

Q: The COVID-19 pandemic has created a great deal of change in the way we work. Are enterprises maintaining these changes permanently or do you anticipate work will return to prepandemic status?

A: There have been a great deal of studies conducted by many organizations, including top consulting firms such as McKinsey, publications such as the *Harvard Business Review* and business analysts. Let me give a summarized view, which includes my opinion.

Before the pandemic, most organizations worldwide believed that offices were essential to their business and productivity deteriorates when employees work from home. But as the pandemic containment efforts included lockdowns worldwide, organizations were forced to adopt the work-from-home (WFH) model, and enterprise leaders were surprised to learn that the WFH model does not affect the productivity of employees. Key findings of a *Harvard Business Review* report show:

- Lockdowns helped employees focus on the work that really matters. The report indicated employees spent 12 percent less time attending large meetings and 9 percent more time interacting with customers and external partners.
- Lockdowns helped employees take responsibility for their own schedules. Employees complete 50 percent more tasks through personal choice—because they see them as important—and half as many because someone else asked them to perform the tasks.
- During lockdown, employees viewed work as more worthwhile. They rated the things being done as valuable to all stakeholders. The number of tasks rated as tiresome dropped from 27 percent to 12 percent, and the number of tasks readily offloaded to others dropped from 41 percent to 27 percent.¹

Many IT organizations that leased office space have reduced the office sizes and encourage employees to work from home and attend offices in rotation. This has helped organizations reduce the costs of managing facilities and face-to-face meetings and has saved time that employees spend commuting. However, large organizations that have already

invested in acquiring office facilities incurred additional expenses to maintain unoccupied offices and are looking forward to the end of WFH. However, most surveys point out that the WFH trend will continue, though perhaps not for all employees and organizations. One study predicts five models of future work, including:

1. Work as it was before the pandemic
2. A clubhouse model, where employees visit the office when they need to collaborate and return home to do their focused work.
3. Activity-based working, where employees work from an office but do not have an assigned desk. Instead, they spend their days moving between a variety of workspaces, such as meeting rooms, phone booths, hot desks and lounges. Prior to the pandemic, many organizations had adopted this model.



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4. A hub and spoke model, where employees work from smaller satellite offices in the suburbs and neighborhoods closer to where they live.
5. Fully virtual models where employees continue to work from home—or anywhere else they like—allowing enterprises to eliminate expensive leases and build on what they started during the pandemic.

Most IT organizations will adopt one of these or, in some cases, mix and match elements of these models, which will be the new, postpandemic normal.²

One report also predicts that, “Workforce transitions may be larger in scale than we estimated before the pandemic, and the share of employment in low-wage job categories may decline.³ Many employees are already benefitting from this trend. Since relocation is not required, many employees are transitioning to jobs that offer WFH models.

One thing is certain: The future workplace will not be the same as it was before the pandemic.

Endnotes

- 1 Birkinshaw, J.; J. Cohen; P. Stach; “Research: Knowledge Workers Are More Productive From Home,” *Harvard Business Review*, 31 August 2020, <https://hbr.org/2020/08/research-knowledge-workers-are-more-productive-from-home>
- 2 Davis, D.; “Five Models for the Post-Pandemic Workplace,” *Harvard Business Review*, 3 June 2021, <https://hbr.org/2021/06/5-models-for-the-post-pandemic-workplace>
- 3 McKinsey Global Institute, *The Future of Work After COVID-19*, USA, 2021, <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/future%20of%20organizations/the%20future%20of%20work%20after%20covid%2019/the-future-of-work-after-covid-19-executive-summary-vf.pdf?shouldIndex=false>