

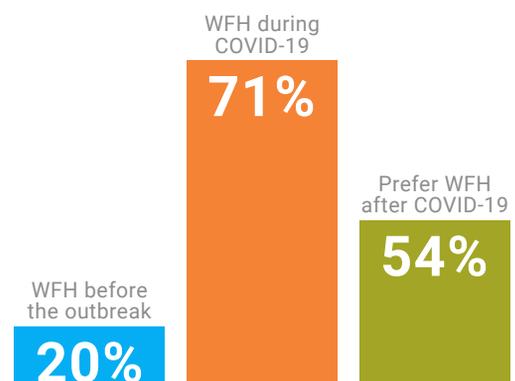
Working From Home: The Future, Today

From the creation of Facebook and YouTube to the launch of the iPhone, the Dot-com bubble to the financial crisis of 2008, these are some examples of occurrences that changed the world forever. But no one was ready for what loomed ahead in early 2020...

The beginning of that year saw the discovery and alarming spread of COVID-19. Physical offices were closed down and overseas workers returned to their respective countries.

For many countries overwhelmed with cases, going out was limited to only essential trips like groceries or emergencies. Streets were empty, malls and amusement parks became ghost towns, and restaurants offered takeout only. This global phenomenon brought the daily routines of billions around the world to almost a complete halt. Whether it's fully from home or a mix of home and office, all will require adjustments to how we go about our work.

In this new era of work, what are some of the threats that are currently facing us? What are the steps to be taken based on our current circumstances? What needs to be changed, both in our workspace, if not our lifestyle? The following pages seek to answer these questions and provide solutions.



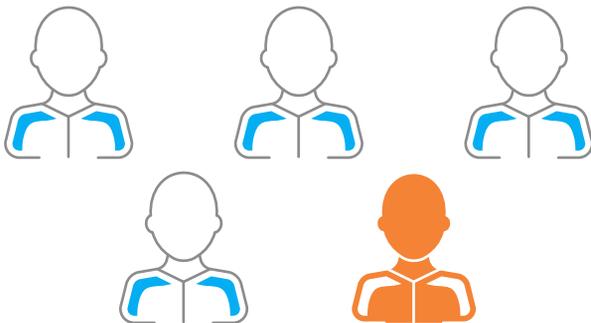
Pew Research Center conducted a survey in October of 2020 based on 5,858 US adults working part-time or full-time.

Health

Sleep

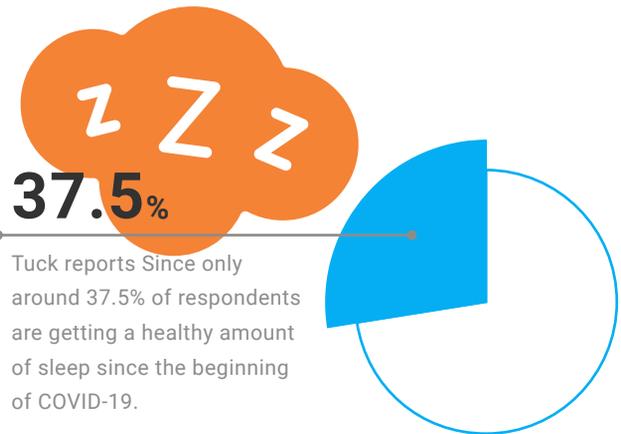
Over the last two years, many have realized that working from home is not all that glamorous as initially anticipated. Typically, people can draw the line of when to answer calls and when to rest with the physical separation of the workplace and home. However, WFH has muddied the waters of this divide. This translates to working into the night, less sleep, the constant stress of emails throughout the day past the usual hours, and more.

“1 in 5 workers have work-related messaging apps on their mobile phones, which results in 49% answering emails early morning or into the night beyond work hours,” based on a study done by Furniture at Work.



Interestingly, 51% are replying to messages faster than usual to remind their co-workers that they are working, which is unnecessary if they are in the office.

With WFH, workers are undergoing an additional kind of invisible and subtle stress throughout the day that can mentally wear down an individual. A “sleep, work, and COVID-19” peer-reviewed study done by Tuck has shown a 37% increase in sleep disruptions, and 47% that never had sleeping issues from stress are now experiencing them.



Stress isn’t just happening at the moment when things go wrong. It could also be an active, hidden component subconsciously, which wreaks havoc on mental health over time if unaddressed.

Workspace

Professional work environments are set up with specific ergonomics for long hours of work. On the other hand, most do not have personal offices at home. During severe lockdown restrictions in certain regions, movement of the body will at most consist of walking within different rooms of where you live.

Take short breaks whenever you can to enable your forced movement plan.

In the office, one could get up for a coffee break to chat with a colleague, or walk to another area of the workplace to discuss a problem or proposal with a fellow coworker. These are known as “forced movements”. However, all this has now all been condensed to quick Slack messages or Zoom video calls. A recommendation is to try taking breaks to walk to different parts of the house or implement short relaxation routines. This will give your wrists and eyes a rest, maybe even an opportunity to do some stretches, which can help with correcting bad posture from working.

Posture

The American Chiropractic Assn.’s Council on Occupational Health reported that 92% of respondents in a survey found an “...increase in musculoskeletal conditions such as back and neck pain as a result of patients working from home.”

For many, their setup consists of “...monitors too small and too low; desks that don’t adjust; chairs without armrests and back support; built-in keyboards and touchpads instead of external ones... [resulting in] remote workers report suffering from aches and pain, joint soreness, stiffness, numbness, carpal tunnel and headaches.” (Chang, 2021). From an article published in the Journal of Occupational Health in June 2021, Seva and her colleagues made the following statement:

“The space within the home may be limited in relation to the occupants, or the furniture available may not be suitable for prolonged work affecting habitability defined as the physical environment’s capability to meet health and safety, functional and task performance, and physical comfort.”

Dr. K. Daniel Riew, Director of Cervical Spine surgery in the Department of Orthopedic Surgery at the New York-Presbyterian Ochsner Medical Center adds:

“Most people are not used to working from home this much and they may not have ergonomically correct chairs and desks, so we are getting more complaints of back and neck pain.”

Eyesight and Stress

Eye strain from long hours in front of the screen plus not blinking often can lead to ailments such as headaches, fatigue, blurred vision, and other ailments. For those that have migraines, scheduled breaks can reduce the chances of episodes as well. Medical professionals at Cedars-Sinai recommend looking into the distance at least 20 feet away every 20 minutes for a minimum of 20 seconds. Subsequently, take time off away from the computer for at least 15 minutes for every 2 hours of screen use. Screens are also recommended to be at an arm’s length out.

Scheduled breaks can reduce the chances of ailments.

A team at Microsoft utilized EEG equipment to conduct tests on 14 volunteers. One test group attended four consecutive 30-minute meetings without breaks, and the other with 10-minute breaks with meditation. Those without breaks had higher levels of beta wave activity with the brain or waves that are associated with stress.

“37% of remote workers stay productive by taking breaks.” – Airtasker

It is best to fully switch off when the day is over. According to a survey done by Buffer, in a survey of 2,300 remote workers, over 27% considered not being able to unplug as their biggest struggle. Reasons for struggling to unplug could also be tied to the previous section with regards to not sticking to a schedule. Set boundaries not just for work but personal time. Not having some time to yourself over extended periods of time can be extremely draining.



Work Environment

Going from a designated workspace to the confines of our homes will require some adjustments. The setup you use for your workspace is a crucial part of affecting your work performance. From amenities to choose where in the house to work, every seemingly small aspect can all add up to a positively transformative working experience.

A designated workspace to separate work and personal life is highly recommended.

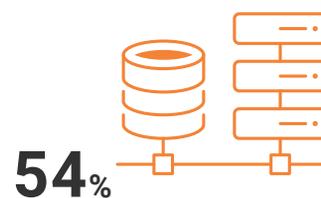
If able, have a specific workspace that is somewhat separate from what you do outside of work. A personal office space, a desk in a bedroom, or in the dining room. During work hours, have those around you in other areas of the house to prevent distractions. For noise, see which room in the house is most optimal for quietness and seclusion. This will be especially beneficial during Zoom calls and other video meetings when you need to minimize background noise to prevent disturbance.

Alternatively, try working in different areas of the house throughout the day. A switch in the environment could refresh your mind as well. Explore different routines and approaches to see what works best for you.

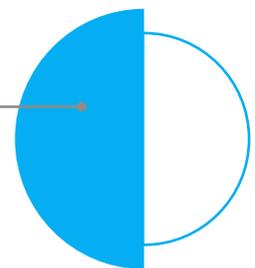
“82% of U.S. employees want to work from home at least some of the time when the pandemic is over. On average, they would prefer to do so half of the time. The balance would prefer to work a hybrid-remote schedule.” -Global Work From Home Experience Survey, Global Workplace Analytics & Iometrics, 2020

Fortunately, many employers understand this issue and have provided WFH allowance to their employees to make their homes better set up for work. Figure out a budget, and if you can modify or add on to what you currently have, before purchasing new items. If you have a dining room table too high and a chair too low, add a seat pillow to the chair seat to adjust the height.

Digital Dangers



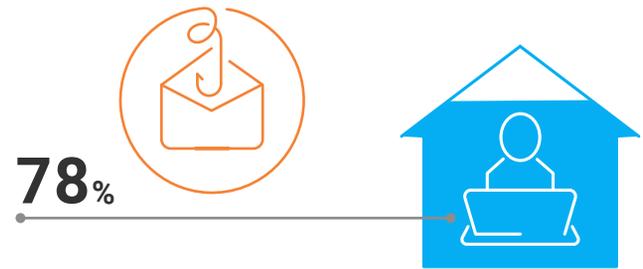
“54% of IT professionals believe that remote work brings greater security risks.”- OpenVPN



COVID-19 restrictions prompted many employees to work from home on their personal laptops or desktops. Many either are not aware of the importance of their digital habits or unsure what to do to minimize the security vulnerabilities they have working from their personal computer.

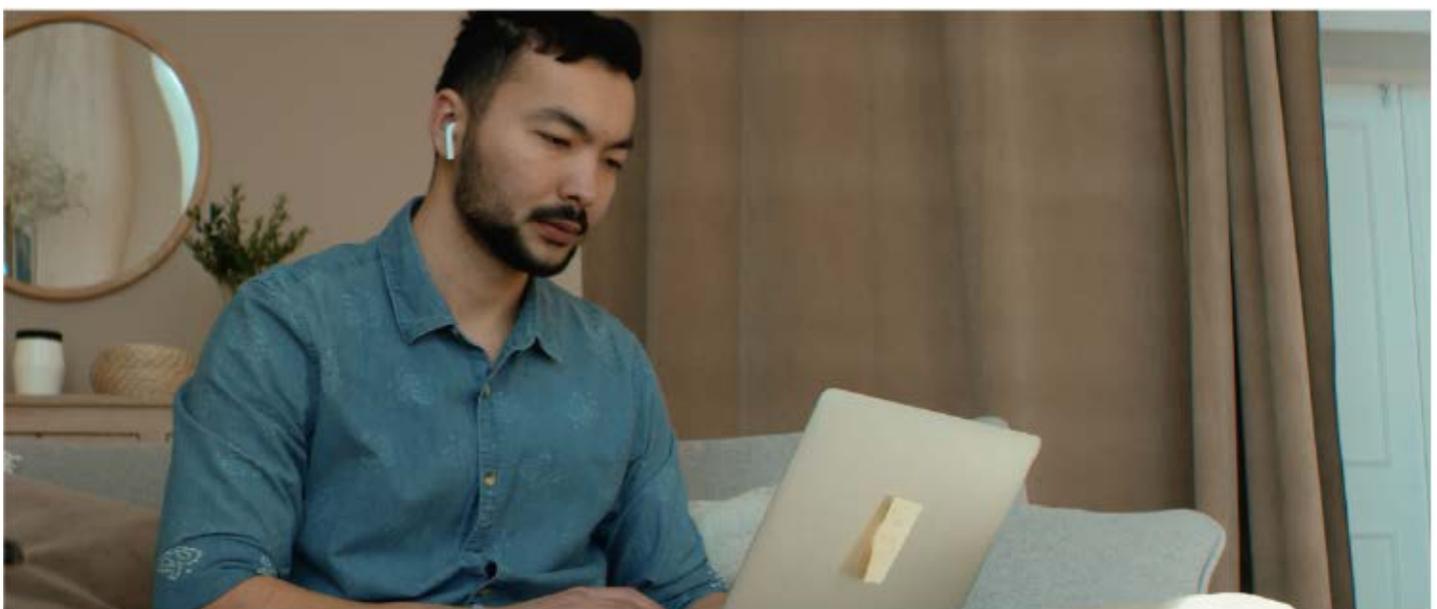
As a result, corporations have realized there are major security flaws that need to be addressed. Certain issues have temporary workarounds or remedies, while others require long-term planning and execution. With many having not much if, at all experience of working from home, insufficient preparation and training for employees is to be expected.

Suppose an individual on their personal home computer opens a file from an email their colleague forwarded and is unaware that it had malicious content hiding within. Not only would their device be compromised, but can also end up causing damage or loss to sensitive company data. Personal devices are often without the security and restrictions of a work computer would have, and often their WiFi networks are nowhere as secure as ones in the office.



“78% of remote workers who worked on their personal devices during the lockdown period between March and July 2020 said they received phishing emails, either in their work or personal inboxes.” -Tessian Research

Work devices provided by employers typically have all the necessary software and resources within their network for maximized security. The IT department within corporations spends much effort to ensure that the digital safety of employees is solid, to prevent cyber threats. However, with personal computers, none of these defenses are equipped. Adding on a simple Wi-Fi setup at home, there are clear vulnerabilities that can easily be taken advantage of. What remedies are available?



Technical Solutions

In these new conditions, companies are encouraged to have their IT departments' aid and guidance on the things that should and should not be done while employees work from home. Although the IT sectors of companies have been at a disadvantage without their usual resources and ability to provide on-site help, this does not mean that they are unable to provide support to the members of the company. Sue Poremba of Security Intelligence stresses the aspect of training as a fundamental part of IT, with courses being an option:

“Employees need more frequent training sessions and more hands-on sessions to understand the importance and urgency of practicing good security habits.”

Paul Vallee of Security Boulevard suggests, “Don’t click suspicious links; ensure your system, antivirus, and applications are patched and updated regularly; don’t send sensitive work information through your email account; etc....it’s also important to establish, communicate and set expectations repeatedly around your organization’s cybersecurity policy.” Cybersecurity research firm Canalis came with the following conclusions:

“Organizations had to implement business continuity measures quickly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic or risk going out of business... These measures were often at the expense of cybersecurity and bypassed long-standing corporate policies, leaving many exposed to exploitation by highly organized and sophisticated threat actors...new security measures are needed.”



Corporate VPN has its shortcomings. A viable solution to rectify its risks would be Remote Browser Isolation or RBI. A user's browsing activity is not conducted on their device, but instead through servers that run everything through the cloud. This provides a secure air gap that separates the device from the websites accessed. The goal of RBI is to prevent malicious content and potential threats from infiltrating the user's laptop or mobile phone. Because of heightened digital attacks that have targeted companies, more implement this measure for the safety of both employees and company networks.

A study done by Gartner Partners suggests companies implement “zero trust execution” and “deny by default” systems for better security, as often antivirus-based mechanisms fail to protect from attacks of recent.

Gartner has also concluded that enterprises that use EPP (end-user-focused device protection) face great risk to their enterprise data, as the risk surface is far greater and varied with employees at home versus within the general workplace. Along with that, traditional infrastructures for enterprises have shown to be becoming obsolete in this era with everything being moved to remote and cloud-based platforms. Hence, Cloud RBI can be a very useful asset for all in the years to come, both personal and work scenarios.

What's Next?

What should we expect for the coming months and years? For those returning to the office, expect to see a major revamp of office layout, amenities, and more because workplaces will not be as packed as they would have been in the past. In addition, some spaces may be converted for use other than work, with the COVID-19 era bringing mental and emotional health to the forefront due to extended WFH hours.

Perhaps a more apparent change would be fewer employees in the office at once, reducing both costs and environmental impacts in the long run for all parties. Instead of one singular headquarters where everyone will work, operations would be spread out and with a more flexible working structure, be it at home or smaller (or even temporary) locations.

“It is important to design hybrid-remote work arrangements that also allow for geographic flexibility and work-from-anywhere.”- Prithwiraj (Raj) Choudhury of HBS.

With hybrid work, teleworking will be the norm for many companies. Sanitary and health precautionary steps will see a significant upgrade. Possibly fewer in-person social engagements, but safer working environments in the grand scheme of things.

The results of COVID-19 will be a watershed moment that brings up a step towards tomorrow. With the cloud sector's ever-so-increasing importance for thousands of companies worldwide, the way we communicate and collaborate is forever changed. Adjustments to the environment around you as well as methods of doing things in order to adapt to this new age will certainly help you prepare for whatever you may face, for full-time WFH. As the future of work will not always be within a company's internet infrastructure, security risks will be as prevalent as ever. Regardless of where work will be, the dynamics within will most certainly have a revolutionary revamp. The work you know will never be the same again.

