

## Remote, in-person, or hybrid work: What do people want?

We got some good news this week: On Tuesday, the White House announced that by the end of May the nation will have enough supply of vaccines "for every adult in America."

As the pandemic winds down, we'll finally get to see what the future of work looks like. While the forced WFH experiment has challenged the dogma that work can't be achieved at scale outside of an office, that doesn't ensure that remote work will dominate the post-COVID world.

To get an indication of where we're headed, Fortune and SurveyMonkey polled 2,616 U.S. adults between February 11 and 15. Our margin of error is 3 percentage points. (Next week, we'll revisit the topic using data collected by Slack.)

### Here's what we found.

The numbers to know

39%... of U.S. workers say they're currently working remotely. Among college graduates, that number is 51%.

36%... of U.S. office workers say they'd prefer to always to be in the office once the pandemic is over. 18% say always remote.

42%... of U.S. office workers say they'd prefer a mix of remote and in-office work (or a hybrid model) once the pandemic is over.

25%... of U.S. workers who are remote as a result of the pandemic say they're more productive. 27% say they're less productive, and 47% say equally as productive.

67%... of professional workers plan to resume previous levels of business travel once the pandemic is over. (Respondents only include workers who traveled for work pre-pandemic.)

### The big picture

**No, offices aren't dead—but things will be different.** Among U.S. office workers, only 2 in 10 would prefer to permanently stay remote. But that lukewarm remote backing doesn't mean we're going back to the old normal: Another 4 in 10 say they'd prefer a hybrid model. In other words, workers are coming back, but don't expect employees in 2022 and beyond to be glued to their desks.

**We're seeing evidence that corporate America will pursue a mixed approach.** Sure, some tech companies like Twitter have already embraced a permanent WFH model. However, employers at large are unlikely to go that far. "We are going to be embracing a hybrid model," said Chris Glennon, vice president and chief real estate officer at Intuit at a recent Fortune event. The challenge, he explained, will be to make sure teams thrive and generate new ideas in the hybrid setting.

### A few deeper takeaways

#### 1. Office workers who are still remote are the ones who aren't eager to return.

Among all office workers, 36% say they'd prefer to always work from the office. But the top-line numbers are a bit misleading. Among workers who've already returned to the office, 54% want to always work from the office. On the other hand, only 9% of office workers who are still remote say they'd like to always work in the office in the future.

That finding is stark.

Perhaps it suggests that when we return to the office, we'll accept the old normal. But I don't buy that takeaway. Instead, I think the divide is a result of the demographics of those who have already gone back to the office. Through interviews and anecdotal experience, I've noticed that many workers who've returned to office either 1) need to do their job from the office (ex. robotics engineers) or 2) personally prefer working in an office.

Meanwhile, Americans who've made it nearly 12 months fully remote have likely realized by now that they don't need to go back to the old 9-to-5 office routine. That's why only 1 in 10 want to fully return to the office.

## **2. It all boils down to productivity.**

When I spoke with Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayen last summer, he said his software company found that some employees were less productive working from home, while others were more. For the latter group, he suggested companies might allow them to stay in that setting.

Among all workers who went remote during the pandemic, 27% said they were less productive working from home, while 25% said more productive. So, pretty equally split. But as employees are slowly trickling back into the office, the workers staying remote are more likely to say they're benefiting. Among employees who remain remote, 22% say they're less productive compared to 31% who say they're more productive.