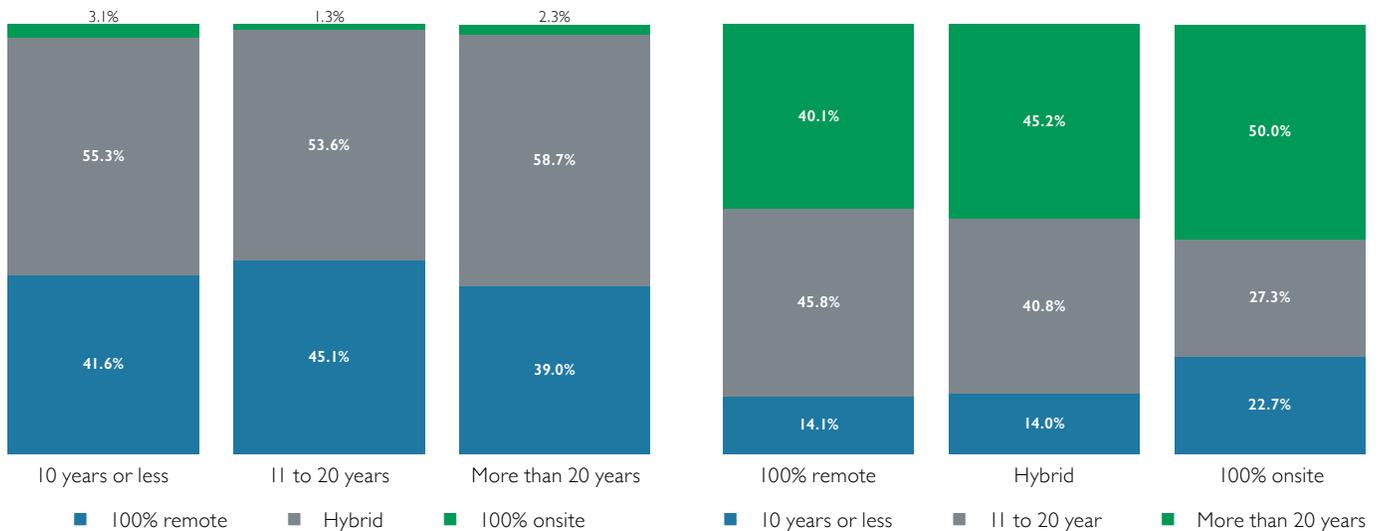
The overwhelming majority (98.0%) of respondents want to maintain the flexibility of a fully remote or hybrid situation. As shown on page 5, that's the way nine out of ten work today and it's their preference going forward. It's worth noting that time in the office is important to nearly 60% (57.6%) of respondents, when combining those who prefer a mix with those who prefer 100% onsite.

Q What is your preferred office situation?



Office Preference Based on Total Years of Work Experience

Compared with others, respondents with less than 10 years of work experience have a slight preference for 100% onsite, citing the need to establish relationships and receive coaching and mentorship critical to their career progression. Only 1.3% of respondents with 11-20 years of experience want 100% onsite, and more than half (53.1%) prefer 100% remote, citing the better balance of family and work responsibilities as a key advantage of working from home. As shown on page 5, nearly half (47.8%) of the respondents who prefer 100% remote would accept less in salary for this option.



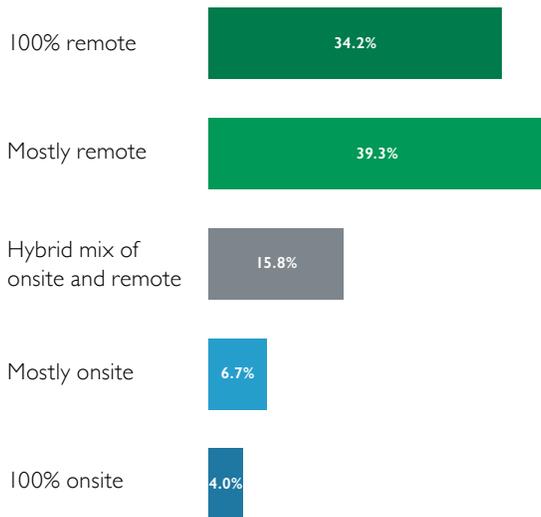
Q Would you accept less in salary in exchange for 100% REMOTE work flexibility?



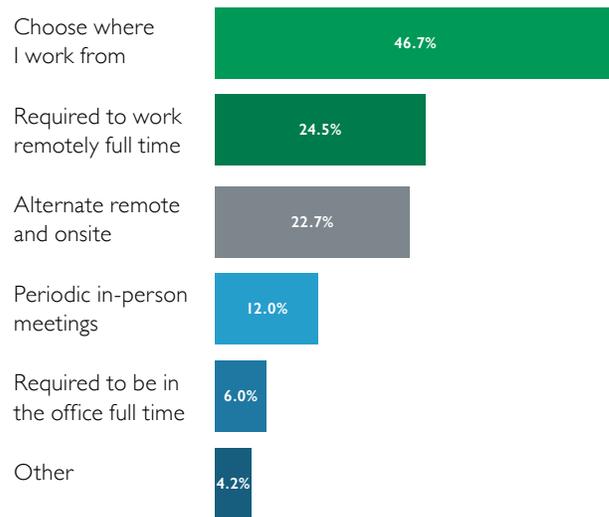
Q Would you accept less in salary in exchange for HYBRID WORK flexibility?



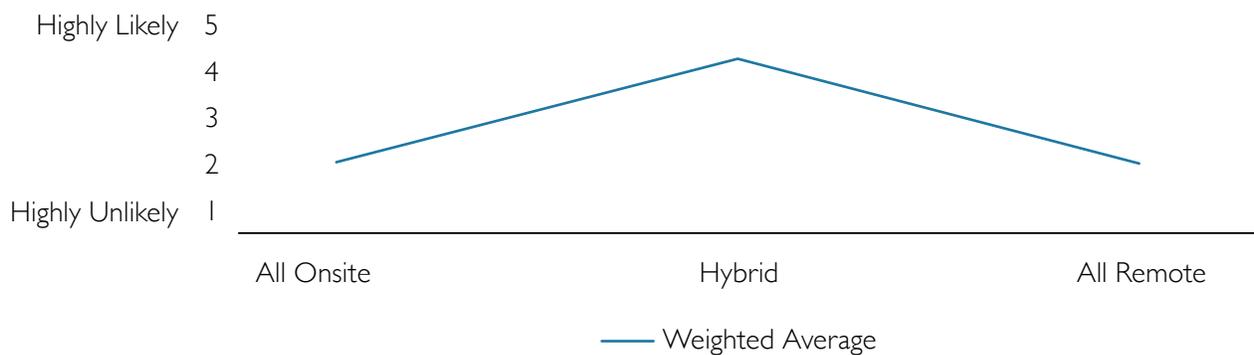
Q What is your TEAM'S current mix of remote and in-office work?



Q Which of these best describes YOUR current office situation? (Check all that apply)



Q What is the current expectation about your team's office situation in January 2022? (This assumes the pandemic is no worse at that time.)



IMPACT ON TEAM CULTURE

The impact of remote work on key areas is notable, with deterioration of camaraderie being cited by almost two-thirds (63.6%) of respondents and building critical relationships by more than half (54.2%).

Q How have these attributes of team culture been affected by changes in remote or flexible work?

Communicating effectively



Coaching/Mentoring



Camaraderie



Providing career advancement opportunities



Building critical relationships



■ Greatly Deteriorated
 ■ Some Deterioration
 ■ No Change
 ■ Some Improvement
 ■ Greatly Improved

“I started my new job mid-pandemic. It’s been surprising, as I feel that I’ve actually developed better relationships with a lot of my co-workers than when working 100% in the office. The Zoom environment may have created a sense of intimacy; we’re seeing into each others homes, which prompts more personal conversations.”

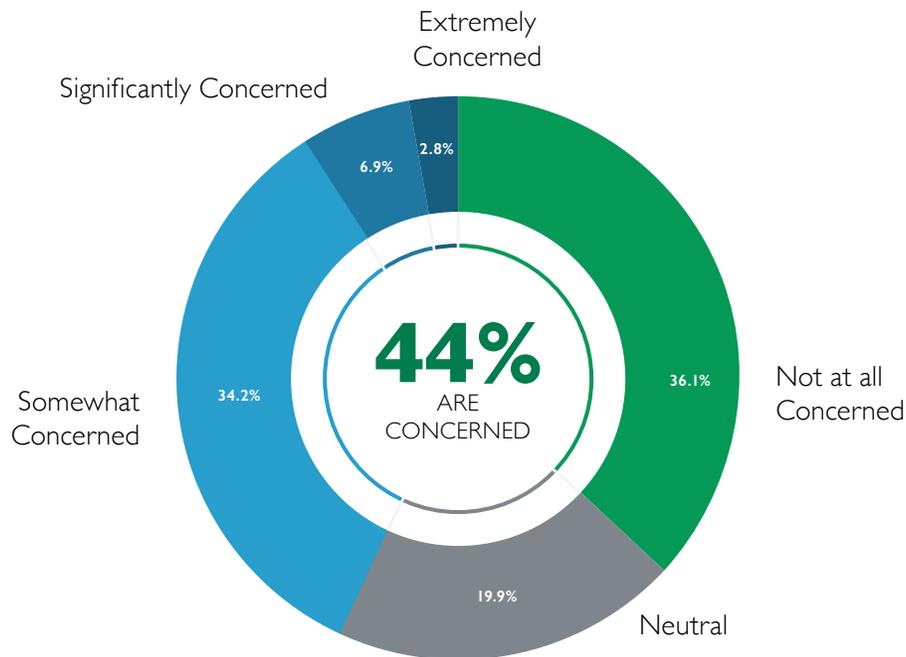
“The office plays an important role in socialization and it doesn’t have to! Maybe we’re more efficient at work (and more rounded as people) if we’re not so reliant on work for socializing. Actual work and productivity hasn’t suffered at all by being remote.”

“I think working remotely forces you to work a little harder at building personal relationships. You lose out on those moments when in the office or at a happy hour that you can’t replicate. However, I think it’s worth it because now I no longer get derailed by coworkers or unnecessary tasks. Also, the flexibility I have right now is priceless. I could never imagine going back to our traditional 9-to-5 job ever again.”

IMPACT ON CAREER PROGRESSION

As shown on page 6, less than one-third (28.1%) of respondents report that remote work has deteriorated opportunities for career advancement. But a greater percentage (43.9%) expressed concern that working remotely could affect their career progression in the future. However, less than one in ten (9.7%) is significantly or extremely concerned.

Q How concerned are you that working remotely in the future will affect your career progression?



“Flexibility is so important to balancing work and life, and enables a much better working experience. But being in the office - especially as someone earlier in my career - is critical to growth and exposure.”

“While the pandemic was the ‘great equalizer’ of remote work, I feel that it might be difficult to continue to be remote if my colleagues opt to go into the office more.”

“Career progression for established professionals hasn’t been affected from the pandemic. This new normal has negatively affected the overall development for younger talent. The lack of a tangible culture and ‘unofficial’ teaching moments has slowed performance of younger talent. Going forward we will have to address this to ensure young talent remains engaged and thrives.”

“Networking and visibility are factors that are impacted by working remotely. It’s all in one’s hands - moving your career along takes speaking up and asking for what would it take.”

IMPACT ON CAREER DECISIONS

Q Have you looked for a new job in the past six months primarily because the office situation doesn't fit your needs?

YES - 27.3%

NO - 72.7%

Fewer than one-third (27.3%) of respondents looked for a job in the prior six months primarily because the office situation doesn't fit their needs. This is the approximate percentage of professionals actively looking at any given time for any reason. Within the set who had looked in the last six months: 30% took a new job, 45% are still looking, and 25% decided not to accept a new job

But the survey data, as well as comments shared by respondents, indicate that there is a bubble beneath the surface.

- The “status quo” -- 72.3% stating they have NOT looked -- is not surprising given that the majority of respondents (73.5%) are working in the hybrid or remote office setting that aligns with their preference and most expect this to continue in 2022.
- There is a strong “wait and see” sentiment among those who said they looked but did not accept a new job.

The motivations for making a change and reasons behind their decisions reflect a balance between their career priorities and the strong preference for a permanent hybrid or fully remote job.

“I changed jobs. The job was a promotion over my old position, but I had two competing offers. The more flexible working arrangement of one offer pushed me over the edge and helped me pick the more flexible company.”

“There were multiple reasons why I chose to switch positions. First it was a better opportunity and second I received a nice increase in salary. With that said, my primary motivation for beginning to search for a new position was due to the fact that my previous employer made a company-wide decision for all employees for return to work. I enjoy the flexibility that remote work brings to my personal life and made a decision to try to maintain this work environment for myself.”

Those who did not change jobs expressed strong intent to resume looking if they will be expected to return to the office full-time.

“I’m still holding out hope that my company will get up to speed and offer better flexibility when this all comes to an end (assuming it does). I love my current job when I work from home.”

“I did not change jobs. It wasn’t the right opportunity and I decided to “stick it out” for a full year before jumping.”

“Waiting to see how “hybrid” will feel once we do go back to the office.”

“I have not yet changed jobs, but if I am required to go back into the office I will absolutely be leaving my current job for something that is 100% remote.”

POSITIVE LEARNING FROM REMOTE WORK

Our Pandemic Workplace Surveys conducted in 2020 and 2021 underscore the force with which the pandemic has accelerated the evolution of workplace flexibility.

Respondents expressed consistent themes about the benefits of enhanced productivity and concerns about deterioration of culture. But the implications for how hiring and career decisions will be made are much more nuanced. They shared positive learning around key qualities and areas where leaders and professionals share mutual responsibility for meeting their organizational and career objectives.

INTENTIONAL LEADERSHIP

- Strong, purposeful, perceptive leadership is even more critical in the remote environment.
- Conversations must be more targeted and planned.

PRODUCTIVITY VS. CONNECTION

- Empowerment and mutual trust are essential.
- Mix solitary/flexible work with the standard office structure.

TEAM DEVELOPMENT & INTERACTION

- Expand the talent pool by removing the relocation hurdle.
- Hire and train on skills for building relationships, teaming and communicating in remote situations.

CAREER DECISIONS & ADVANCEMENT

- Reflect and redefine career and work life priorities.
- Find new ways to be seen and heard, access mentors and pursue relationships.

INTENTIONAL LEADERSHIP

“Camaraderie and team dynamics can remain intact, but a strong, purposeful, perceptive leader is required. Being mindful of differences and using situational leadership will be even more critical in remote environments.”

“A team can remain productive - or even become more productive - while working remotely. This is hugely dependent on a manager that embraces this work environment and has trust in their team. Managers who continually monitor time logged in and persist in after-hours requests will make building an effective remote team impossible. For the first time in my career, I feel like I did not have to choose between being a mom and an effective manager.”

“I’ve learned that a flexible arrangement empowers employees and me to live a happier life. Making flexibility work is a two-way road and not just the company’s responsibility. A rigid company is not a place where today’s employee can flourish. Control over days in office vs. at home brings happiness.”

“There are far fewer impromptu conversations while working remotely. Career conversations have to be much more targeted and planned. On the flip side, not commuting has afforded me more time and opportunity to make these planned conversations happen.”

TEAM DEVELOPMENT AND INTERACTION

“Remote brings greater opportunities to tap into talent no matter the location, but it’s a training issue. Many co-workers are unskilled in building relationships, teaming and communicating in a remote situation. The expansion of remote has challenged skills.”

“Companies will get the best employees by not using location as an employment hurdle. Instead, find the right person for the role and work with them for a flexible hybrid schedule that fits their situation.”

“New hires have been the most impacted due to loss of informal training. They miss out on listening into commentary in person and seeing interactions between senior people.”

“I’m not concerned about remote work impacting my career progression because I’m already quite senior. But I do have concerns that those early in their career may have negative career impacts they just aren’t aware of today due to missed informal coaching, learning by observation, and camaraderie that impacts engagement.”

PRODUCTIVITY VS. PERSONAL CONNECTION

“In terms of actually getting the work done and effectively shared with the team, I have found that remote work is extremely effective. However, coaching, mentoring, and keeping informed of happenings can be more difficult.”

“People are less willing to get on the phone, unless you schedule a meeting so spontaneous collaboration is nearly impossible. But I get more ‘thinking’ work done, and it is high quality; just not sure if that output is really valued.”

“We can be as productive, or more, while working remotely – that is clear. What suffers, is the sense of camaraderie, belonging, and fun that a workplace has to offer. That said, my personal freedom and mobility is more important to me than office camaraderie.”

“Give employees a choice and an opportunity to manage their time, to a point. You need a mix of solitary/flexible work plus the standard office structure. Too much of either one is not good.”

“You have to keep taking advantage of opportunities to connect with people virtually, just like you had to take advantage of opportunities to connect in person.”

“I’ve learned collaborative work and relationships are more difficult remotely. This affects work, career progression, coaching, etc. I’ve also learned that when I need to buckle down and work on a project on my own, it’s much more effective remotely where I can concentrate and avoid disruptions or distractions. That’s why I like a hybrid model.”

CAREER DECISIONS AND ADVANCEMENT

“The pandemic forced me to rethink my priorities. I decided to find a new job, primarily driven by wanting a more meaningful purpose in my career – with flexibility being a close second.”

“My company has been very vague about what the future of work looks like and what the flexibility will be like. Once they specify the balance of remote flexibility vs. in office, I will probably look for a full-time remote option if that doesn’t exist any longer with my current company.”

“The pandemic has given us the time to pause, reflect and redefine our career and work life balance needs. It has been a blessing in disguise for career advancement for many individuals.”

“I just transitioned to a new job, so it has definitely slowed my ability to navigate the organization. But, as long as I’m active about mentoring and pursuing relationships, I don’t see this as a continuing barrier.”

“Upper management still believes in facetime, so you need to be seen and heard.”

CONCLUSION

This pulse check on the pandemic workplace confirms that professionals have made the pivot from the centralized office to the “work from anywhere” world. They are in a productive mode and able to deliver on their business objectives while enjoying more autonomy and control over their time. They communicate effectively and are open to new ways to build critical relationships and camaraderie.

It's important to retrospectively consider that more than half (53.0%) of the managers who responded to our 2020 survey believed they may lose team members to an organization that allows more flexibility, in the event that they required them to return to the office.

A year later, employees have made their overwhelming preference for a flexible hybrid or remote office situation clear. Managers should view the remote workplace dynamic as a strong influence on career decisions and a critically important factor in their ability to hire and retain team members.

The challenge will be real for organizations that ultimately decide to bring their teams back into a central office full-time. But the challenge cuts both ways. Organizations that follow the “work-from-anywhere” path will need to be intentional in changing their practices for building and leading successful teams. They will need to be innovative in tapping into talent pools that were previously unavailable or under-developed when location was a primary consideration.

The workforce is growing with a generation of professionals who have spent their entire lives building relationships through technology. They have very different expectations about how, where and why work intersects with their lives. They have an unprecedented moment with the power to re-imagine and reshape their careers to align with what they now know they can accomplish personally and professionally in a flexible work environment.

Managers need to approach recruitment and retention very differently. Hiring for fit virtually, and then onboarding, mentoring and motivating teams with little to no in-person interaction requires a level of intentionality, skill and support managers may be unprepared to deliver.

At a deeper level, the pandemic workplace reminds us that leadership skills must evolve. Organizations will need to reconsider and redefine the skills and qualities of the people who are managing teams. These leaders need to cultivate relationships and build a strong, compatible culture, even when their team is dispersed most of the time.

ABOUT O'CONNELL GROUP

O'Connell Group is ranked as one of America's 50 Best Executive Recruiting Firms by Forbes. Founded in 1993 by veterans of the CPG industry, we're a leading executive search firm in consumer marketing and insights. We serve companies nationwide, from America's largest CPG leaders to entrepreneurial and private equity-backed enterprises. Our clients include consumer-driven, non-CPG companies who want to hire CPG talent.

We partner to build strong, lasting relationships with professionals on both sides of the hiring equation – those who hire and those considering new roles. As a trusted advisor, we provide counsel, expertise and guidance, so companies and candidates make the best decisions. We pride ourselves in not just filling jobs, but in building careers and companies.

Additional Resources

In addition to this 2021 survey of how the pandemic workplace influences career decisions, O'Connell Group published "The Pandemic Workplace: Impact on Team Culture, Recruitment and Retention" in 2020.

Visit our website to download that survey and for additional insights and case studies about how we have helped build transformative teams that are taking organizations to the next level. Please contact us to start a conversation and allow us to learn about your objectives. We will share market insights and examples of winning recruitment strategies based on our deep experience in helping leaders identify and acquire the right talent.

Meet our Team

Visit oconnellgroup.com/about-us/meet-our-team

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