



The Impact of Home Working During Covid-19

Research Report

The background is a light-colored wooden desk. A silver ruler is placed diagonally across the upper right portion of the image. A silver pen lies horizontally across the lower left portion. In the bottom left corner, there is a white weekly planner with the words 'WEEKLY PLANNER' visible on its cover.

What has the experience of widespread remote work felt like for employees, managers and leaders? And, have organisations learned anything that will make them rethink how work gets done as they approach what remains an uncertain future?

We understand that the social fabric for many companies who rely on face-to-face interactions has changed “how we do things,” or more specifically, “how we interact and accomplish our work each day.” With this dramatic shift, our survey has taken a deep dive into the factors that matter to employees and here we share the key results: the positives, the lows and future considerations.

Researching home working during Covid-19

The survey was conducted across a range of respondents from North America, the UK and Europe.

Some results clearly highlighted positive factors but also some 'low' points. Respondents offered their reflections on how workplaces may change in the future, and how the role of homeworking might play a part within that.

It isn't a surprise that when we go through life-changing experiences, we reflect on what has come to pass. It's human nature. Respondents have indeed reflected on their life and journey during homeworking in this critical period to consider what is and isn't important. This may impact on their relationship to work and to ways of working, as much as to what kind of work people actually want to do in future and how they might want to do it. It also poses questions for Human Resource departments about the way the employee experience is viewed and different opportunities to engage employees. For some, the re-evaluation of domestic roles has come to the fore, because of the blurred lines of work/life.

Issues such as interpersonal trust and boundaries have become important, in addition to the ability to look after each other, spot problems and keep each other buoyant and motivated.



Home working
is no longer a
privilege
for the few.

58%

More people in North America worked at home more often than anywhere else.

47%

Europe based

40%

United Kingdom

15%

Have never worked from home

Research Summary: The Positive Highlights

Even with issues of emergency planning around remote working, respondents reported that they were less worried about the set-up processes, making adjustments and the management of home working. There were a few positive factors that stood out:

- Most respondents felt positively able to make adjustments to how they worked.
- Productivity levels have increased for many.
- Some reported that it felt easier to drop in conversations at a more personal level with leaders.
- Many people feel they have developed deeper, more open relationships with colleagues, and can spend more focused time in conversation.
- Meetings have become more purposeful because of time, volume and opportunity.

Research Summary: The 'Low' Points

Once underway, the 'stacking' of factors around home working have had an impact. Issues around isolation, general saturation, exhaustion levels, reflection and a lack of ability to break out of the pressure and volume of activity. Here are the specifics:

- Simple concerns about how to compartmentalise time, domestic roles, children and care materialised.
- Problems with maintaining documents and records from the volume of activity alongside a lack of real reflection time on tasks and reviewing/writing up the content of meetings.
- The volume and pace of work is higher meaning that the working day is difficult to manage or even separate out in terms of work/life; it becomes blended.
- Constant online meetings that need attention and focus impacted negatively, as it didn't feel like the working norm, where activities are varied and split into types.
- Lack of attention caused by saturation may give rise to a greater incidence of groupthink or minority influence in decision making.
- Less spontaneity in ideas and divergent thinking has impacted directly on innovation and more expansive problem-solving.
- Ergonomic issues concerned resources, access to IT, chairs, desks, monitors and the planning required to work at home. The longer-term impacts are already showing in ergonomics related health issues, repetitive strain back issues, etc.

30%

respondents were happy to work from home.

73%

of North American respondents were happy to work from home.

Research Summary: The Unknown

As employees are very much focused on the present, and obviously the concerns around the present, it's difficult to understand any longer-term impacts, so knock-on effects are harder to predict. Here are some reflections:

- The lack of time for administration and review may affect work competence and knowledge over time, creating gaps in understanding and therefore poor judgement calls.
- Personal reflection may also change the mindset and life expectations of some respondents, as trigger events, but the impact of this isn't yet realised.
- It's hard to make sense of what is going on for some people and opportunities or threats may have been missed along the way.
- How HR flexes for the future of home working will be a feature to discuss and plan, in terms of resources and implications.



Current Considerations

Individualisation would be helpful if possible. If managers can ask each team member to describe the conditions under which they perform best, their concerns about their workflow and their emotional response to the situation. Then, some of these concerns can be addressed.

11%

of UK respondents felt unable to make decisions initially

9%

of North Americans felt the same

0%

in Europe

‘Manager support,
both practical and
emotional, is
needed during
what is a tough
transitional phase
of work/life’

Manager Support

This sudden change to homeworking has changed how managers work and communicate with their teams. That can be a tough transition in terms of manager needs and expectations and their preferred working management styles. They may worry about disruptions to the workflow they're accountable for. Some may feel they have to be physically present to be good coaches and leaders. Others may feel unsure that they can engage workers from a distance, while others have trust issues about what their employees may actually be doing.

40%

of UK respondents were worried about their mental health

28%

of European respondents

27%

North America

Emotional Connection with Employees

Many employees are suddenly working with more distractions, chaos and uncertainty. Some are sharing their space with multiple family members, others are dealing with healthcare uncertainties for themselves or their families, and still others are adjusting to remote work. Showing employees that you care about them as a person, and not only as a producer of work, is critical during this time.

What you learn about **leading**
a remote workforce now will
likely become **best**
practice for your company
later on, even if not all
workers are home workers.

Conclusion: Future Considerations

Re-opening businesses to more on-site work will require the ability to estimate the “readiness” of employees from a functional and emotional perspective. What may optimise the employee experience for one organisation, may be different for another. Returning employees will be influenced by many factors and your remote work policies and decisions will affect employee engagement.

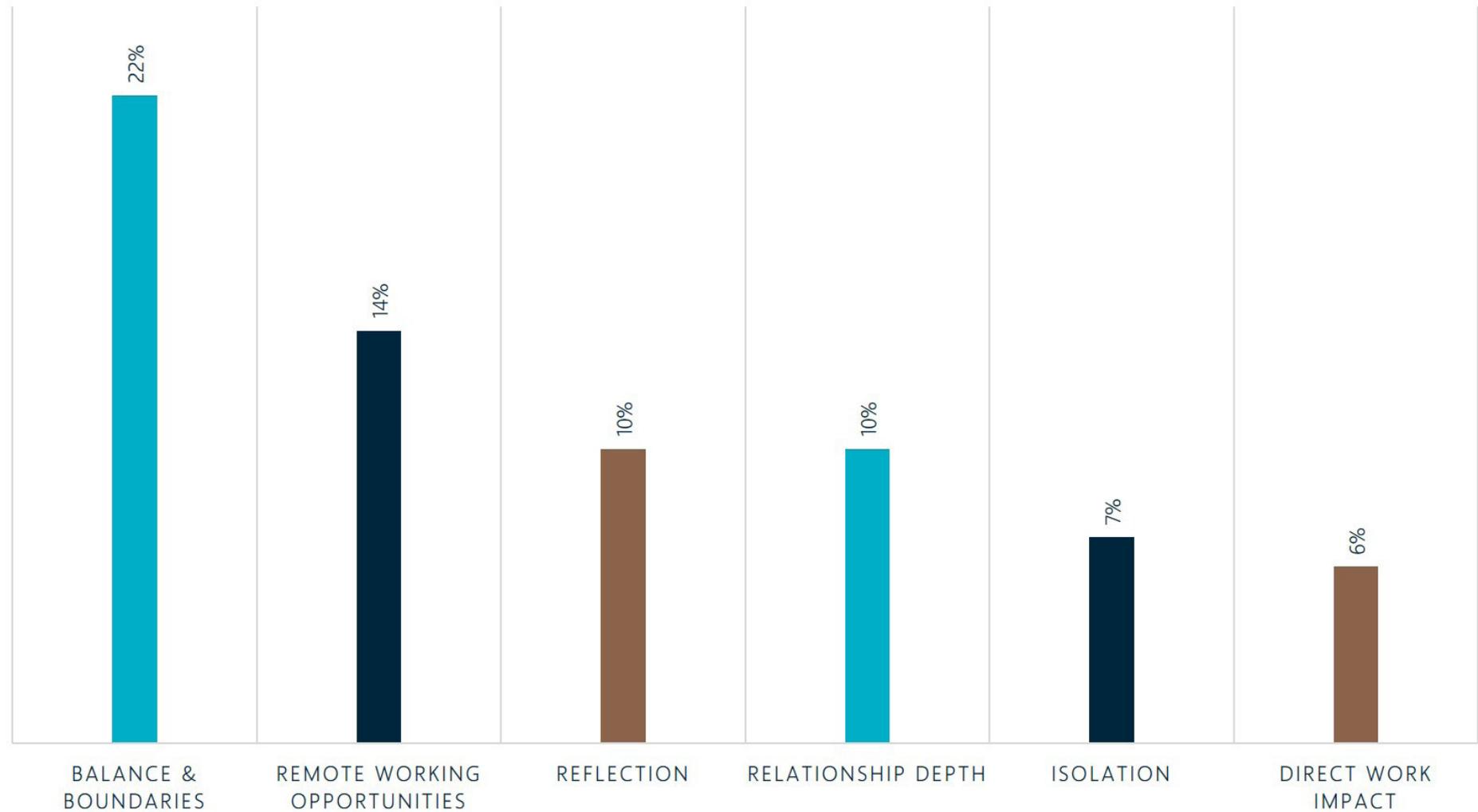
What simultaneous factors will you need to explore?

- The functional role and key job demands
- Work space and safety
- The individual’s perceived readiness and comfort
- Life circumstances
- Performance
- Team engagement
- Personal development
- The dynamics of working together remotely compared with in-person work

Greater remote
work could become
the “next normal”

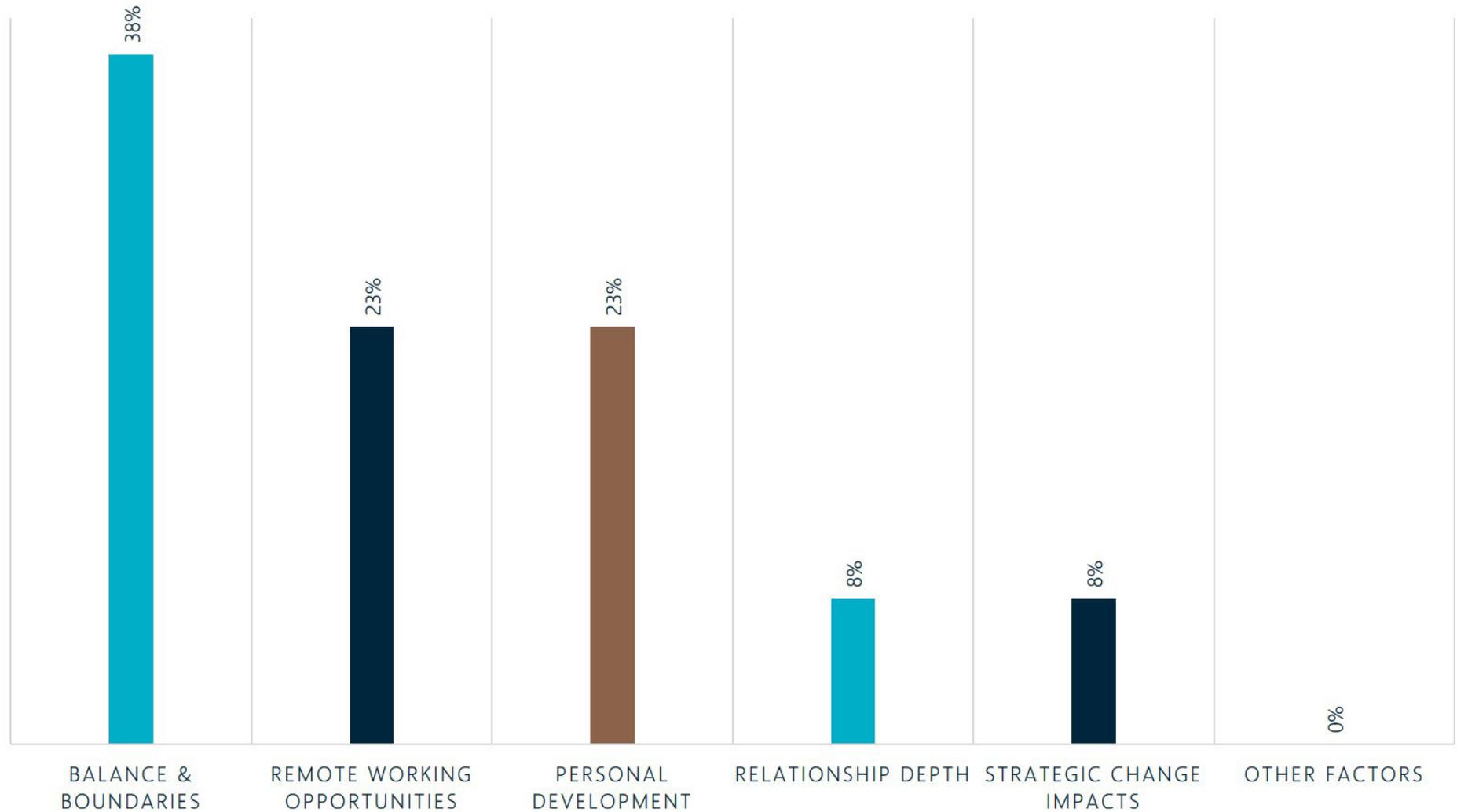
UK Response – Top 6

Highest % of
Respondent
Answers



North America Response – Top 6

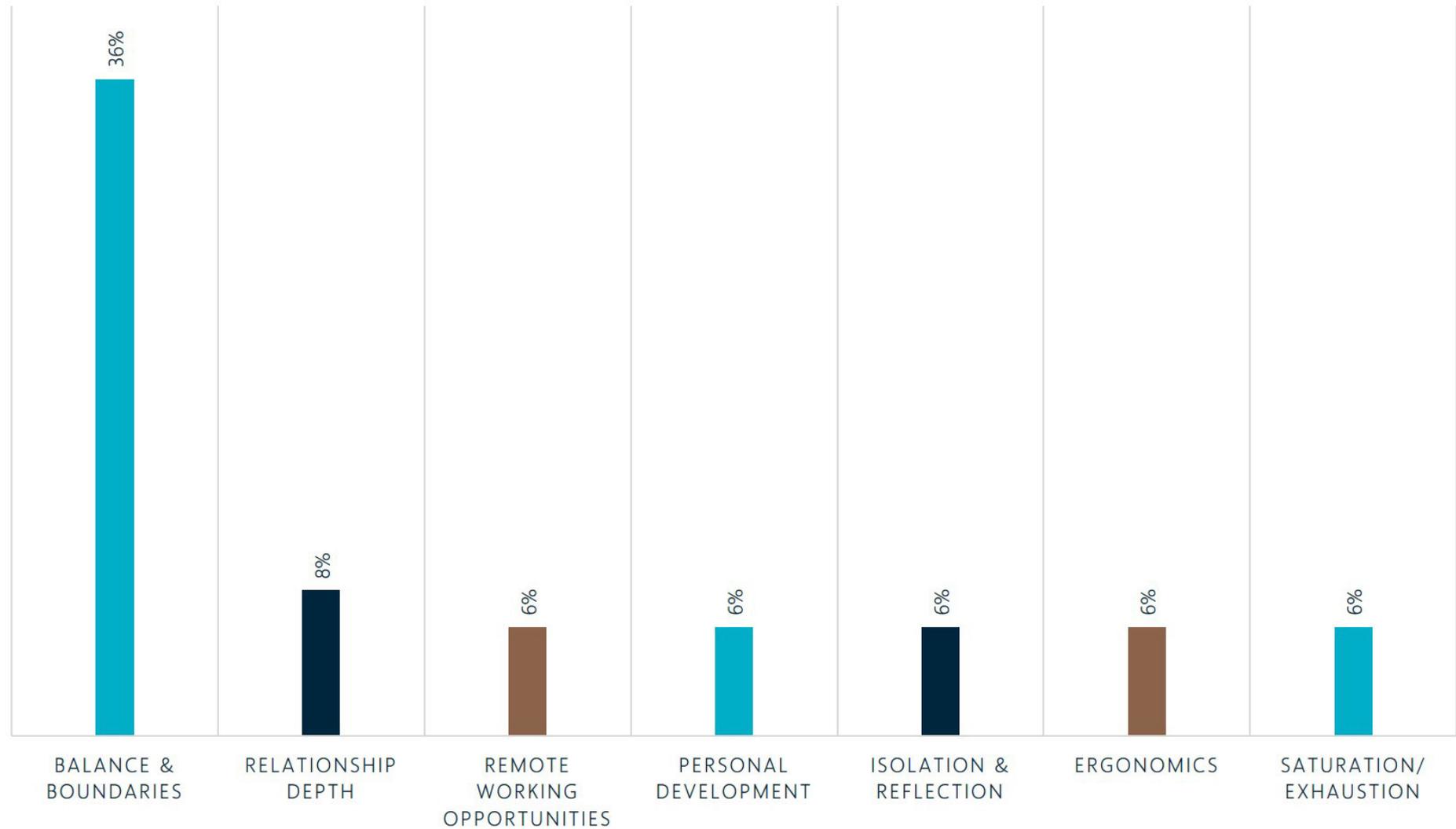
Highest % of
Respondent
Answers



Europe Response – Top 6

Highest % of
Respondent
Answers

NB: 5 factors share
the 3rd highest ratings



Remote Working: Challenges and Opportunities

Balance and Boundaries

Work Considerations

The Hidden Effects

Relationship Depth

Relationship Problems

Isolation

Alongside feelings of isolation, there was also evidence that people were able to develop deeper relationships and meetings were driven by greater purpose.

Relationship problems at work become more difficult to solve remotely. Tracking activity especially for the novice or developing person becomes hidden.

Saturation -Exhaustion



Most important under crisis but practice needs to develop more widely for homeworking, spotting saturation and exhaustion as it comes into view. Making sense of what is going on for people and spotting things. Volume of online meetings is unrelenting.



Role Shift Issues

Role Emphasis

Contact Changes

These are issues of presentism, when people are not physically present, someone (leaders) may jump to the next best immediate contact, jumping over role boundaries, replacing people, leaving confusion behind in roles and projects.

Time Impacts

The Hidden Effects

Time Issues

Contact Timing

Avoidance

People lose time, cannot trace people, perhaps related to fatigue from stress and pace of online. Problems with maintenance of documents and records from volume of activity, problem of real reflection on tasks and review of content of meetings, write up.



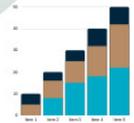
Interpersonal and Personal Reflection, Changing States

Relationship Depth

Reflection

Reflections, life, journey and about what is and isn't important. This may impact on the relationship to working and ways of working, as much as to what work people actually want to do in future and how they might want to do it. HR consideration for flexible working and location.

Personal Development



Strategic Change Impacts



Trust required for implementing new strategy or culture mergers etc. becomes difficult to achieve remotely where existing relationships are new.

Spontaneity

The opportunity for diverse patterns of thought and challenge. Implication here is there may be a greater potential for groupthink problems with remote dialogue, practice needs to be developed to this end and to frame watercooler style interactions. Impact on innovation, problems solving and knowledge creation could be problematic.

Structural and Planning Impacts – Related Largely to Crisis

Health Concerns

Ergonomic Impacts

Poor Crisis Planning

Network-Systems Access



Isolation

There are feelings of loneliness and isolation which have knock effects for health and well being. This is however not the whole picture, many people feel they have developed deeper more open relationships with colleagues, and can spend more focused time in conversation. Meetings become more purposeful because of time, volume and opportunity.



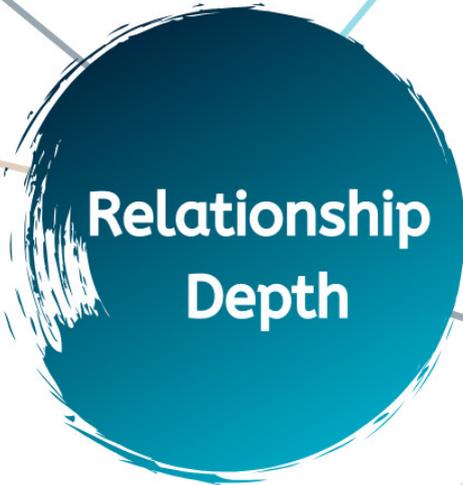
Time Issues

Saturation -Exhaustion

Contact Timing Time Impacts

Time and opportunity for some allows them to develop relationships and widen their contact base. Time for some means its easier to drop in conversations at a more personal level with leaders. Time restriction and allocation forces people into focus, which is also exhausting.

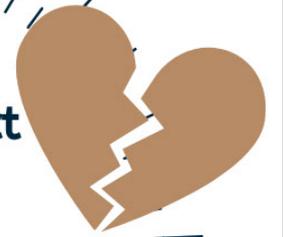
For some because of relentless pace depth of communication suffers. Their maybe potential for missed opportunity, poor emotional intelligence and deep thinking.



Online Contact

Relationship Problems

Relationship problems at work become more difficult to solve remotely.

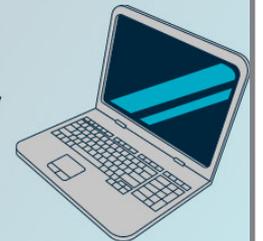


Role Worries

Role Emphasis

Contact Changes

People become worried about the work relationships and position. They don't have sight of office relationships.



Simple concerns about how to compartmentalise time, domestic roles, children and care for example.

Volume and pace of work is higher means the day is difficult to manage.

Re-evaluation about what is possible and what domestic roles are.



Pressure and Saturation Potential

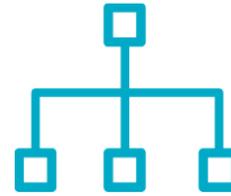
Time Impacts

Contact Timing

Saturation - Exhaustion

Fatigue from stress and unrelenting pace of online. Problems with maintenance of documents and records from volume of activity, problem of real reflection on tasks and review of content of meetings, write up.

Most important under crisis but practice needs to develop more widely for homeworking, spotting saturation and exhaustion as it comes into view. Making sense of what is going on for people and spotting things. Volume of online meetings is unrelenting.



Structural and Planning Impacts - Related Largely to Crisis

Health Concerns

Poor Crisis Planning

Network-Systems Access

Ergonomic Impacts



Largely related to problems with resources, access to IT, chairs, desks, monitors and the planning required to work at home. The longer terms impacts already showing in ergonomics related health issues, repetitive strain back issues etc.

Balance & Boundaries



Isolation

Feelings of loneliness and isolation, with knock effects for health and wellbeing.



Data Points:
The research in more detail

The research in more detail

- 30% of respondents said homeworking in the crisis had some form of **Negative Impact**. 5% of people suggested the impact was high.
- 62% of respondents suggested they were able to **positively engage** with work and take positive action.
- 87% of respondents suggested there was little in the way of **foundation issues** (the issues which prevented them from successfully beginning remote working initially). Only around 9% said they had foundation issues.
- 77% were able to deal with competing **domestic and work demands**.
- 64% of people had little or no **personal apprehension** about how homeworking in the crisis would affect them. However, 28% of people had higher levels of personal apprehension about how homeworking would affect them.
- 69% of people were able to **increase embeddedness (the use of their networks)** and make **network improvements**.
- Of those people who had never worked at home 11% of respondents suggested that they had **very high levels of negative impact**, compared to 6% and 2% respectively of the those who had previously worked at home occasionally and often. The least reported levels of negative impact overall, at 23%, was from those who had worked at home occasionally. Those who never worked at home or worked at home often showed 39% and 33% respectively.
- Those people who had worked at home occasionally showed the highest levels of **positive engagement with taking action** at 73%, compared to 50% who never worked at home and 55% who often worked at home in the past.
- Those people who had never engaged in home working showed 0% very positive levels of **positive engagement**, whereas those who had worked at home occasionally or often in the past showed 12% or 15% respectively in terms of high positive engagement.

The Research in More Detail

- 23% of those respondents who had never worked at home reported they had **foundation issues**, 10% reporting high foundation issues. Of those people who worked at home occasionally or often 0% reported high foundation issues, though both groups 6% reported some level of foundation issues.
- Of those who never worked at home previously 28% of respondents believed they were able to deal with **competing home and work demands**. The outlook for dealing with home demands was more than twice as high in those who had previously worked at home often at 60%
- Of those who never worked at home previously 16% of respondents believed they no **personal apprehension** about the effects working from home initially. The level of personal apprehension was more than three times as high in those who had previously worked at home often at 49%. This figure was 28% in those who had worked at home occasionally previously.
- The lowest **levels of embeddedness** were in those who had never worked at home 33%. Whereas those who had worked at home occasionally or often in the past showed 15% or 6% respectively in terms low levels of embeddedness.
- More people in North America **worked at home** more often than anywhere else at 58%, 47% Europe and 40% UK. Europe had the smallest percentage of people who had never worked at home. Only 15% of respondents in total had never worked at home.
- In respect of being very **happy at the opportunity to work from home** more North American respondents were happy at 73% compared to 30% in UK and 45% in Europe. UK had the highest percentage of respondents suggesting they were **unhappy with the opportunity**.
- Around 9% and 11% of North American respondents and UK respondents respectively felt they were **unable to make decisions initially**. This proportion was 0% in Europe.

The Research in More Detail

- 13% of UK responders said they were very worried about **impacts on wellbeing** compared 3% in Europe and 0% in North America. Those respondents that felt they were worried represented 42% of UK responders compared 31% in Europe and 9% in North America.
- Those respondents that felt they were **worried about mental health** represented 40% of UK responders compared 28% in Europe and 27% in North America.
- 73% of North American respondents believed they could make **improvements to working practice** 53% and 59% in UK and Europe respectively.
- More respondents in the UK suggested that homeworking would allow them to **widen their networks**. 39% UK compared to 22% Europe and 22% North America.
- Only 10% of European respondents suggested they had been able to **help colleagues** settle into homeworking practice, compared to 50% of North American and UK respondents.
- The UK had the highest proportion of respondents suggesting they were **unable find workarounds for resources**.
- More UK respondents felt the **crisis overshadowed all their thoughts** at 33% compared to 20% North American and 14% Europe.
- Between a third and a fifth of respondents suggested they had not been able to make **positive changes in their relationship** to their leaders and managers. 30% Europe, 20% North America and 21% UK.
- More people in North American suggested the period of homeworking had affected their **sense of wellbeing**, 30% NA, Europe 20% and UK 25%.
- The UK has more respondents who believe the situation has very much affected their **mental health** at 9% North American and Europe both recorded 0% here, however those that believed their mental health had been effected was recorded at 20%, 40% and 28% in Europe, north American and UK respectively. This makes the North America the region with the largest impact on mental health overall.
- Interestingly of those respondents who suggested they were very likely to have the **mental health** impacted 70% found it indeed was at some level 39% at a high level. Of those respondents who said their mental health was not going to be affected 16% in fact were, 9% reporting mental health effects as high. A similarly pattern was exhibited in relation to wellbeing.

The Research in More Detail

- Only around 11% of **Pharma/Biotech** employees were neutral about the opportunity to work from home during the crisis. 86% of Pharma/Biotech staff surveyed said they were happy about the working from home opportunity.
- 55% of **Public Sector** workers surveyed said they were positive about the opportunity to work from home in the crisis, 18% were not happy about the opportunity to work at home, some 27% were neutral on the issue.
- In the **Financial Services** sector 44% were neutral and 44% positive about the opportunity to work from home during the crisis, 11%.
- 77% of **Management Development and Consultant** workers surveyed said they were positive about the opportunity to work from home in the crisis, 11% were not happy about the opportunity to work at home, some 11% were neutral on the issue.
- **Manufacturing** (42%), **Digital** (42%), **Not for Profit** (37%) and **Healthcare** (40%) found it the most difficult to work from home because of the conditions caused by the crisis.
- **Manufacturing** (57%), **Digital** (71%), **Not for Profit** (38%) found it the most difficult to work from home because of competing domestic and work demands. The sectors responding to the survey that saw least in the way of competing domestic demands were **Management Development** (89%) and **Pharma/Biotech** (88%).

To talk to us about the future of your team, get in touch.



Why not drop us a line at discovery@compasspartnership.com



or give us a call on
[+44 \(0\)845 112 0016](tel:+44(0)8451120016)



www.compasspartnership.com