

Telecommuting and Remote Work Revolution: Are Workers More Effective and Productive Working from Home? (A Multi-Perspective Analysis)

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Abstract: Working from Home (WFH) has become a profound workplace culture in developed and developing countries with a concern whether it should be continued or discontinued. Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to examine the subject of telecommuting and remote work revolution against whether workers are more effective and productive working from home? To accomplish this, a descriptive research design that is multi-perspective in nature and utilizes the content analysis approach was adopted. The paper presented a brief history of teleworking, different remote working platforms, performance of teleworkers, factors affecting performance of remote workers and concluding remarks which embodies recommendations.

Keywords: *Telecommuting, Remote Work Revolution, Remote Workers, Productivity.*

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Introduction

The telecommuting and remote work revolution that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 has attracted a number of discourses and debates from professionals and scholars. Telecommuting and remote working are technical terms used to describe a paradigm shift and flexibility in the workplace environment in which workers are allowed to work from home or any other location outside their organisation's physical workspace (Wrike, 2023). The remote work revolution across the globe offers a new brave workplace characterized by the digitalization of work contents, use of multiple communication tools, collaborative networks largely decided by power elites in the organization (Gephart, 2002; Rice & Gattiker, 2001).

Early advocates of teleworking and remote working argued that it will help address urbanization problems like traffic congestion, energy cost (Nilles et al., 1976), reduce real-estate costs for organisations (Egan, 1997). To control the spread of the COVID-19 virus during the pick of the pandemic, companies including government establishments directed their workers to work from home. Many months of experimenting this work model, it is important to evaluate the performance of remote workers in terms of their efficiency and productivity.

This paper is therefore undertaken to fill the gap in literature by answering the question, are workers more effective and productive working from home? Put differently, what lessons are we learning from remote work revolution? Should the model be stopped or continued? What technical difficulties confront the Working from Home model (WFH)?

For the purpose of clarity, the paper is divided into sections with each section covering a specific theme collectively driven towards determining whether workers are more effective and productive when they work from home.

Origin and Nature of Telecommuting and Remote Working

Literatures on the history of telecommuting, teleworking, and remote working agrees that the terms are not a new phenomenon. The history of teleworking and remote working is largely divided in phases: the period before the industrial revolution; the Industrial Revolution Phase which covered the years from 1800s to 1950s; the flex period of the 1960s; the 1970 years largely regarded as the father of telecommuting with the writing of Jack Nilles' book: **The Telecommunications-Transportation Tradeoff**, which demonstrated how telecommuting can be used as a strategy to solve the

emerging problem of traffic congestion in urban cities and conserve resources; the 1980s period characterized by advancements in the telecommunication industry; the phase of environmental influences-1990s, the New Millennium Period- 2000s (Pasini, 2018) and the COVID-19 period.

The period before the industrial revolution is characterized by working from home at its infancy stage. Working from home was considered imperative during this period as many persons did not have the luxury of time and financial resources to travel to a separate location on a daily basis. Working from home was the normal way of life for persons involved in trading and farming. Artisans like carpenters, blacksmiths, weavers, tailors, gunsmiths, barbers and saddlers saw it as a necessity to work from home by partitioning their living space or construct a separate structure on their land to carry out their business or perform their craft. Farmers farm crops and raise animals around their homes without having to make journeys to their farms (Pasini, 2018).

The workplace and the traditional model of working from home changed dramatically during the Industrial Revolution. The technological revolution that greeted the period saw the establishment of industries occasioned by the compelling need to draw men from their homes to work in the newly established industries. This period was followed by the birth of the flextime in 1967 largely to address the problem of traffic congestion, tardiness, absenteeism in the workplace, boost job satisfaction and commitment, enhance efficiency and productivity. Flexible time schedules and programs were introduced by companies like Messerschmitt-Bolkow-Blohm (a German Aerospace manufacturer) and Hewlett-Packard which allowed for part-time careers, job sharing, working in shifts, compressed workweek, and work at home arrangements (Dobbin, 2009; Pasini, 2018).

The above period was followed by a remarkable change in remote working following the publication of Jack M. Nilles' book: *The Telecommunications-Transportation Tradeoff (T3)* in 1976. In this book, Nilles (often regarded as the Father of Telecommuting) and his colleagues advocated the work model of telecommuting (the idea of moving the work closer to the workers rather than moving the workers to the work) as a potential strategy of ameliorating urbanization challenges like traffic congestion (Nilles, 1988; Nilles et al., 1976).

From the humble phases of growth painted above, teleworking and remote working has grown in sophistication to becoming a dominant culture of workplace organization in some contemporary organisations. This is made possible through the advancement in Information and Communication Technology.

Teleworking and Remote Working Platforms

Teleworking and Remote Working Platforms or Software are online tools designed to help remote works to communicate with other organizational workers. They could serve as one-in-all online platforms/workplaces performing diverse functions for the benefit of the organisation, project being executed or customers being served. As noted earlier, teleworking and remote working before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic is made possible through advancements in technology and ICT. One of such advancements is the design of various teleworking and remote working softwares and platforms. This section highlights a few of these platforms such as Google Drive, Slack, Click Up, Basecamp, Dropbox Business, Slack, Zoom, Trello, TeamViewer, Asana, GoTo Meeting, Front, Todoist, WeWork, Hubstaff, Zappier, Virtual Vacations, Airtable, Microsoft Teams, Miro, Trainual, Bloomfire, Justworks, MangoApps, 15five, Kudos, Libreoffice, Monday.com, LinkedIn, etc. To use these softwares and platforms, the remote worker needs reliable and stable high- speed network (internet), a computer- desktop or laptop and android phone. Some of the platforms enumerated above are briefly described in the table below:

Table 1: Selected Teleworking and Remote Working Platforms

S/N	Remote Platform	Functionality	Cost of Subscription
1.	Google Drive and Google Workplace	Google Drive was developed by Google and launched on April 24, 2012. It is a storage and synchronization service that allows users to share files within and outside organizations, store files in the cloud and synchronize files across devices. As at 2018, the software had 1 billion users. Google Workplace consists of applications like Gmail, Slide, Calendars, Docs, Sheets, Drive, Docs, Meet designed to create, communicate, and collaborate (Wikipedia, 2023, Soltero, 2020)	Free version exists (15GB), 100 GB for 1.99USD Monthly, etc.
2.	Slack	Slack is designed to serve as a communication platform used by remote teams and social organizations globally. It usually	Although it has a free version, the Pro package goes

		facilitates communication between departments, offices via channels, threads, and direct messages (Robinson, 2022)	for 7.25USD a Month
3.	ClickUp	ClickUp is designed to serve as a virtual productivity platform, cloud storage system and workspace (customized workspace can be created) that combined multiple tools allowing team users to assign and track tasks. Through its dashboard, documents can be shared, wikis built, ideas shared and exchanged. Some of ClickUp features are- goal measurement, calendars, time tracking, productivity monitoring, and reminders (Robinson, 2022)	It has various packages- Free Version, Unlimited Package for small teams at 5USD/month; Business package for mid-size teams at 12USD/Month, etc.
4.	Basecamp	Basecamp has a history more than a decade in existence and its tools are designed to aid remote team communication and project coordination through multiple tasking in one central workspace. The software consists of message boards, tools for group chats, documents and file-sharing, task-assignment, and automated check-ins. These combined tools assist remote teams to stay organized and productive (Robinson, 2022).	The minimum package of this platform goes for 15USD a month
5.	Dropbox Business	Dropbox Business is created to provide file hosting services, permit remote teams cloud storage of documents, file sharing, send messages use of productivity tools and content collaboration. To enhance productivity of remote teams, the software supports integrations with other apps like Gmail, Salesforce, etc. The software is believed to have over 700 million users.	Users have the option of a free version or monthly subscription of 16.58USD.

6.	Zoom	Zoom is a leading virtual platform for video conferencing, file sharing, cloud storage, screen sharing, video calls and face to face meetings for remote teams and workers.	There is Basic package (40 minutes per meeting that is free and subscription package of 14.99USD monthly.
7.	Asana	Asana is designed to serve as a product and project management tool, set-up cross-sectional work and manage teams. It is used to communicate, collaborate, store information, organize and assign tasks, automate workflows and monitor progress.	Asana has a free version and subscription packages- Premium (10.99USD/month), Business- 24.99USD/month, etc.
8.	GoTo Meeting	Go To Meeting is a secured professional software for online meeting, web conferencing, desktop sharing, and video calls. It is therefore an alternative Zoom platform. It has the features for business messaging, collaboration among team members, online meeting with customers, colleagues, clients and team members in real time.	Released on July 2004. It offers a Professional and Business Packages which monthly attracts 12USD and 16USD respectively.
9.	TeamViewer	TeamViewer is a remote access software released in 2005. It grants remote access by enabling workers to work from anywhere with full access to devices for meetings, control, online sales, and support to customers and employees.	TeamViewer Premium goes for 52.90USD/monthly
10.	WeWork	WeWork is created to provides flexible workspace solutions, such as traditional offices, coworking spaces, office suites with private amenities. WeWork has more than 700 locations globally in 150 cities and 38 countries (Johnston et al., 2022).	

11.	Hubstaff	Hubstaff is a remote software created with a dashboard for time tracking, workforce management, and employee monitoring.	It has a desk starter for 5.83USD/monthly
12.	Monday.com	monday.com is designed to serve as communication and project management tool. It possesses features such as data dashboards, remote team calendars, project boards, and timelines. It permits collaborations and information sharing (Robinson, 2022)	
13.	LibreOffice		In terms of cost, LibreOffice is free forever for users

Source: Compiled by Agba et al. (2020a; 2020b)

Performance of Remote Workers: Are Workers More Effective and Productive Working from Home? (A Multi-Perspective Analysis)

From a multi-perspective analysis, attempt is made to address the question: are workers more effective and productive working from home? A survey of literature that analyzing the performance of remote workers, shows divergent views- argument for remote working and against remote working.

The advancement recorded in remote working technologies, the need to curb air pollution, responds the acts that protect the physically challenged, followed by the pandemic crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic offer a choice of hybrid and remote work models to job seekers, staff and employers in the world of work. In the face of high energy cost affecting transportation, rising cases of insecurity and terrorism attacks in public places, climatic and topographical changes, job seekers and workers are making efforts to get additional knowledge, training and skills that will equip them to work remotely or hybrid. The work style revolution is so dramatic that statistics support a positive trend towards remote work and hybrid work models. For instance, the Gallup survey conducted in June, 2022 revealed that 5 out10 workers are working hybrid (this implies that part of their weekdays at home and part on-site); 3 in every 10 workers are exclusively working remotely and 2 in 10 are entirely on-site. Gallup estimated that more than 70 million United States workers can carry out their job working remotely while 2 in 10 remote-capable workers are currently working fully on-site (Wigert & Agrawal, 2022). Similar findings of the Upwork study carried out in 2021 projected that by 2025, 40.7 million American professionals will be working remotely (Ozimek, 2021). The

FlexJobs' Employee Engagement Report of a survey conducted between 13-31 July, 2022 revealed that 48% of employers are maintaining some form of remote work for their workforce (Howington, 2022a). In summary, Howington (2022b), concludes that organisations have discovered that physically being at the office full-time is not imperative to produce great performance results.

In developing countries, the ability to work remotely is low, and the culture of remote work has not been fully embraced. In an empirical study conducted by Gottlieb, Grobovsek, Poschke & Saltiel (2021), it was discovered that the capacity to work from home is low in developing countries, and that remote working is more likely to involve the educated, wage employees and women. The findings of this study further indicates that fewer than 10 percent of urban jobs in developing economies can be carried out remotely. Vulnerable groups like employees in low-wage occupations, the self-employed and high school dropouts are less likely to work remotely. Another study by Viollaz (2022) arrived at similar findings of low percentage of workers who are able to work from home in developing countries; however, concludes that infrastructural deficiencies are the major obstacles of working from home in developing countries. Since the findings of these authors, we note in this paper that a lot have taken place in developing countries with respect to working from home. The pay benefits associated remote jobs in recent times have motivated people especially the youths in developing countries to learn skills like programming, softwares development, business analytic, digital marketing as a way of empowerment to secure remote jobs. More persons are now able to work from home in developing countries.

In terms of organizational performance and a build up for cost saving culture, professionals and scholars are arguing for remote work because it is good for business. Recent studies have shown that businesses lost about \$600 billion annually caused by workplace distractions and that remote workers are 35-40% more productive than their counterparts who work in the office or on site (Howington, 2022a). There are a number of reasons why remote workers are considered more productive than office workers, some of these reasons are: fewer interruptions when workers work from home, quieter and conducive work environment, more comfortable workplace, more focused and dedicated time, avoiding office politics (Howington, 2022b). Waltowers (2023) listed three factors as accounting for high productivity among remote works-remote workers spend longer hours working, working from home improves work-life balance and remote workers experience less stress at work. These factors are not sufficient to explaining why remote workers are considered more productive than their counterparts who work in office. For

instance, to work remotely, availability of power, reliable internet, possession of require skills and knowledge, the right motivation, support, etc. are imperative necessity.

Furthermore, working from home makes workers more productive and committed to their jobs. Recent studies have demonstrated that working from home enhance work-life balance, improve work satisfaction, reduces attrition rate, reduces work related stress, boost commitment and productivity, and might well facilitates healthier lifestyles. Remote workspace aids and nurture workers with a new vigor of high performance on the job (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Ergotron, 2023, Tsipursky, 2022; Waltower, 2023). In a study conducted by Ergotron involving 1000 workers in the United States to explore the effect of remote and hybrid work on employee engagement, wellness and productivity. From the study, it was discovered among others that 40% of office employees report that they work longer hours now that they are remote/hybrid; 56% of the workers report improvements in their mental health as a result of working remotely (Ergotron, 2023). For workers who by job description have a culture or element of working from home attached to their employment, the transition to remote work especially during the COVID-19 pandemic has boosted their productivity and performance. For instance, academic staff with the social and management sciences domains boosted their research and academic papers output during the COVID-19 pandemic. The remote work culture afforded them the advantage of a conducive and quite work environment that translated to increase in the number of papers (Agba et al., 2020a; 2020b). As on professional cited by (Ani, 2021) argues, “the office is excellent for things such as collaboration, spontaneous creative interactions, and mentoring. However, it is also full of distractions. Working from home gives employees more control over their work and focused employees are more productive” (paragraph, 21).

It is important to note that there is a debate that is contrary to the above view. Summarily, this debate holds that remote workers are not productive, not committed to working hard as compare to when they work in the office, lacks access to office supporting tools and equipment necessary for high job performance, cannot be closely monitored, and they pretend to work when in real time, they are not working hard. Future Forum survey, associate the skepticism towards working from home with older organisational leaders who are in their 50s and 60s. According to the survey, organizational leaders under the age of 50 years are much more inclined toward hybrid and working from home and are interested in strategies of doing it well (Tsipursky, 2022). As on professional argues, “the office is excellent for things such as collaboration, spontaneous creative interactions, and mentoring. However, it

is also full of distractions. Working from home gives employees more control over their work and focused employees are more productive.”

Obviously, there are jobs that can be done remotely while others require the workers to be physically present in the office. From this stand point of view, the workplace adjustment/decentralization during the COVID-19 pandemic occasioned by the introduction of remote work culture was possible only for jobs that can be performed remotely (Agba, Agba & Chukwurah, 2020) and for which the remote workers have the competence and enabling work environment to deliver.

Factors Affecting Remoting Workers' Performance

The performance of workers working from home is dependent on a number of factors. A few of these factors are listed below:

1. Worker possessing the requisite skills and knowledge to function on a telecommuting platform
2. Creating the enabling environment, such as a conducive workspace characterized by availability of electric power supply, steady internet, etc.
3. Employers providing the necessary support, coaching and training on how to navigate subscribed online workplace. Without the necessary support, training and coaching it will be difficult for remote workers to navigate through the online workplace platform
4. Proper communication channel and defining clearly the job descriptions of remote workers.
5. Providing the necessary incentives and motivation that will boost and drive workers to commitment and devotion necessary to deliver assigned tasks on time. This might take the form of commendations letters and awards for jobs that are done well and delivered on time.
6. Nature of work done online. Is the work easily done online in terms of availability of necessary data and information to work with?

Concluding Remarks

Remote workplace or Working from Home (WFH) remains one of the viable workplace models for the organization of work in public and private sectors. As a fast-growing global workplace model, it is drive and affected by internal and external factors much of which are technological advancement, government policy decisions like acts to protect the interest of physically challenge, the nature of job to be done, the competency of the remote worker, organizational policy, internet, conducive workplace, regular electric power supply and support from organizational managers and colleagues. Working

from Home has boosted performance of remote workers as attested in by empirical studies. As one professional cited in Ani (2021) noted, workers who work from home have control over their work and focused and devoted remote workers are more productive. As we conclude, we recommend a contingency approach that navigates between remote working option and hybrid. When it is necessary to go completely remote, organizational managers should adopt and adjust the workplace. And when the operational environment permits hybrid, it should be so adopted for the benefit of the organization and the workers. To encourage and sustain performance of workers, it is imperative to adopt workable strategies for managing virtual workforce. Such strategies include the use of functional communication network which enables the communication of vision and mission to remote workers and to receive feedback; adopting the culture of accountability and transparency in virtual workforce.

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