



**REMOTE  
WORK DURING  
COVID-19**

## Introduction

The recent lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic has forced most firms with white collar workers to work from home. Faster internet access at home, cloud computing, and conference technologies have made all this possible. Many companies, that previously required workers to always be onsite, were left with no choice but to exercise remote option to stay alive and continue with their projects and keep up with day to day activities. However, to some workers, remote work was nothing new, and they were used to working a certain percentage remotely, who then switched to working 100% remotely.



In the month of April, we conducted a survey of white-collar workers working remotely to learn about the challenges and opportunities that remote work offers to both employees and employers. In this paper we discuss the results of our survey at a high-level and provide recommendations based on our analysis. We hope that those reading this paper will gain a little deeper understanding of remote work and positively influence the policy of companies on remote work going into the future.

## Survey Respondents and Sample Size

A total of 52 people took part in the survey with ages ranging 25-55 years. Most of these respondents worked in the IT sector and some having background in other fields such as financial services. However, we feel that this lack of professional diversity is not a major flaw and that our conclusions would not have been much different if respondents across diverse professions had participated in the survey.

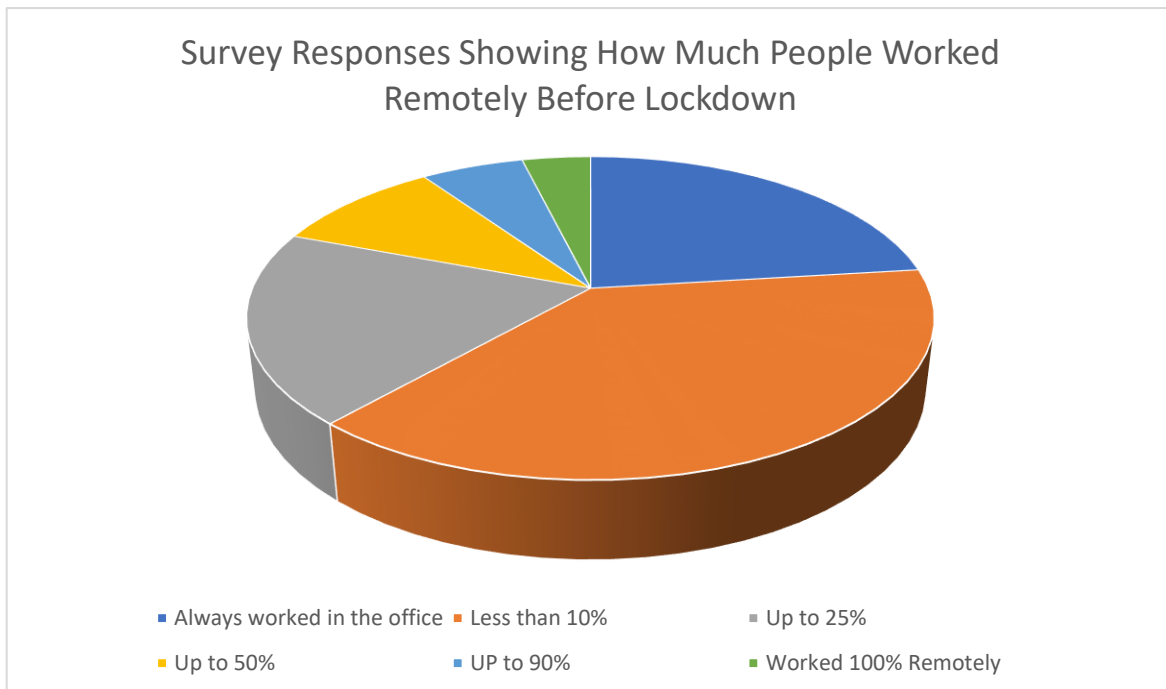
## Disclaimer

We do not claim that this poll to be scientific and that all survey biases were addressed. We have also acknowledged in the beginning distribution of survey respondents being skewed in favor of IT workers. Nevertheless, we do believe that this survey was conducted with objectivity in mind and that it's analysis and subsequent conclusions do provide good insights that could be used by decision makers in the future when formulating their work from home policies.

## Survey Analysis

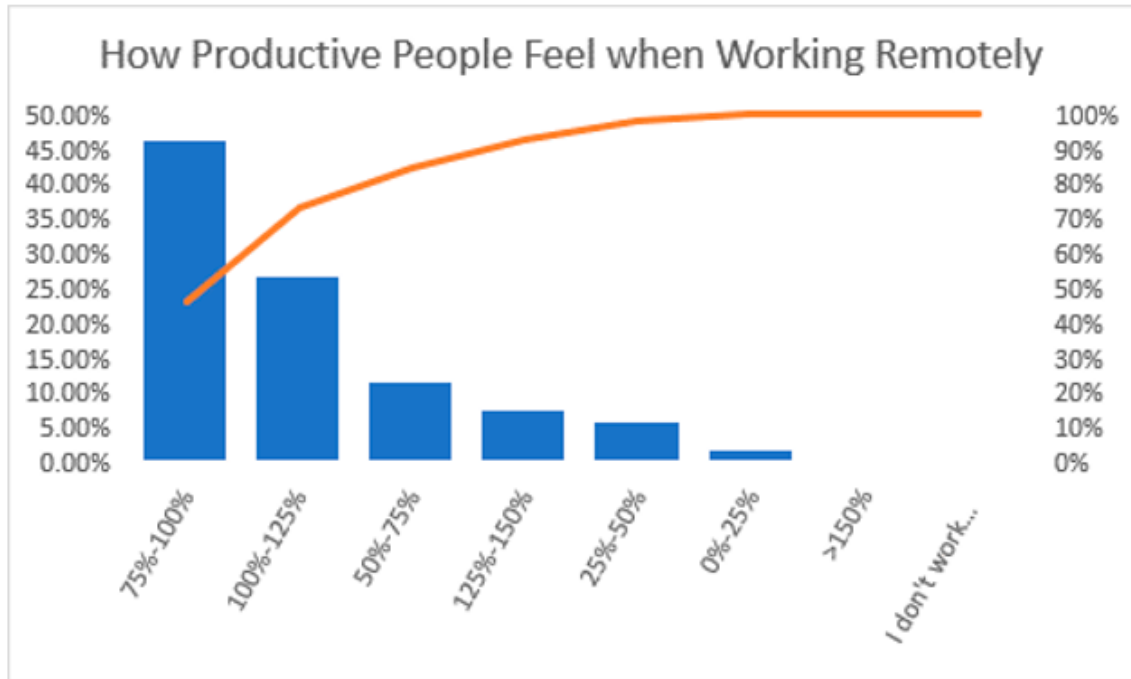
### Remote Work Before Lockdown

Based on our survey, about 23% of the respondents had never worked remotely before, therefore, it was their first time. On the other hand, less than 4% of the respondents were 100% remote workers prior to the lockdown, therefore, we expect that there was little or no change for them. The remaining 73% of the respondents indicated varying degrees of experience with working from home. The pie-chart below shows the different percentage of remote work experience prior to COVID-19.



## Productivity During Remote Work

While only 34.61% of the respondents felt they were more productive from home than at work, those that reported being less than 75% productive were only 19.23 percent, leaving 46.15 percent in the category of maintaining between 75% to 100% of office productivity. Hence the good news is that more than 80% of the people reported being at least 75% as productive while working from home.



Among all the challenges of remote work, the most often cited ones were:

- ☑ Physical work space
- ☑ Too many distractions at home
- ☑ Social Isolation
- ☑ Difficulty in communicating and collaborating with workers
- ☑ Keeping a regular schedule

Difficulty in communicating and collaborating with workers was cited as the most common challenge with 51% of the respondents associating with it.

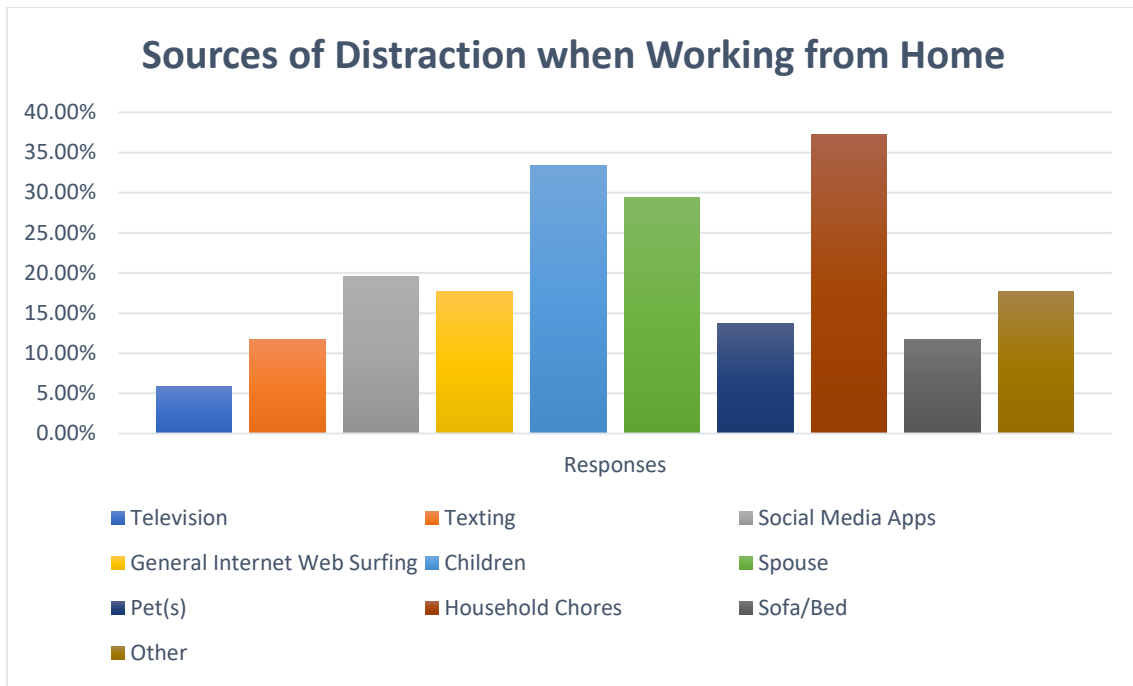
When asked about the reasons for higher remote productivity when compared to office, the most popular choices were:

- ☑ Fewer office co-workers to distract me
- ☑ Quieter environment allowing me to focus on my tasks and deliverables

However, on the question of the main sources of distraction when working remotely, the popular ones were:

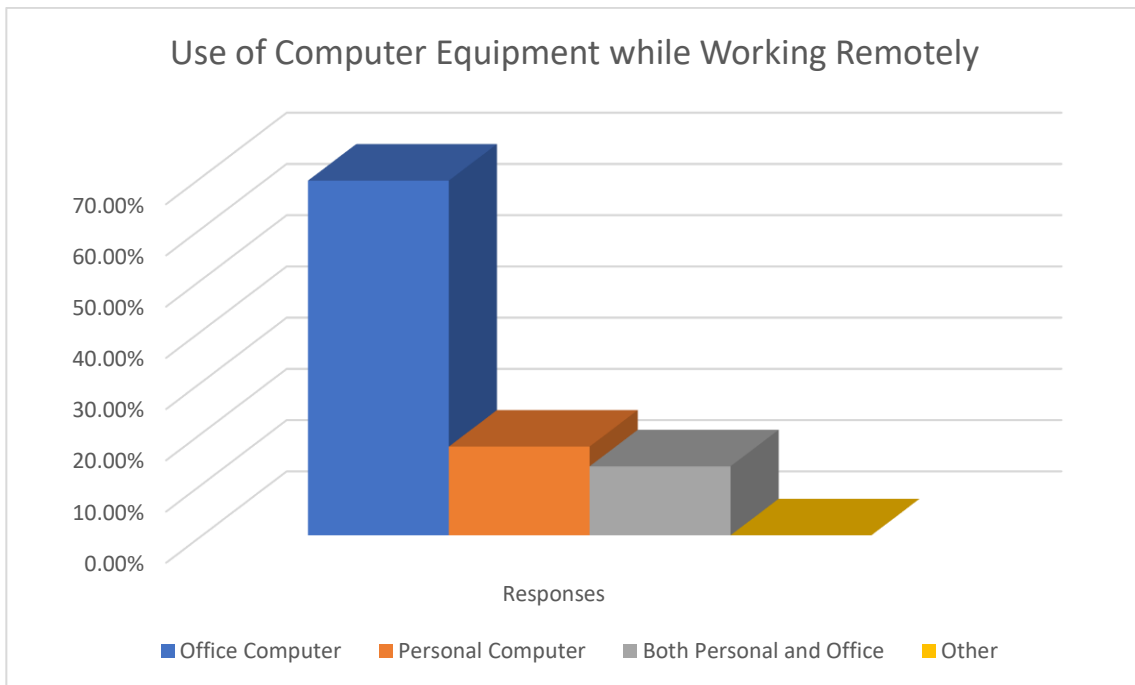
- ☑ Children,
- ☑ Spouse, and
- ☑ Household chores

To our surprise, Social Media Apps (like Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.) did not rank as high as we had expected with less than 20% of the respondents picking that as a source of distraction.



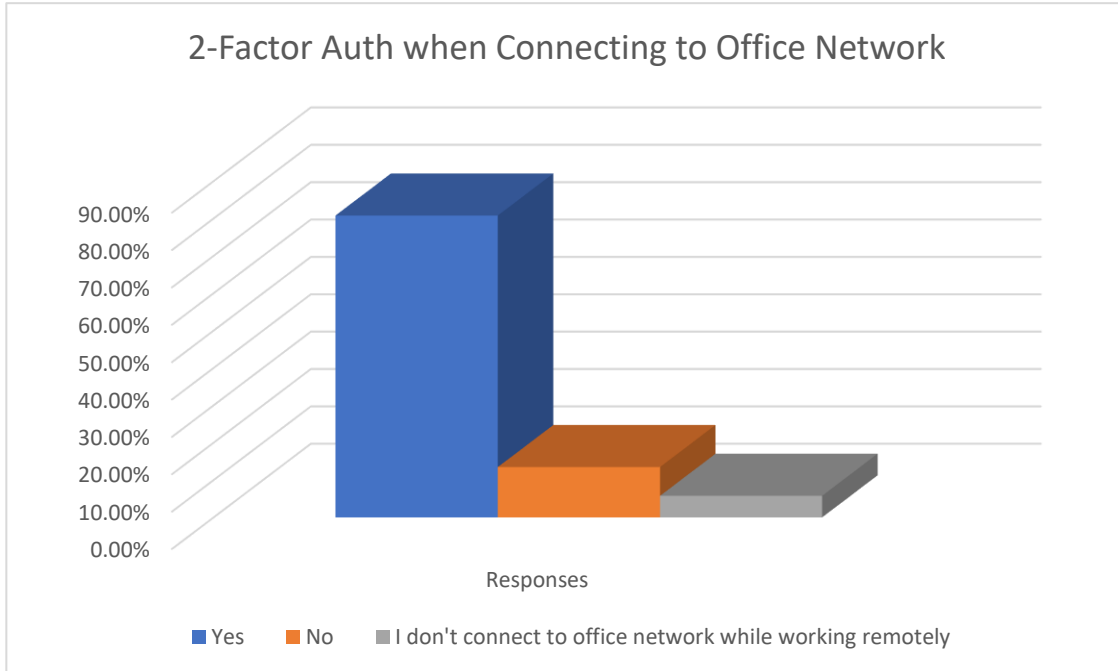
## Use of Computer Equipment and Security

Based on survey responses, we learned that over 30% of employees use a personal computer with slightly over 17% reporting exclusive use of personal computer.

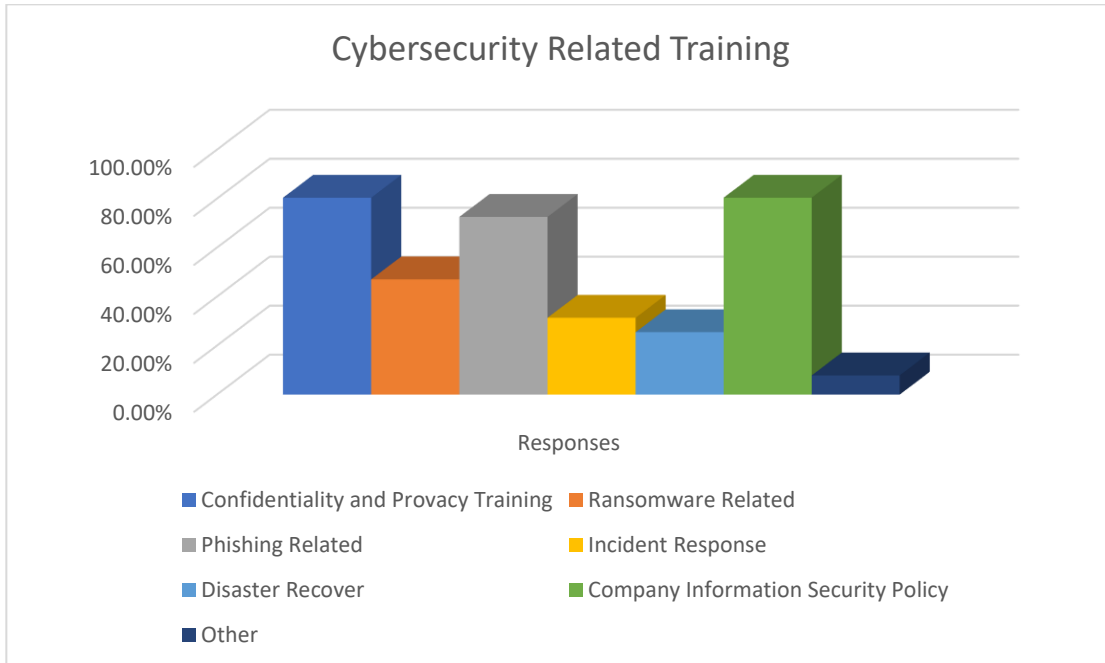


Of those who reported using personal computer while working remotely, 30.77% voiced at least some concern about the security of their computers, meaning safe in terms of up-to-date anti-virus, anti-malware, firewall, etc.

Moreover, 13.46% reported not having to use 2-factor authentication when connecting to office network.



On the question of various cybersecurity training which they had taken before starting remote work, only 47% reported having some training on ransomware and 72.5% on Phishing, which means there is still a lot of work left for certain firms to train their employees and raise their cybersecurity awareness.



## Preference for Work from Home vs. Work in the Office

On the question of desire to work from home, the average response across all survey participants was slightly over 50 on a 0-100 scale, meaning on an average people prefer to split their work 50/50 between home and office.

# Conclusions and Recommendations



## Employer Reach

Our survey results have validated the belief that remote work is not only possible, but it is a viable alternative to work in the office, and with recent lockdown due to COVID-19, its popularity and demand is only expected to grow in the coming years. Employers, who previously believed in “all employees showing up to office every day,” will also be forced to revise their policies to include remote work as a benefit to attract and retain good employees. **This will extend employers’ reach to outside their immediate geographic areas.** An employer, with its main office in St. Louis, Missouri, will no longer be limited to sourcing talent locally for many positions, and will be able to attract employees from East Coast, West Coast, and other areas of the country. **Furthermore, it will even cause employers, that were generally opposed to offshore resources, to rethink their sourcing strategy and become more open to it.**

## Addressing Worker Productivity

Despite the fact that most survey takers reported being at least 75%, if not more, being as productive as they generally are in the office, working remotely is not without its challenges. Some challenges like physical workspace and collaboration with coworkers, etc. can be addressed to a great extent with the help of employers. For example, employers could apply part of the cost savings resulting from employees not having to come to work toward helping their employees get proper work space including desk, comfortable chair, and high speed internet. Deployment of online collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams, Skype, Zoom, GoTo Meeting, OneNote, Google Drive, etc., along with proper training, can help to a great extent establish collaboration among colleagues. Employers may also be able to help their employees build their time management skills to address the problems of distraction and keeping a regular schedule. With time, we expect most workers to get better at working from home and address certain challenges of distraction and others on their own.

While most workers are expected to adjust and continue to increase their productivity while working remotely, there will always be a certain percentage (depending on the type of job) of workers who will never be good at working remotely. Therefore, employers must invest in developing certain metrics to measure productivity of workers and differentiate between good remote workers and those that are on the opposite end. Those that tend to abuse the remote work may then be asked to report to office every day or separated from the firm.

## Cybersecurity

Remote work is also not without security challenges. As the survey revealed, most employees still lack training

in Cybersecurity such as ransomware and phishing. These types of attacks are expected to rise as more and more people work remotely. Employers must invest in imparting training to their employees. Additionally a small percentage of employees still use their personal computer to do remote work, which should be a matter of concern to their employers, as the latter must provide employees with company owned computers with industrial strength antivirus, anti-malware, and firewall. There are still firms that have yet to deploy 2-factor authentication for VPN connection for remote employees, and they should as soon as possible to protect their companys' networks.

## **Balance between Remote Work and Work in the Office**

Despite the rise in popularity of remote work, working in the office has certain natural advantages that cannot be ignored, one of which is the collaboration and creativity fostering idea generation that happens when people are in close physical proximity to one another. Our survey respondents seem to confirm this belief as they indicated their desire to split work 50/50 between office and home. Employers may consider 2/3 followed by 3/2 days the following week for work-from-home/work-in-office policy. This in turn should allow employers to downsize their real estate footprint, thereby reducing their cost structure substantially, through sharing of workspace by employees on a rotating schedule. This concept of hoteling has been around for about 20 years and has been used quite successfully by consulting companies like PwC, IBM, Accenture, etc.

## **About the Author**

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Saeed is the Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Data Dynamics. He obtained his BS in Electrical Engineering from Washington University, St. Louis, MS in Electrical Engineering from University of Michigan, and MBA from Olin School of Business at Washington University. Saeed has over 30 years of experience in technology consulting in various different industries.

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