

MAKING REMOTE WORK PRODUCTIVE

FOR YOU AND YOUR TEAM

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INTRODUCTION

The promise of remote work is no longer a far-fetched dream: A 2017 analysis¹ found that working remotely has grown by 159% over the last decade with more Americans now working from home than those who walk or bike to the office. Working remotely is increasingly the norm, which means companies need to figure out how to foster productive working relationships no matter where their employees are located.

Part of this shift can be explained by shifting demographics. In 2017 millennials and Generation Z made up a combined 40% of the total US workforce—and these two groups cite flexibility among their top priorities. Millennials, in particular, tend to associate workplace flexibility with increased productivity, better overall organizational performance, improved engagement levels, and a higher degree of personal wellbeing.²

But employers, too, reap the benefits of remote work: fewer employees in the office means lower overhead costs and a more geographically diverse workforce means companies can pick talent without being limited by local availability.

To examine not only the current state of remote work but also how it's affecting professional relationships in the global workforce, Quartz Creative and Workplace by Facebook conducted an anonymous survey of more than 500 international employees. The total sample size consisted of 503 international employees. Responses reflect a variety of geographic regions across North America, South America, Asia, Europe, Australia, Africa, and the Middle East. The largest percentage of respondents indicated that they work in industries like technology (13%), consulting/professional services (10%), and education (10%).

About half (51%) of the respondents work at companies with fewer than 250 employees. The other half (49%) are employed at large organizations consisting of more than 250 people. 31% reported that they hold executive positions (c-suite or senior management) and 69% are in non-executive roles (managers, specialists, entry-level, or other positions).

Here are the four key takeaways we found:

- 1. Remote workers maintain better working relationships with dispersed team members than office-based counterparts**
- 2. A new wave of organizational tools are key for driving collaboration**
- 3. Remote work is the new normal—including among executives who forego the corner office**
- 4. People are increasingly comfortable managing and being managed remotely**

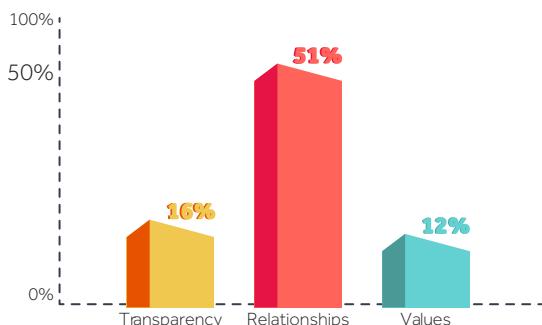
At Workplace by Facebook we're in a unique position to see how more than 30,000 companies use our platform. We commissioned this study to learn more about the reality of remote work and how employees working from home collaborate. As attitudes about remote work continue to evolve, we're seeing a global workforce thrive thanks to technology that better supports a remote workforce. The results illuminate the fact that flexible collaboration is key to ensuring remote work is productive for the entire team.

SECTION 1: Nurturing workplace relationships is critical for employee engagement—and remote workers are no exception



"I'm currently in my best job working remotely (with two days a week in the office) and have an excellent salary/benefits package. The only gripe I have is lack of any meaningful connections with colleagues, as the hiring policy isn't very diverse and I'm often 'out of the loop' due to generational differences." -Financial services employee, Serbia

51% of respondents to the Quartz Creative and Workplace by Facebook survey said their relationships with colleagues were the driving factor behind company culture. Satisfaction with workplace relationships is one of the biggest predictors of employee happiness and employee engagement, a metric that is closely tied to overall organizational success and business performance.³ Beyond office dynamics, a full 55% of respondents to a 2014 Globoforce study⁴ stated that work relationships are "very or extremely important" to their overall quality of life.



Over half of employees surveyed in the Quartz and Workplace study (51%) named relationships with colleagues as the factor with the greatest impact on their company's culture.

Engaged employees are defined as workers who are both emotionally and intellectually committed to their company, and who speak positively about their role and the organization to both coworkers and potential customers. Unfortunately, only 33% of US workers report feeling fully engaged in their current roles, according to a 2016 Gallup report.⁵

By contrast, however, studies show higher engagement levels among employees who work

remotely. Our research found that 62% of remote workers were likely to report feeling connected to their colleagues. When office-based employees were asked how connected they feel to employees who don't work in their office, that number dipped down to 40%. This gap could be explained by the fact that remote workers may be more adept at maintaining remote working relationships via virtual communication: One study⁶ published in the Journal of Personnel Psychology found that within partially distributed teams, remote workers developed different communication patterns than did workers operating in face-to-face environments. Because of their reliance on online communication tools, remote workers may be learning to speak a similar and more colloquial digital "language" which their in-office counterparts are less well versed in.

The Journal of Personnel Psychology study divided some students into separate offices while another team of students worked together in the same room. Within an hour, different communication styles emerged.⁷ The remote segment wrote longer, more polite messages with more positive expressions, humor, and nicknames. The in-office group, on the other hand, kept digital correspondence shorter, more straightforward, and focused on the task at hand.

In a different study⁸ by the Association for Psychological Science, researchers found that remote workers, in expressing gratitude for flexibility, often work harder to prove that they're capable of taking on the same level of

responsibility as office employees. Remote workers are more likely to share information that closes knowledge gaps, another reason remote employees may develop stronger bonds with colleagues. "It's not unusual to have teams, freelancers, or affiliates split across satellite offices that are thousands of miles apart. That can create a feeling of isolation which can have a serious impact on the team's work if people start to become disengaged," says Catherine Flynn, global director of marketing for Workplace by Facebook. "One way to ensure that doesn't happen is by making sure information can flow freely and everyone's work is visible so people feel recognized."

Almost all employees (94%) in the Quartz Creative and Workplace by Facebook survey said their relationships with colleagues positively affects the quality of their work.



Remote managers, therefore, might take steps not only to mitigate an "us versus them" mentality between remote and in-office employees, but also to encourage all team members to adopt more uniform language for virtual communication. Managers of remote employees can tailor their messages to be more expressive when appropriate. Because digital communication isn't paired with in-person facial cues, the communication style should mimic everyday communication where possible. Agreeing upon specific communication patterns, establishing systems for social support online, and setting concrete expectations can help put remote and in-office workers on a more level playing field.

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Patterns of virtual communication tend to differ among remote workers and office workers. Senior management can take cues from how remote workers collaborate and communicate with team members.

SECTION 2: Digital tools are key for supporting collaboration



"My current job is full of people who are fun to work with and inspire me to be a better worker on a daily basis. Half of them sit in a different office though..."

— Business developer who works in the office, Switzerland

Almost three-quarters of survey respondents (74%) regularly work with team members based in another office. This jumps to 81% among executives. With so many workers connecting across different regions, technology is the beating heart at the core of the remote work trend. Our research reveals, however, that email remains the most popular method for digital workplace interaction: 84% of survey respondents indicate it is their most frequently used communication tool.

But despite email's prevalence, it is perhaps the least personal—and most easily misconstrued—method of communicating. Some studies suggest⁹ that email is only about 7% as effective as a face-to-face interaction. Other research has found that email increases the likelihood of conflict and miscommunication.¹⁰



Perhaps as a result of the continued proliferation of email—and what it leaves to be desired as a collaboration tool—our survey indicates that more than three-quarters of employees across a broad range of professional circumstances believe there's room for improvement when it comes to how they communicate to get work done. 77% of all respondents said they are actively seeking out new technologies to help them be more efficient and productive.

A variety of tools are more effective than email at mimicking in-person communication. Over the past two decades, organizational messaging platforms have evolved from basic intranets to dynamic, socially oriented digital ecosystems that make both intra-company and cross-industry communication easier and more efficient.

"Remote work is just the reality now and it's only going to become more common. And that's a good thing," says vice president of Workplace by Facebook, Julien Codorniou. "The key thing is for employers to equip employees with the right tools to get the job done, while also allowing them to participate fully in the company's culture. That means mobile. So when we were building Workplace we started by building mobile tools, like chat or Facebook Live—all of which keep people connected to their teams in ways that feel familiar and fun."

"The key thing is for employers to equip employees with the right tools to get the job done, while also allowing them to participate fully in the company's culture."

-Julien Codorniou , VP of Workplace by Facebook

Today's tools allow for increasingly casual and expressive forms of communication including video chatting, GIF exchanges, and impromptu

interactions. These new tools may help alleviate feelings of isolation or disconnection among remote workers. For instance, evidence suggests that virtual conversations that mimic or replicate face-to-face communication create stronger bonds between remote managers and employees: One study found that 87% of remote employees¹¹ feel more connected to their team and processes when using video conferencing.

Executives, at least, are picking up on this trend: Our survey found that 46% of execs regularly use video calls, compared to 33% of non-execs. Executives are also more likely than other employees to use voice and video calls to stay in touch with remote team members, and less likely to use email and instant message (IM).

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Remote managers and workers report that tools that foster casual and impromptu interactions or that mimic face-to-face communication are more effective than email. Despite the rise of new workplace communication technologies, however, email remains the go-to tool for collaborating with colleagues (remote or otherwise).



SECTION 3: Executives are leaving the corner office



Q: Think about the best job you ever had. What made it so great?

A: "The ability to collaborate with a geographically dispersed workforce..."

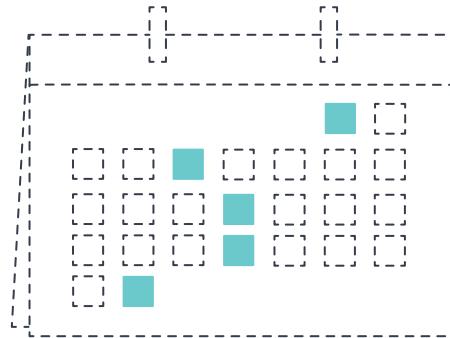
— CIO in the technology industry, Australia

Flexibility is becoming one of the most coveted perks of workplace cultures. Gallup's State of the American Workforce reports¹² that 51% of US employees would exchange their job for one with flexible hours. While remote work has long been viewed as a perk or reward for high-performing employees, today, employers are embracing the practice as a natural extension of the way work gets done.

Our study found that the c-suite and executives are more likely to work remotely than more junior employees: 76% of executives reported that they work remotely at least once a month compared to 55% of non-executives. Survey results suggest that when leaders work remotely themselves, the practice is more readily adopted throughout all levels of the organization. This practice extends to recruiting remote workers: Almost half of executives with hiring responsibilities (45%) have chosen to hire or manage someone remotely.

...when leaders work remotely themselves, the practice is more readily adopted throughout all levels of the organization.

As with other sweeping organizational changes, executives must be the ones to actualize company policy. When executives work remotely it signals to the rest of the company that remote culture is not only adopted, but supported throughout the wider organization.



Among primarily office-based workers, working remotely once per week is most common. A fifth (20%) of office-based workers reported that they work from another location once per week.

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Cultural attitudes about remote work are changing at all levels, with executives leading the charge and leading by example.

SECTION 4: People are increasingly comfortable managing and being managed remotely



"Picking the right team to work with makes the job the best. It doesn't matter if it's remote or not, it's the right people that counts the most."

– Arts and entertainment industry employee who mainly works remotely, US

We found a shift in cultural attitudes toward remote management that suggests employees are increasingly comfortable with managing and being managed remotely. But being a good manager hasn't changed: Successfully leading a team remotely requires a mix of innate management skills and collaborative communication tools. Remote employees are not necessarily a different type of worker simply because they dial-in from home a few days a week or work offsite full-time.¹³ The basics of good management—integrity, credibility, and the ability to instill trust—still apply.

Perhaps it is no surprise that executives are ushering in an era of remote work: they tend to travel more frequently and have more autonomy over when and where they work. But executives are also proving to be trailblazers when it comes to promoting remote management within the company. Among executives with hiring responsibilities, 45% said they have hired or managed someone remotely—among non-executives with hiring responsibilities that number dips down to 28%.

Given that executives tend to have more management experience, the discrepancy could be explained by the fact that non-executives feel less comfortable or equipped to manage a remote worker and therefore prefer to hire someone who will work from the same location. A study of 1,153 remote employees found that the best managers check-in regularly, have exemplary communication

skills, and make expectations explicit.¹⁴ The skills required to succeed as a remote manager are similar to those required for managing on-site employees—but not entirely the same. Companies may consider implementing management training programs that offer techniques for remote management so employees of all levels with hiring responsibilities feel comfortable hiring the best possible employee—regardless of where they are located.

Regardless of comfort level with managing remote employees, according to our survey, 31% of employees with hiring or managerial duties are open to managing remotely. More than a third (34%) of total respondents said they already have experience hiring or managing at least one remote employee.

When it comes to interacting with supervisors in a remote environment, close to half of survey respondents (49%) said they've already been managed remotely in some capacity. A further 30% of employees noted that they'd be open to this scenario. Just 5% of respondents said they wouldn't be comfortable having a remote manager.

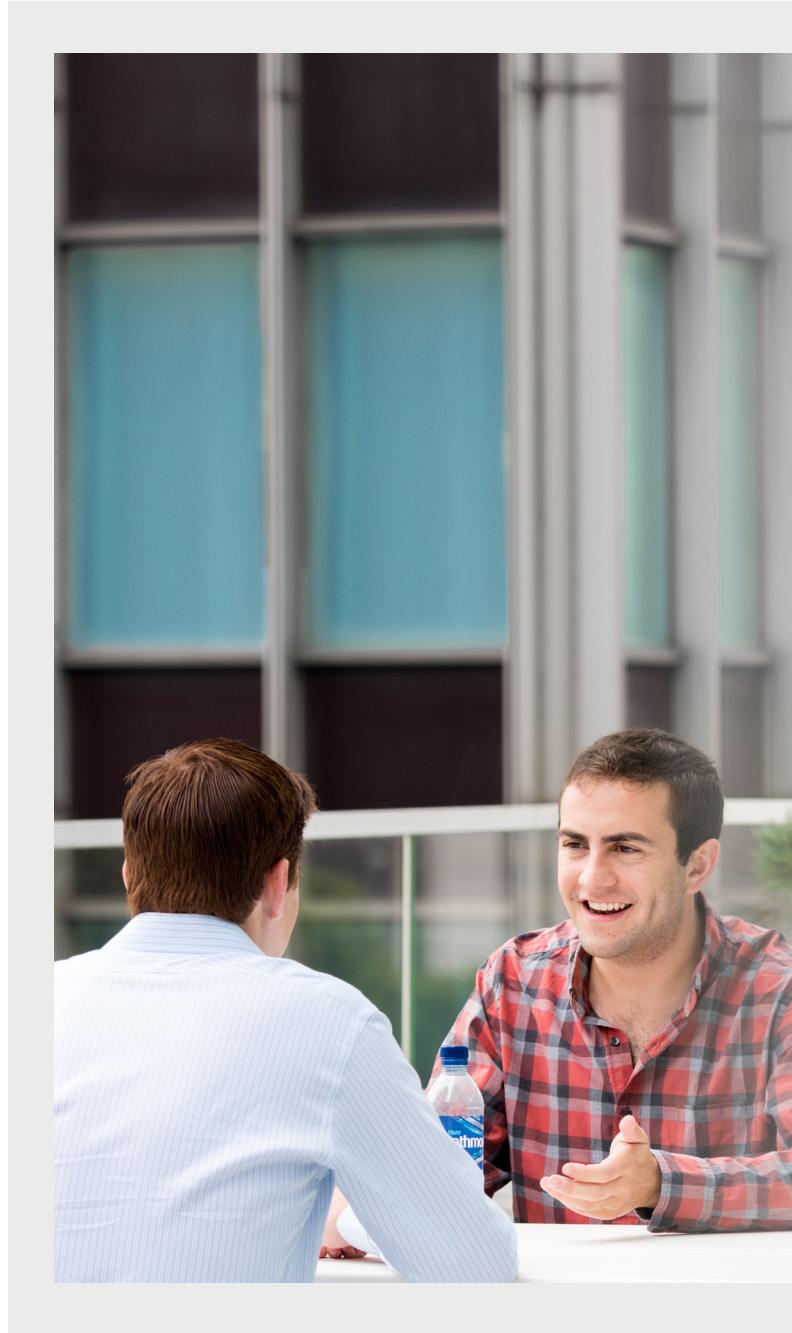
One of the biggest challenges of remote management is instilling a sense of camaraderie and openness among distributed teams. One recent study¹⁵ found that when faced with common workplace challenges, up to 84% of remote team members waited to voice their concerns for a few days or longer, and 47% let the

issue drag on for weeks or more. An established system for frequent communication is important because remote employees tend to miss out on the impromptu conversations that occur naturally when people are working together in the same physical space—the “water cooler” chats.

Studies¹⁶ have found that more frequent rates of communication between managers and their reportees result in higher levels of interpersonal trust of remote employees. In addition, when working remotely, cognition-based trust (trust based upon rationality and cognitive clues) is found to be more important than affect-based trust (feelings not necessarily rooted in concrete evidence). Remote employees can strengthen relationships with their managers by proactively communicating their needs and sending regular updates about ongoing projects.

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Most employees are open to managing and being managed remotely. To help employees of all levels feel more comfortable with remote management, organizations might implement tailored management training programs to facilitate effective modes of communication that foster collaboration and camaraderie among remote workers.



SECTION 5: Conclusion

Despite the trend toward remote work, there is a lag in adoption: executives tend to work remotely more frequently than other employees. But when leadership works remotely, a flexible mentality filters down throughout the organization. The survey data shows that the majority of employees are open to working remotely, managing remotely, and being managed remotely. In fact, most view it as a core way to improve the company's culture. In order for remote work to truly be optimized, however, employees must feel supported in ways that allow them to feel collaborative with colleagues.

More remote workers hasn't changed the fact that relationships between colleagues are more important than ever. In fact, our research suggests remote workers are better at maintaining dispersed professional relationships than office-based employees. Managers can take cues from remote employees as to how best to encourage collaboration between dispersed team members, such as communicating at the same time every day or infusing personality and empathy into routine messages. As remote management becomes the norm, organizations should consider augmenting traditional management training programs with those that directly address the unique needs of a remote workforce.

Workplace technology is a core component of maintaining these relationships. Most survey respondents noted the important role digital tools play when collaborating with coworkers. Nevertheless, email is still the number one tool most teams use to communicate, revealing a gap between how people want to collaborate and the organizational tools that allow them to do so. Organizations should work to embrace digital tools that mimic everyday communication styles in order to help strengthen professional relationships among dispersed teams.

In a world in which the nature of the workplace is shifting to encompass geographic diffusion, the rise of the freelance and gig economies, and higher instances of location-independent work, the reality is that remote work can actually fortify professional relationships. To do this, decision makers must proactively embrace the right digital tools and leadership skills. Embraced effectively, the reality of remote work proves more promising than the idea.



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