

Why Work from an Office?

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There has been considerable debate about the merits of working remotely for years, long before the COVID pandemic which forced many people to work from home. Prior to COVID, studies often found that working from home or a remote location reduced costs and improved individual productivity. And as most know following the pandemic, if they didn't know already, remote working arrangements offer a degree of flexibility that workers enjoy. People enjoy spending more time at home with their family. They want less commuting. For most organizations, allowing employees to work remotely increases morale and retention.

Working from home also has disadvantages such as family distractions, insufficient workspace, and a lack of resources. Yet working from home has been and will continue to be a viable solution for employees in most organizations, especially for those who already made the adjustment due to the pandemic. But many organizations are wrestling with if, when, and how employees will work remotely going forward. Should they require everyone to return to work? Or should they offer a hybrid model where some people work remotely and some don't? Or have people work alternating days? Or allow everyone to work from home on Fridays? Or empower employees to decide?

There is no single right answer and there are many implications to consider in deciding whether or not to allow employees to work from home or other remote locations. Perhaps the only right answer is to not force everyone to come back or allow everyone to continue to work from home without thinking through the implications.

If you are in a position of influence on this topic, listed below are key questions to consider. If the answer to very many of these are "yes", working remotely full-time may not be the best solution. Or if the answers to most questions are "no", then working remotely may be the best solution, at least part-time.

- **Job requirements** - Do the requirements of the job entail work to be done onsite at the office or designated work location? Yes or No
- **Interaction** - Does the work require frequent or face-to-face interaction with clients, partners, or other colleagues at the work location? Yes or No
- **Offerings** - Is your product, service, or deliverable physical as opposed to digital? Physical offerings require more physical presence. Yes or No
- **Working hours** - Does the work need to be done at the work location to ensure the work is done during a specific time period? Yes or No
- **Oversight needed** - Does the work need to be observed or monitored? Do the employees need to be observed or monitored? Is there a lack of metrics or deliverables such that performance can't be tracked without direct observation? Yes or No
- **Management involvement** - Do the employees need frequent interaction with their managers who work at the office or designated work location? Yes or No
- **Resources** - Are there tools, equipment, or resources at the work location that employees need to do their work productively, accurately, and safely? Yes or No
- **Facilities** - Are the facilities at the office or work location such that they enable higher levels of productivity or effectiveness? Yes or No
- **Colleagues** - Are most of the colleagues with whom employees need to communicate already collocated at the designated work location? Yes or No



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- **Communication** - Are there bandwidth or security issues with communications such as with phone service and internet access that inhibit working remotely? Yes or No
- **Costs** - Does working remotely cause employees or the organization to incur extra expenses? Yes or No
- **Distractions** – Are there distractions when working remotely that inhibit the work to be done? Yes or No
- **Assistance** - Is it important for employees to regularly receive assistance from others or give assistance to others at the work location? Yes or No
- **Community** - Is camaraderie and having a sense of belonging to a team or organization important and better achieved by working at the office or designated work location? Yes or No
- **Culture** - Is the influence that employees have on the organization’s work location culture or the culture has on the employee important? Yes or No
- **Career advancement** – Does working remotely prevent people from advancing in their career in some way? Yes or No
- **Ad-hoc encounters** – Are casual interactions such as meeting in the break room or eating lunch together important? Is the ability to have frequent impromptu discussions important? Yes or No
- **Learning** – Is employee learning and development enhanced by being present at the designated work location? Yes or No
- **Retention and morale** – Do talented and critical employees prefer to work at the designated work location? Yes or No
- **Disability accommodation** – Does the designated work location provide better accommodations for people’s impairments or other special needs? Yes or No

If your organization is contemplating having employees come back to a designated work location full-time, or part-time in a hybrid model, also give thought to what you are doing to attract people back to the work location. If the office is the best solution, can you provide services, resources, or facility improvements that would make people want to come back? Can you make the location more attractive or functional? Can you provide snacks, outdoor break areas, or better parking options? Or change working hours to shorten people’s commutes? People are your most important asset. For them to give their best, make their work location as functional and enjoyable as you reasonably can.

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