

Three days remote working most preferable – new survey

ANDY PRENDERGAST

The third annual remote working survey from NUIG and the Western Development Commission finds the vast majority of respondents are remote working, either partially or fully, and that three days remote working is the preferred balance for hybrid working.

Just over half of the 8,428 employee respondents to the survey – now in its third year – are currently working hybrid (sometimes remotely, sometimes onsite), while 40% are working fully remotely.

Nearly half of remote/hybrid workers would prefer to work three days remotely going forward, while another 30% would prefer four days remote work. Just 1% of employees who are currently working remotely would prefer not to work remotely in the future.

Half of surveyed workers indicated that their employer has confirmed how they will work in the future while one-fifth are still “in a trial phase.”

This suggests that most employers are moving forward with their remote/hybrid working plans, before the statutory ‘right to request’ remote working law comes into play. Anecdotal accounts heretofore indicated this was the case. Yet the main argument to have a ‘right to request’ law is that it is intended for those who have less bargaining power in the workplace.

Of the workers who have certainty on their future working patterns, 61% indicated that they will work hybrid, 30% indicated that they will work completely remotely, while 9% “will work fully onsite.”

Most hybrid workers have their working patterns set by their employer. Just over one-fifth of workers are deciding their own working location.

The survey was conducted in April of this year. Around two-thirds of respondents work in the private sector. The sector with largest proportion of responses is the ICT sector, comprising 18.3% of all respondents.

JOB CHANGE RATE: 27%

For the half of respondents who indicated that they will work according to a hybrid system going forward, the following are the noted hybrid work patterns:

- 3% are expected to be on site a minimum of 4 days a week
- 24% are expected to be on site a minimum of 3 days a week
- 36% are expected to be on site a minimum of 2 days a week
- 17% are expected to be on site a minimum of 1 day a week
- 8% are expected to be on site several days a month
- 12% indicated "other"

This largely tallies with the 3:2, remote: on-site pattern preference indicated by workers.

For those who selected "other", the answers given included having to be on site as required for certain face-to-face meetings, for creative work, as required ad hoc, depending on project requirements and for 'purposeful meetings'. These reasons reflect employers' need for flexibility to be on-site on a 'needs be' basis, rather than a rigid formula of days on and off-site.

Just over one-quarter of workers (27%) have changed employer since the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020, but just over half of this cohort indicated that remote working "was not a key factor in changing employer."

Around 30% of workers said they would change their job even if it means a pay cut, if remote working is not facilitated, while another 33% said "maybe" they would change their job.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Regarding opportunities for promotion, most respondents believe remote working has no impact (49%) or they do not yet know the impact (33%).

Thirty-seven per cent of surveyed workers indicated they would change job if remote working is not facilitated, even if it means fewer promotion opportunities, while 27% said "maybe." Thirty per cent said they would not change job if it means fewer promotion opportunities, while 6% "don't know."

On broader career opportunities, the majority believe that working remotely has no impact (45%) or they do not yet know the impact (30%). Sixteen per cent believe there is a positive impact while 9% believe there is a negative impact.

One-third indicated that they will change their job if remote working is not granted, "even if it reduces their career opportunities", while another 33% they would not change jobs over this issue, (27% said "maybe").

EMPLOYEE ATTRACTION AND RETENTION

Granting remote working also seems to positively affect an employee's loyalty to their employer.

The vast majority of respondents indicated remote working is impacting employee attraction and retention in their organisation: 88% either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement that their organisation needs to offer remote/hybrid working to attract staff; while 90% 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement that their organisation needs to offer remote/hybrid working to retain staff.

Of the time saved by not commuting, 27% of respondents indicated they spent up to half an hour of their saved commute time working, while 30% of respondents indicated they spent half an hour to an hour of their saved commute time working. One-fifth of respondents indicated that they spent none of their saved commute time working.

Similar to findings from the 2021 survey, remote/hybrid working seems to have a greater impact on quality of life than on the quality of work: 76% either agreed or strongly agreed that working remotely makes their job easier and 95% either agreed or strongly agreed that working remotely makes their life easier.

Some 79% either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that working remotely reduces their work-related stress.

However, 35% indicated working remotely had a negative effect on their level of engagement with colleagues – double the rate of those who said remote working had a positive effect on colleague engagement.

CONNECTED HUBS

Meanwhile, the Minister for Social Protection and Rural Affairs, Heather Humphreys, has announced new incentives to attract more workers to remote working hubs.

A new voucher scheme will give remote workers free access to their local digital hub, with at least 10,000 hot desk facilities "to be provided free of charge to existing hub users and those using the facilities for the first time."

Local Authorities will each receive €50,000 in funding to promote remote working opportunities in their areas.

Hub working across the country is one of the main pillars of the Government's 'Making Remote Work' strategy, established in early 2021.

At end of May 2022, 236 remote working hubs have been connected to the connectedhubs.ie network, with another 349 hubs mapped and invited to connect.

Some major counties (Dublin, Cork, Kildare) have had most of the identified hubs connected to the network, while others have yet to build up capacity, namely Meath, which had 20 hubs identified but none connected as of May 2022.

This year to date, €5m has been allocated to further develop and leverage the capacity of the National Hub Network. Last year, almost €9m was allocated under the same scheme.

