

Fresh survey of remote workers gives voice to the future of work.

 ODGERS BERNDTSON



86% of remote workers surveyed want a blended working model.

An Odgers Berndtson survey assesses the thinking around post COVID-19 working practices.

Daily working practices suddenly disrupted

To mark the one-year anniversary of the beginning of large-scale remote working, we undertook a survey to delve into the minds and hearts of those who have first-hand experience.

Our respondents, Senior Executives from across all sectors and functions, were suddenly thrust into a new working world in their home environments.

We enquired into a wide range of aspects which revealed an insightful picture of the new mindset among the working population with regard to remote working. The most outstanding feature that emerged is that the future of work they want is not a return to what it was previously.

No going back to the pre-COVID-19 working model

Once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted an overwhelming 86% of our respondents want a blended working model; some time in the office, some at home. The ideal proportion of this time varies among individuals. Feedback from our professional networks seems to indicate for the majority, it would mean a 3-day office-based and 2-day home-based working environment, but this has yet to play out. Fewer than 4% want to return to the office full time and just 9.5% would choose to work remotely on a permanent basis.

Naturally, post-Covid working arrangements will require every company to have a cultural discussion among leaders and teams which will include ways to best uphold employee wellbeing and also benefit business needs and goals. Flexibility will be a cornerstone in the shaping of new practices.

“We don’t see a rush back to the office. Our community of business leaders has let us know how aware they are of the need for flexibility and creativity in designing a new working model. And wellbeing must be top of mind.”

Helen Thomas, Head of Candidate Care, Odgers Berndtson Ireland

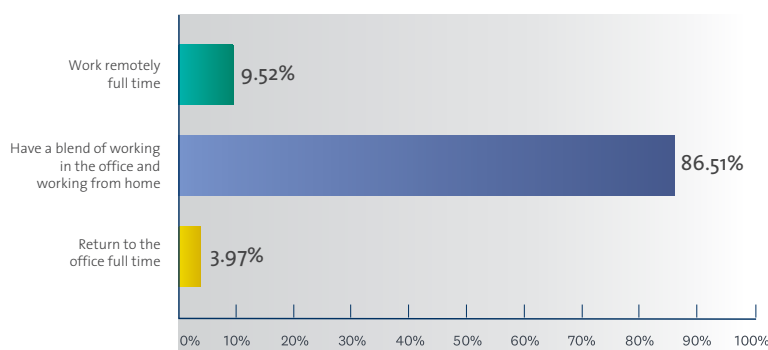
Companies need clear policies on working boundaries

As our newly evolving working practices are here to stay for the foreseeable future, we wondered what remote workers would ask of their companies to transform their experience that has not already been looked after.

One theme was in the area of an ‘always on’ environment. Some companies are leading the charge when it comes to boundaries around being ‘on’ when working from home. Leaders are walking the talk with modelled behaviour on clear policies with regard to meeting length, meeting-free time zones, fixed ‘off’ time during the working day and the right to disconnect.

“No meetings’ days would be useful. My diary is full of 30 minute catch ups on matters formerly dealt with on a quick call, a drop into someone’s office, a corridor chat. Now it feels like in order to respect someone else’s time, a formal request is sent. A couple of days a week blacked out for ‘getting the job done’ - emergencies aside - would be beneficial.”

When restrictions lift, would you prefer to:





Other companies need to be aware of the need to address this issue and introduce guidelines and boundaries or face high staff turnover in the coming 12 months. Virtual prearranged meetings are adding sometimes unnecessary formality and disproportionate time and reducing warmer, impromptu calls. The lack of interruptions is a big advantage to the quietness of the home environment (especially for those without children present) and more of this would be welcome.

Have workers benefitted from remote working?

75% of those who responded are working remotely on a full-time basis. This has clearly added benefits to many workers lives. 55% find the biggest advantage is the absence of a commute. This could also be a contributing factor among the 28% of people whose top benefit is that remote working gives them a better work/life balance.

Conversely, when asked what they found most challenging, 33% reported that, again, an ‘always on’ environment, therefore a lack of good work/life balance was their biggest drawback. Understandably, it has been a steep learning curve for organisations, leaders and team members. Companies were forced into a sprint to adapt working practices, implement technical support and maintain employee wellbeing and communication channels while big adjustments were taking place.

We want some fun back!

Half of our respondents found the lack of social interaction among colleagues during the working day was their biggest challenge. Good social engagement among colleagues doesn’t just have personal benefits. A 2015 Gallup poll found that organisations that had a high level of employee engagement also had lower business costs, improved performance outcomes, lower staff turnover and absenteeism and fewer safety incidents.

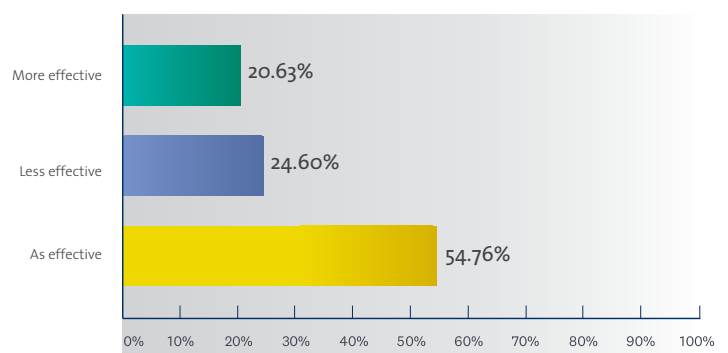
Informal networking opportunities are being called for. People really miss informal chats on corridors, between working periods and either side of face-to-face discussions. There is a call for greater recognition of gender imbalance in caring responsibilities. Several studies have shown working women bear a greater responsibility for childcare and family/home responsibilities, which takes a toll on them and their companies, who may miss out on the creativity and innovation that the lifting of this responsibility could unleash.

Leadership and support

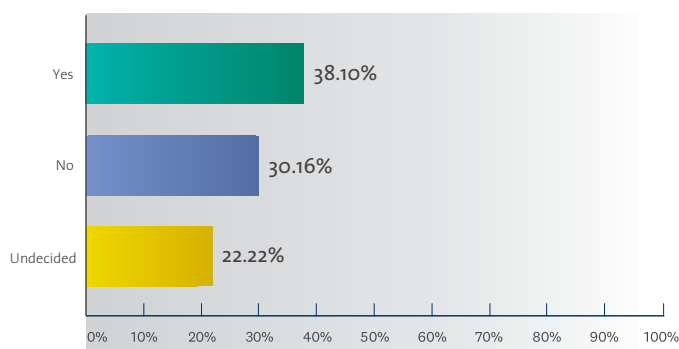
With clear indications that remote working is here to stay, new challenges will need to be addressed. 42% of leaders find the biggest issue with being in separate environments is the difficulty in tuning in to when team members may need support. In-person interaction allows for a variety of nuances in communication that virtual mediums lack. This is a challenge for those in leadership roles, who find it more difficult to build a collaborative culture in these conditions.

“Lack of the softer, social metrics makes the job more transactional and the atmosphere less collegiate. Cross disciplinary collaboration is less effective.”

Do you feel you are more or less effective in your current role than you were pre-Covid?



Do you think you will proactively make a career move in the next 12 months?



However, when asked if working from home reduced the likelihood of addressing an issue with a colleague, member of management or other workplace concern, though 42% answered yes, 58% did not find it a hindrance.

How has remote working affected performance and career progression?

As a result of similar research, the Whitaker Institute, Galway recommends “visible leadership from senior leaders in supporting remote workers, particularly in a mix of onsite and remote to avoid an approach that disadvantages those working remotely in terms of career development and opportunity. Structured social interaction, training on how to work remotely and support for early-career workers is crucial.” [1]

In our survey, 55% report that remote working during the pandemic has not afforded them the opportunity to develop in their current role and 38% would proactively make a career move in the coming 12 months. However, almost two thirds of our respondents feel they are equally or more effective in their roles compared to previous to Covid working restrictions.

Communications have played a starring role

One area which has come to the fore prominently over the past year is communications. This function is the plasma that keeps all stakeholders informed, engaged, satisfied and buoyant.

HR leaders and anyone involved in crafting and delivering sensitive, informative and human messages have had their time to shine. And apart from the big stuff, daily, weekly and impromptu support from skilled communicators has been a lifeline to those who have struggled with various pressures and difficulties over the past 12 months.

“All roads have led to comms during Covid. It has afforded me and my team more exposure and recognition.”

“More people needed my help and advice which opens doors previously shut.”

“I have proactively reached out to strengthen stakeholder relationships and build collaborative new partnerships to build organisational resilience.”

It’s been a historic past year. It’s clear from these results that many companies have been exceptional in adapting work practices to this unprecedented environment and in looking after their leaders and employees. But a significant number of those surveyed are planning a move in the next 12 months, partly for career progression, but also because of dissatisfaction.

“This is a really positive sign for the economy, but it’s something employers must be aware of too. Executives aren’t afraid to start looking towards a future where they can continue a blended way of working and improved work-life balance. In planning the next twelve months, employers need to keep well-being high on the agenda and remember this will be key to retaining vital staff in the future.”

Mark O’Donnell, Managing Partner, Odgers Berndtson Ireland

It’s now time for these companies to show their integrity with appropriate consideration of all stakeholders. The future of work has arrived.

We expect to see an invigorated market in the second half of this year and are eager to see the creativity and innovation that arises from the past year’s experiences.

[1] <http://whitakerinstitute.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Remote-Working-National-Survey-Phase-II-Report-Oct-2020-Final.pdf>



Odgers Berndtson Ireland Candidate Care Team



Helen Thomas
Head of Candidate Care,
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Helen works to appoint C Suite and Board level executives and their direct reports across the private and public sectors. Since 2007, she has managed international executive search assignments for a cross section of FTSE and ISEQ quoted companies. She leads the Candidate Care Agenda at Odgers Berndtson Ireland, championing all candidates and ensuring they receive the best possible experience from interactions with the firm.



Ruth Anne Kilduff
Marketing Executive,
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Ruth manages all marketing initiatives Odgers Berndtson Ireland, continually innovating with new digital marketing campaigns. Through social media management, analytics and online mediums she creates an interactive space for clients and candidates and looks for novel opportunities to strengthen these relationships.



Mark O'Donnell
Managing Partner,
Ireland

Mark is Managing Partner of Odgers Berndtson Ireland. He specialises in high-level executive searches and appointments of senior management appointments from Head of Function to Board level across a range of industries and functions. He is particularly focused on assisting clients in the Consumer, Financial Services, Technology, Arts and Sports sectors. He is considered a leading consultant in the recruitment of all C suite positions in particular CEO, CFO, HRD, Marketing and Commercial Directors. Additionally, Mark leads our assessment practice where he is passionate about assisting clients to assess and develop their talent.

