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I have found that working for small businesses with ‘tunnel vision’ really impacts on their acceptance of home or mobile working. In my experience, the majority of ‘the older generation’ of colleagues can’t accept or tolerate the work-from-home world and hot-desking is just a cool freelance-vibe café seen as ‘not working’. Ultimately, it’s down to leadership and culture.
The post-industrialization workplace of 9-to-5 office-based work is changing. Employees are demanding increased flexibility with hours and location, and personalized benefits. Many expect employers to sell the role and the company as an attractive place to work, including free health insurance, free food, socials and discounts. As many as 82% of millennials consider flexible working as a deciding factor when evaluating potential employers.

However, the idea of flexible working has moved beyond a mere ‘work perk’. The U.S.’s 1 Million for Work Flexibility initiative believe that change must come from both employees and managers, as there are benefits for both parties.

But what is the reality of a mobile workforce?

That’s what the Avast Business Mobile Workforce Report 2018 aims to answer.

We surveyed 1,850 small business employees in the U.S. and U.K. to find out:

- What are the pros and cons of having a mobile workforce?
- Can you trust your mobile workers?
- What impacts on productivity in and out of the office?
- How can you get the most from your employees?
- What value do employees place on mobile working?

### KEY FINDINGS

- The largest proportion of small business staff (38%) are most productive at home.
- Only 6% see hot-desks as a productive place to work, whereas 21% work best in a public place like a café or park.
- Distractions at home impact on productivity between 15% and 27% of the time. They have a smaller effect than distractions in the office, which impact on productivity between 20% and 35% of the time.
- Workplace stress is one of the main factors affecting employee productivity in and out of the office, although the impact is less for mobile workers (26% compared to 35% when in the office).
- For those who work best when they’re at home, TV and domestic chores are the biggest distraction (27%) but 39% also tend to work longer hours.
- 52% would prefer to take a pay cut than be restricted to an office.

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1 FlexJobs 2016 survey: flexjobs.com/employer-blog/flexjobssurvey-millennials-interested-travel-work-flexibility/

2 1 Million For Work Flexibility (1MFWF): workflexibility.org
We are pro-flexible working, but my inbox on days when colleagues work from home results in lots of email. However, we do find 'work from home' days very productive because people aren't distracted by chatting or getting involved in tasks or issues which aren't directly under their remit.

— JO TONGUE
CEO AT TONGUE TIED MEDIA
Working hours mean nothing if an employee’s productivity is poor. One assumption that you are forgiven for making is that the most productive place for an employee to be is in the office. But is that mistaking productivity for visibility? Where are workers more productive?

We asked respondents where they feel most productive. The most popular location chosen was not the office, but home, countering the concerns many of you may have about your home-based workforce ‘slacking off’. That’s not to say that the lure of domestic chores and daytime TV aren’t present though. In fact, these home-based distractions affect productivity more than remote technology, demotivation and stress. But it does suggest that home-workers deserve the trust they’re being given.

A result that may be surprising to some is the significant number of employees that are most productive in a public location like a café or library. While this may be where these individuals work best, it may not be the best for your business. Working in public comes with risks such as confidentiality breaches (if the employee were overheard on a work-related phone call) and cybersecurity (accessing the company’s network through unsecured Wi-Fi).

Hot-desks are the least productive space among our survey respondents. But for those that do prefer to hot-desk, the distractions they encounter affect their productivity in and out of the office more than their colleagues. So, while hot-desks may reduce overheads, any savings generated may be being wasted with reduced productivity. This could particularly affect start-ups, who often rely on hot-desking spaces before they can afford their own office.

In general, environment-based distractions affect employees’ productivity less outside the office than in the office. The single biggest distraction outside the office (chores and TV) was chosen by 27% of respondents, whereas the top seven distractions in the office were all chosen by more than 27% respondents.
It’s understandable that people find themselves more distracted by office politics, interruptions by colleagues, meetings and commuting due to the nature of office working.

Interestingly, problems with remote technology and conferencing affect the productivity of employees less when working outside the office. The increasing use of technology for personal communication (video calls, instant messaging, etc) means the working population has more expertise than previously in using these kinds of software. When faced with a problem, employees working by themselves are likely to be more comfortable with resolving the issue or working around the problem.

That’s not to say people aren’t affected by distractions outside the office, just that they have less impact on productivity. And for you, this means less impact on the bottom line.

People who are most productive in the office are particularly affected by lack of access to expertise when they work from home or in a public space. This isn’t surprising but does suggests that the reason these people find the office productive is that it allows for collaborative working – being able to draw on the knowledge of colleagues when they need it.

In contrast, for those who prefer to work at home, lack of expertise is one of the factors affecting productivity the least (chosen by only 14% of respondents). This may be due to the nature of their specific role (perhaps one less reliant on collaboration) or because of the tasks they tend to perform when working outside the office. Either way, this highlights the need for you to understand, on an individual basis, what barriers your employees have.

FIGURE 2
Factors most affecting productivity of small business staff when working in the office
**FIGURE 3**
Factors most affecting productivity of small business staff when working outside the office

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distractions such as TV and domestic tasks</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress/anxiety</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise and disruption</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making lunch</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demotivation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of contact with team/individuals</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleague chat</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working at times that don’t suit me</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuting</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of access to expertise</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote technology/conferencing not working</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interruptions by colleagues</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office politics</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KEY FINDINGS**

- 38% of employees are most productive when working from home compared to 35% in the office.
- 21% are most productive in a public space.
- People feel the least productive at a hot-desk (6%).
- Employees’ productivity is affected more in the office than out:
  - Stress/anxiety has the biggest impact (35%) on productivity in the office.
  - Domestic tasks and TV have the biggest impact (27%) on productivity outside the office.
- People said that remote technology and conferencing not working affects their productivity more in the office (20%) than outside the office (17%).
- The productivity of employees when working remotely is less impacted by office-based distractions:
  - Office politics (15% vs 25% in the office).
  - Interruptions by colleagues (16% vs 34%).
  - Meetings (17% vs 28%).
  - Commuting (18% vs 28%).
THE PROS AND CONS OF MOBILE WORKING

Staff admit that they do run chores at home when they are having breaks, but in 100% of cases they work later and start earlier than they would if they were commuting – and are happier to do so. As such, our productivity has increased.

ALEX YOUNGS
FOUNDER, CAMPAIGNAMP
The biggest benefit that mobile working offers employees is happiness – ‘I am happier’ was chosen by 34% of respondents. But it’s not just employees that benefit from mobile working, it’s you too – the survey shows that when working outside the office, people also take pride in what they do and deliver higher quality work. Great news for your business!

If you want to attract and retain the best talent, it’s essential not only to understand how but also where people work best. Why do your employees prefer to work in the office or at home? This section looks at the pros and cons of mobile working and discusses the impact this can have on job satisfaction.

**FIGURE 4**
The benefits of mobile working according to small business staff

- I am happier: 34%
- I have a better work/life balance: 33%
- I enjoy my job: 32%
- I am more productive: 25%
- I structure my day according to what suits me: 24%
- I take pride in what I do: 22%
- I deliver higher quality work: 21%
- I get the same job done in less time: 20%
- I am better at my job: 19%
- I sometimes do personal tasks in core hours: 19%
- I go the extra mile when needed: 18%
- I am healthier: 16%
- I take fewer days off sick: 16%
- I work outside of core hours: 15%
- I feel more engaged with my role and the tasks I have to do: 15%
- I respect my employer: 14%
- I feel empowered: 14%
- I want to stay with the company more: 10%
- I work shorter hours than I am supposed to: 9%
- I react positively to a request for a favor from a superior: 8%
However, in general, people feel more strongly about the downsides of mobile working than they do about the benefits. And benefits such as feelings of empowerment and respect for their employer are at the bottom of the list. Don’t expect your staff member to feel more engaged or have more affinity for the company just because you let them work at home – they are more interested in having a good work/life balance and choosing when to take breaks (chosen by 33% and 24% of respondents respectively compared to 14% who said ‘I respect my employer’ and 10% who said ‘I want to stay with the company more’).

**FIGURE 5**
The downsides of mobile working according to small business staff

- I get distracted: 45.5%
- I sometimes procrastinate: 40.5%
- I sometimes miss something important that happens in the office: 40%
- I work longer than I am supposed to: 39%
- I sometimes don’t have the tech support/expertise I need: 38%
- I have weaker relationships with some colleagues: 37%
- I miss the camaraderie of colleagues: 31.5%
- I may be overlooked for promotion: 29%
- I might not be available during core office hours: 25%
- I don’t get as much time with my line manager: 25%
- I don’t learn new things or stay abreast of trends/topical news: 21.5%
In most jobs, face-to-face time with managers and colleagues is important. You can communicate through calls/video chats/email, but if you are never in the same space you lose out on the inspiration and feeling of collaboration you get from being able to chat, ask quick questions and show people what you’re working on. The sense of camaraderie you get by being in the same space as your team is an important element of an effective work environment.

ABI SMITH
DIRECTOR OF CREATIVE, POWSTER

This shouldn’t be taken to mean that your employees are not good workers and don’t care about the company. But when it comes to mobile working, it’s the more personal and emotional aspects that people are most interested in, not how they fit within the wider company.

What people marked as the cons of mobile working may offer clues as to how this can be tackled. After distractions and procrastination, the biggest downside of mobile working is missing important things that happen in the office. Many people also said that they have weaker relationships with their colleagues and that they don’t get as much time with their line manager. These aspects could be tackled by ensuring strong communications channels. For example, you could introduce online video conferencing to the office, or set up daily calls with your remote workers.

KEY FINDINGS

- 34% said that being able to work from home meant they are happier.
- 39% of employees said they work longer hours than they’re supposed to – only 9% said they work shorter hours.
- Employees’ feel more strongly about the downsides of mobile working than the benefits:
  - Getting distracted is the biggest downside (45.5%).
  - Happiness is biggest benefit (27%).
Our employees say it’s easier to manage both their mental and physical health with work-from-home days. With the average roundtrip commute being just over an hour, the extra ‘free’ time during the day helps get all that life admin done and reduces stress.

MARK COOK
DIRECTOR AT CANDOUR
Stress and anxiety in the workplace IS a growing challenge. It can affect staff morale, employee retention and profits. We were interested to discover whether remote working decreases the impact of stress and anxiety, and whether flexible working is therefore an effective way to improve staff wellbeing.

In our survey, employees identified stress and anxiety as the main factor affecting their productivity when working in the office. When working from home, stress and anxiety is not the biggest aspect impacting on productivity, but it still affects more than a quarter of staff. This suggests that you’re unlikely to see significant changes in productivity when home-working alone is offered as a solution to workplace stress.

In addition, when asked to select five benefits of mobile working, only 16% of respondents chose ‘I am healthier’ and ‘I take fewer days off sick’ (see Fig. 4). This shows that there are other aspects of working outside the office that respondents deemed more important.

It’s therefore not possible to conclude from our results that working from home is better for people’s stress and anxiety. Instead, we recommend a personalized approach to staff wellbeing. Speak to your employees about where they feel the least stressed and why, and make changes to accommodate.

FIGURE 6
Stress and anxiety affecting the productivity of small business staff in and out of the office

KEY FINDINGS
- Stress and anxiety has more of an impact on productivity in the office than when remote working (by 9%).
- There are 12 factors that employees see as a bigger benefit to mobile working than ‘I am healthier’ and ‘I take fewer sick days’.
VALUE OF FLEXIBILITY

We promote the ability to work remotely. To attract talent, we have two full-timers who live in the South West [of the U.K.]. We also allow people to work one or two days from home.

The key is the ‘contract’: We’re happy for people to work where they prefer as long as they are performing, and we review that regularly. All in all, it works well and brings out the best in individuals.

GAVIN MILLER, MBA, FCIM
COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR AT ULTIMA MEDIA, LONDON
Traditionally, work is a means to an end. A positive work/life balance and a fulfilling, interesting job that has appeal on a personal level is ‘the dream’. Do employees still see money as the driver with everything else a bonus? Or does a modern, flexible workforce stack their priorities differently?

Most employees we surveyed stated that they would work in an office full-time - with no option of working from another location – for a pay increase. However, the data suggests that the pay increase would need to be more than 5% to make it worthwhile.

For some respondents (12%) not even a pay increase of 25% or more would entice them to work in an office full-time. In fact, most people would prefer to take a pay cut than give up their option of remote working. The only people disagreeing with this are those who are most productive in the office, at their own desk.

These results show that money isn’t always the most valuable part of having a job – some employees prefer flexibility. For example, people who find themselves most productive at a hot-desk are much more likely to take a pay cut than those who prefer to work at home, in the office (at their own desk) or in a public place.

**FIGURE 7**
Pay increase required for small business staff to give up the option of remote working

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pay Increase</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-15%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-25%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%+</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wouldn’t</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The takeaway here is not to make assumptions about your workers. Most respondents value mobile working options, but not necessarily at the expense of a pay cut. So, while flexibility should be part of the package on offer to employees, it isn’t the whole package.

**FIGURE 8**
Percentage of small business staff who would take a pay cut over giving up the option of remote working

“I WOULD TAKE A PAY CUT RATHER THAN WORK IN AN OFFICE FULL-TIME”
- Agree
- Disagree

- 12% of workers would choose home-working flexibility over a pay rise, even if offered an increase of 25% or more.
- Only 8% would accept a pay rise of 1-5% to give up remote working.
- 52% would choose a pay cut over giving up the option of flexible working:
  - This increases to 60% for people who say they are most productive at home and 68% of people who work best at a hot-desk would choose a pay cut over giving up the option of flexible working.
  - Only 42% of those who say they are most productive in an office would take a pay cut.
Flexible working makes commercial sense, saving costs (parking, less desk space needed) as well as saving time without the daily commute. It also has a massive benefit to work/life balance, which can only be good for engagement, diversity, attraction and retention of staff. It’s a win/win from my perspective.

So many businesses are anti-agile working and it’s all down to trust. If businesses valued output as much as they value presenteeism then I’m sure there would be far more of it.

SUZANNE SMITH
HR DIRECTOR AT BUSSEYS NORFOLK
Your business needs and interests are a complex balancing act between employee relations and profit. We sought to find out what employees understand of the challenges you face when it comes to remote working.

Employees said that trust would be their biggest concern if they were an employer, more than productivity, finances and reputation (45% compared to 43%, 11% and 12% respectively). The point here isn’t to see if staff agree with what you see as the biggest challenges – it is to grasp what they see as key issues for you. The fact that they understand the importance of trust is encouraging and should certainly ease some of your concerns about employing people to work remotely.

The results from our survey also showed that, for employees, one of the biggest downsides to working outside the office is doing longer hours than they are paid for (39% of respondents). This may be because certain distractions are not seen as valid when in the office. For example, more people see ‘making lunch’ as a distraction in the office than when working from home (23% and 21% respectively).
Interestingly, there is a correlation between the people who said they work long hours and those who said they enjoy their job. This a good reminder that even though your staff may be happy, they may be in danger of burnout.

These results also show that you can trust your remote workers. While 45.5% of workers say that ‘getting distracted’ is the biggest downside of remote working (see Fig. 5), this doesn’t mean they are taking liberties with the flexibility they’ve been afforded. They’re hard workers. And now that you know, you can check in and make sure they aren’t in danger of taking on too much or doing too many unpaid hours. This will show that you care and trust them and help you to gain their trust in return.

### FIGURE 10
Working hours of small business staff when working at home

- I work longer hours than I am supposed to: 39%
- I work shorter hours than I am supposed to: 9%

### KEY FINDINGS
- 45% of respondents say that trust would be their biggest concern as an employer.
- Fewer than 15% of respondents chose expertise and talent, reputation, technology, finances or staff retention as a concern.
- 45.5% of workers say that ‘getting distracted’ is the biggest downside of mobile working.
  - However, 39% also say they work longer hours than they should.
I always ask anyone working remotely and accessing the main work email or PayPal to take extra security precautions. We have not had any issues yet, but it’s better to be safe than sorry. Emailing something from their personal email to me is not a big issue, but I ask that no one accesses our work email, banking, PayPal and accounting software or makes changes to the website, eBay, Facebook or Reverb using unsecured or mobile Wi-Fi.

ERIKA DUPPER
HR AND ACCOUNTING MANAGER, HOUSE OF MUSICAL TRADITIONS
While working outside the office may boost productivity for some, a mobile workforce can leave your small business vulnerable to attack. The results of our survey highlighted these risks.

Many of our respondents (21%) stated that they are most productive in a public space such as a café or library (see Fig. 1), but only 18% see IT and security as a concern for employers (see Fig. 9).

If your staff are accessing sensitive data or logging into business accounts through unsecured Wi-Fi, businesses are vulnerable to attack. There is also the risk of data breach. For example, if your staff are in the habit of saving files to their desktop, a stolen laptop could cost your business financially and in terms of reputation.

If the mobile workforce is here to stay – and our report suggests that it is – then it’s essential for you to protect your hardware and digital assets. Services like Avast Business ProPlus include a VPN that protects your private and sensitive data from prying eyes while using Wi-Fi and ensures that all software and hardware is up to date as new threats emerge and evolve.

It is also important to train your staff. It won’t matter if you have a VPN in place if your employee doesn’t know what it is or why it’s important. When our survey respondents were asked what their biggest concern would be about working remotely if they were an employer, security and IT didn’t appear in the top three answers. However, results also show that 38% of employees don’t have the technological support they need when they are working from home (see Fig. 5). This suggests that there is a lack of understanding around IT – staff know it’s an issue, but don’t see it as a big concern for you. Leading by example when it comes to cybersecurity and taking the time to get buy-in from your staff can save you time and money in the long run.

Head to www.avast.com/business for more information on how to protect your business.
CONCLUSION

Overall, the best approach is to find a balance, so people feel valued and know that the company both supports them and encourages them to shape their work day. People should be allowed to build the work day that allows them to be most happy and most productive, but includes regular time spent in the office working alongside their colleagues.

ABI SMITH
DIRECTOR OF CREATIVE, POWSTER
The Avast Business Mobile Workforce Report 2018 has revealed that remote working can increase productivity and happiness, but it comes with challenges to be addressed. Here’s a summary of key takeaways from the report that you can use to help adapt your business for flexible working.

**Productivity**
Don’t assume that staff working in the office are more productive than those working from remote locations - all your employees are vulnerable to distraction. Take the time to discover your employees’ barriers to productivity on a one-to-one basis and make an action plan to tackle these.

**Pros and cons of mobile working**
For most employees, mobile working is a way to maintain a positive work/life balance with little concern around how they fit into the company. Make sure your business has strong communications channels in place so that your staff understand their place in the business.

Home-workers also tend to work longer hours, so it’s important to review unpaid overtime with your staff regularly. Find out how long hours affect your employees and what you can do to improve this for them.

**Stress and anxiety**
Working outside the office can reduce but not eradicate stress and anxiety. If you don’t have a staff wellbeing programme in place, then use this as a chance to create one. Ask your staff where and when they feel stressed and get feedback on measures that could address this.

**The value of flexible working**
Try not to make assumptions about what your staff place the most value on. While remuneration is important to your employees, so too is having the ability to choose when and where they work. It’s a good idea to discuss flexible working options when negotiating salary with your staff and remember that money isn’t the only benefit you have to offer.

**Trust**
Your staff understand that mobile working requires a lot of trust on your part. You can build on this by showing your employees that you understand trust from their point of view as well: They trust you to provide them with a working arrangement that suits their mental, physical and social needs as well as salary expectations. If you keep up your side of the arrangement, they’re more likely to keep up theirs by working efficiently.

**Cybersecurity**
Your staff may want to work outside the office, but they don’t necessarily understand the importance of data security. Make sure you have relevant measures in place to protect your network, including business antivirus software and staff training.
In July 2018, Avast Business surveyed 1,850 individuals who spend at least one day a week working from home. All respondents work for small businesses (between two and 50 workers) in the U.S. and U.K.

The research was conducted as an online survey, with individuals recruited from independent research panels.

**FIGURE 11**
Respondents by size of small business

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES</th>
<th>NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-25</td>
<td>558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-50</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCES**

1. Flexjobs is a (U.S.) website and community for recruiting and managing a flexible workforce. Its 2016 survey included data from 3,000 respondents (millennials (678 respondents); gen x (1,358 respondents); and baby boomers (845 respondents)).

2. 1 Million for Work Flexibility (1MFWF) is the first national (U.S.) initiative creating a collective voice in support of work flexibility.
ABOUT AVAST BUSINESS
Avast Business provides easy-to-manage, enterprise-grade security and network management solutions for SMBs and IT service providers.

Our unique combination of security and remote monitoring and management expertise means we can deliver advanced, comprehensive protection for data, devices, and people.

Backed by the largest, most globally dispersed threat detection network, the Avast Business security portfolio helps businesses and channel partners build trusted networks by quickly assessing vulnerabilities, securing weak points, monitoring anomalies, and seamlessly recovering data in the event of an attack.

The result is security, stability, and accessibility that SMBs can count on.

For more information about our managed services and cybersecurity solutions, visit www.avast.com/business