

A man with a beard and headphones is sitting in a modern office chair, working at a desk. He is looking at a computer monitor which displays a document with text and a circular graphic containing the number 410. The background is a light-colored, textured wall. The overall scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source coming from the monitor.

IVY EXEC

# Work From Anywhere: Productivity and Satisfaction in Remote Work

Whitepaper



## INTRODUCTION

To uncover a leadership perspective on the current, and future success of remote work, Ivy Exec conducted a quantitative study of 151 senior level professionals, including Directors, VP's, and C-Suite executives.

We examined the use of remote productivity tools as well as sentiment towards remote work and productivity among business leaders. With nearly 95% of respondents working either semi or fully remotely, we found that high levels of productivity were reported, along with high levels of the usage of cloud-based support tools — many of which were implemented due to new and shifting needs.

The majority of respondents also said that they enjoy working from home, but most would not like to work from home full-time should other services resume due to feelings of isolation and communication struggles in a remote framework. Through this survey, we were able to identify common positives and pain points related to remote work that companies can use to evaluate and improve their procedures even after the pandemic has passed.



# Introduction

Months have passed since companies began a rapid pivot to remote work, and for many companies there is no end in sight to these changed circumstances. Remote work has often been a point of contention between business leaders who seek peak productivity, creativity, and collaboration and employees in search of flexibility, and comfort. With the rapid change to remote work for all, companies and individuals alike have had to reckon with the full implications of remote work and its impact on daily processes and productivity. Different places have addressed these challenges in unique ways, ranging from implementing new software and tools to a full overhaul of worker policies.

Directors, VPs, and executives sit at a unique intersection in this work from home framework. They are both team leaders and team members. They must pursue their own personal productivity in the face of unprecedented circumstances and ensure that their reports are meeting standards while looking out for their well-being in a highly unusual and stressful time. We sought to understand how leaders perceive three key areas of remote work:

productivity, the use of cloud-based tools, and satisfaction with working from home. As such, we conducted a quantitative study of senior management and above, ultimately reaching 151 respondents.

To recruit a broad field of respondents across industries, organization sizes, and functions, we drew upon our more than 2 million member database of professionals around the world. Of all respondents, 38.4% work in companies of less than 100 people and 23.8% work in companies of more than 10,000 people. Of the remaining respondents, 9% work both in companies of 100-250 people and of 1,000-5,000 people. About 14% of respondents work in companies of 250-1,000 employees and only 4.6% work in companies 5,000-10,000 people. Nearly 25% of respondents' companies earn less than \$1 million in annual revenue and almost 30% work for companies earning more than \$1 billion in annual revenue with the remainder falling in between. The survey questions covered personal and team productivity, cloud-based productivity tools, and work from home sentiment. Several intriguing trends emerged, and even the outliers to these trends shed light on what we may be able to expect from the future of work during the COVID-19 Pandemic and beyond.



# Remote Status and Productivity

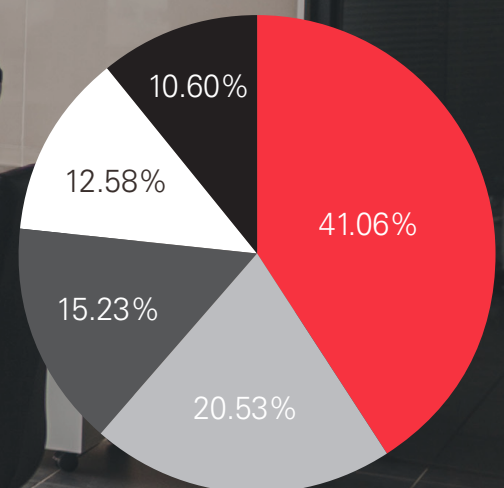
At the time of the survey 55% of respondents reported that their workplaces were completely remote, 39% have semi-remote workplaces, and 9% are currently working in-office. Companies overwhelmingly seem to plan to return to work, but the details remain vague and unconfirmed.

Forty-one percent of those surveyed reported that their companies have said they will return to the office at “some point” but have not specified any date, while another 21% have said they plan to return to the office sometime in 2021. At the other end of the spectrum, 12.5% of companies have said they are now permanently remote and another 15% of companies simply haven’t said anything. From these results, we see that the majority of companies envision an office-based future of some kind, but with the continuing fluctuations in the pandemic they are uncertain when that may be. We can conclude that the leadership of participants’ companies see a value in a shared workplace where employees are present together, but are unsure when or how that can be safely achieved.

Perhaps the biggest concern among business leaders at the start of the pandemic was the effect that working from home would have on productivity. Even before the unique childcare and mental-health challenges of the coronavirus

Has your company expressed that you will need to/can return to the office?

- Yes, within a month
- Yes, in 2021
- Yes but no date given
- No, they haven’t said anything
- No, we have gone permanently remote



pandemic, productivity concerns cropped up in remote work discussions across industries and carried over to these unique times. Our survey, however, shows little to no drop in productivity as far as these business leaders are concerned. Participants, who are all leaders in their companies at the senior management level and above — therefore overseeing teams of their own, overwhelmingly reported that their productivity from home was either “good” or “very good” at 29% and 49% respectively. Only 8.6% of participants said their productivity was “poor” and less than 1% said “very poor.” The remainder reported their productivity was “neutral” meaning that it is equivalent to in the office.

Interestingly, while those we surveyed in leadership positions are pleased with their own productivity, they mostly think their teams are performing at about the same level as they did in the office. Forty nine percent of people who manage a team directly said their teams are performing “about the same” and only 21% said they are performing better. However, productivity could still overall be considered strong, as only 11% of those who manage a team said their team was performing poorly while working remotely. This generally positive, though not overwhelmingly so, response is reflected in the fact that 69% of the professionals we surveyed would consider hiring employees who are completely remote in the future regardless of their offices’ status.

“It is good to stay home to be safe and healthy. Health has priority. At the same time, productivity is impacted hence more communication and task management tools and engagement more than before is constantly needed to maintain the same levels of contribution.”

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– Executive Survey Respondent



## The state of the remote office:

- Most people are working completely or semi-remotelyTask management
- The majority of remote workers are confident in their productivity levels-Work automation
- Employers largely plan to return to an office setting, but don't know when
- Even though managers think they are personally performing very well, they report that their teams are performing about the same as in-office
- A majority of senior level professionals would consider hiring future employees who are completely remote

There could be extenuating circumstances, such as fears over the effects of COVID-19 on businesses motivating employees to work harder, or lack of competing activities available due to shutdowns. However, these circumstances may be mitigated by opposing factors such as having entire families working and learning in the same space and the toll of stress from the pandemic on workers. Ultimately this level of successful productivity bodes well for the adoption of remote work beyond the pandemic. In fact, among those we surveyed productivity was far from a frontline concern, eclipsed by feelings of isolation and the dual business/emotional challenges of not seeing people face-to-face.




Google Docs Google Drive Office Email Salesforce suite cloud JIRA

MS Google Teams Outlook Zoom Microsoft Slack Calender

Ms Office Microsoft office Webex Sharepoint Skype Google Meet Microsoft Teams

A word cloud demonstrating the most commonly cited tools being used in a remote work setting

Fewer  More  
Number Of Mentiones

## Tools and Assistance

One of the biggest question marks of the mass remote work experiment is what tools are needed to ensure workers feel supported and what tools actually promote productivity and efficiency. To get a sense of whether workplaces are navigating these new experiences with new tools, we asked three key questions: whether the respondent uses any cloud-based tools to support their productivity, what tools they use, and whether these tools were implemented by their workplace specifically in an effort to boost work from home productivity. The answers revealed that most people do rely on tools, using the same tools that they had access to before the pandemic, and that a

few particular cloud-based tools stand out as market favorites.

Overall, 75% of respondents said they do use cloud-based tools to support their remote work productivity, with communication tools being by far the most commonly used. Ninety percent of respondents in fact said that the tools they rely on are communication tools, with a distant second of 66% citing the use of task management tools. Time tracking tools were not common, with only 23% of respondents using them.

### Top five reasons for using cloud-based tools:

- Communication
- Task management
- Digitized office tools
- Work automation
- Time tracking

In terms of the implementation of new tools, 63% said that the tools they use now were only offered to them in response to the shift to remote work. By far the most used and the most newly implemented tool was Zoom. Other popular choices include Slack, Google Drive and/or Docs, Microsoft Teams and Webex products. Even those tools in this list which support task-completion, such as Google docs, include an element of communication tools with easy file sharing being a key feature.

The clearest indication that these tools are appreciated and useful is the fact that 83% of participants said that they would continue to use these tools even after returning to the office.

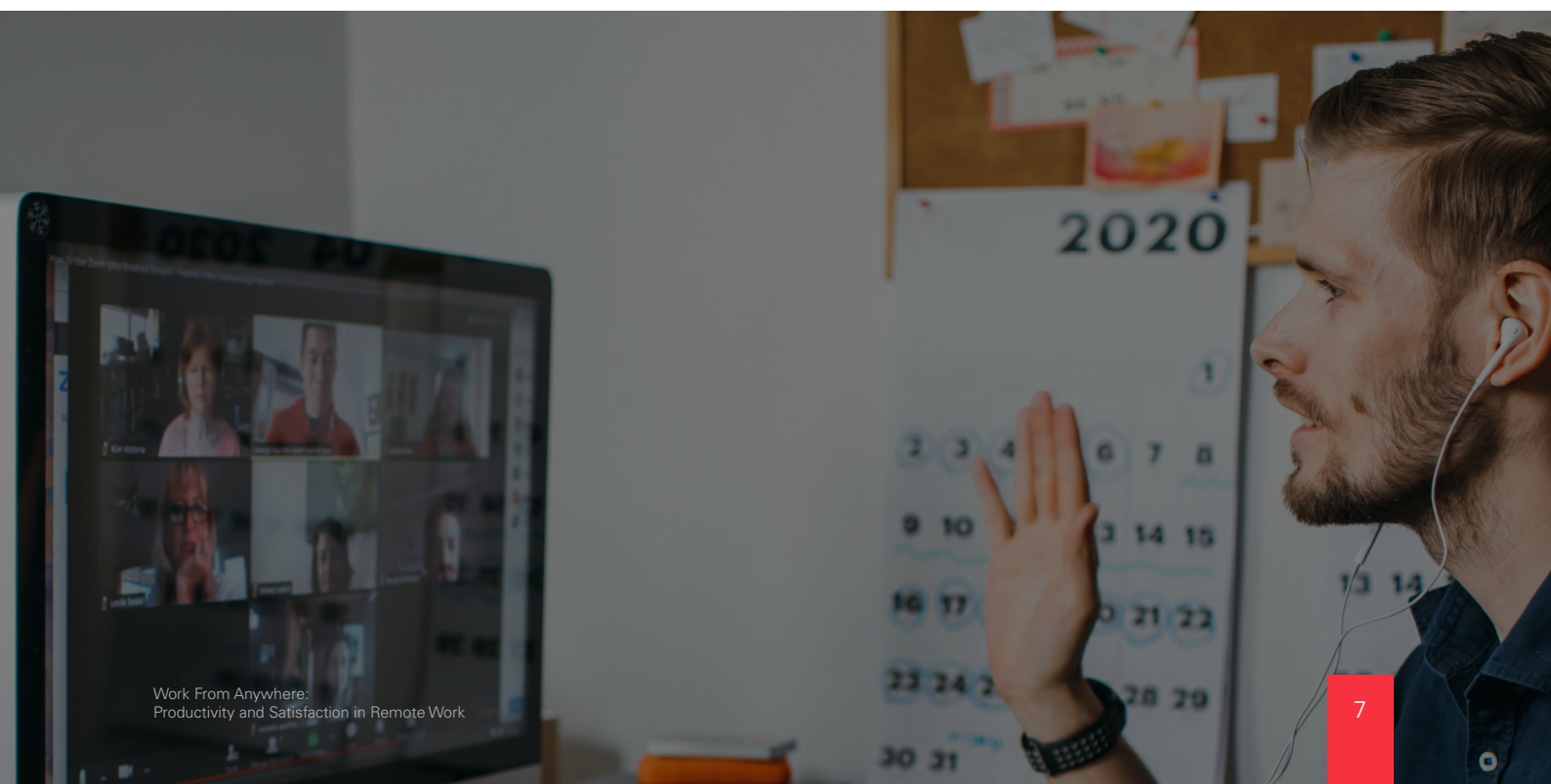
While remote work may have given a push for using these tools, there is clearly a need for cloud-based productivity tools even in

traditional work settings. In terms of what needs are not being met, we asked what tools participants wish they had to support their remote work productivity. Three major themes emerged. The most desired tools were for mental productivity (36%), task management (30%), and work automation (27%), indicating that remote work is stretching peoples' ability to manage their workload at the levels they need.

At the same time, communication reigns both as the area most supported by tools and the most wished for. When participants were asked to describe what they needed more support with, employee engagement and interaction were consistently cited. The two most commonly wished for products were Zoom and Slack.

"Remote and intermittent team communication is a challenge and help here would be huge."

- Executive Survey Respondent





# Remote Work Sentiments and Outlook

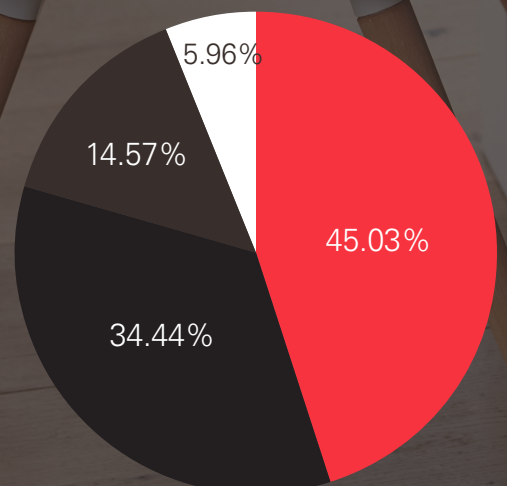
Even in the face of the multifaceted challenges presented by working remotely in the midst of a global pandemic, the large majority of senior professionals enjoy working from home — a full 78% of survey participants responded in the affirmative. However, there are caveats and nuances to this satisfaction.

“Workplace and relationships are about so much more than what you produce. While the convenience of wfh is undeniable, I’d trade it in a heartbeat for human interaction and opportunity to experience new people, places, and experiences related to work.” - Survey Respondent

While most people are generally positive about working from home while they have to, attitudes towards remaining at home are split. The majority of participants, 45% said they would like to keep working from home a few days a week if other services such as childcare and public transportation resumed. Only 34% of respondents would like to continue working from home permanently and a paltry 6% reported that they do not want to work from home at all when they no longer have to. The remainder said they would like to work from home just a few days a month.

Assuming services such as childcare and public transportation resumed, would you be interested in continuing to work from home after the pandemic?

- Yes, permanently
- Yes, a few days a week
- Yes, a few days a month
- No



By far the biggest benefit that people find to working from home is the lack of commute, with 74% citing that as the top benefit. In second and third place with 58% and 50% respectively were time with family and that remote work saves money.

Even though most people responded that yes, they enjoy working from home, when given the opportunity respondents usually shared drawbacks about the experience — even if they personally had said they enjoy working from home. The two most common complaints were:

- Missing human interaction, whether with their own team, other coworkers, or clients.
- A lack of work-life balance and an inability to disconnect from work.

Comments included statements like “work-life balance is nonexistent,” “Expected to always be connected and online,” and several simply saying that they feel their hours are much longer and the work is too much to handle. Others said they miss spontaneous conversations, human connection, and that the inability to apply emotional intelligence to business interactions was actually hurting their relationships with clients. Accordingly, a lack of team culture and communication, and isolation were the two most-cited drawbacks of working from home, at 60% and 48% respectively. Productivity was not largely a concern, only 18% reported it suffering as a drawback of remote work.

At the same time, those who are enjoying work from home, really enjoy it and we received many comments that people love working remotely, hope it continues, and would like to be able to do so at least some of the time even after the pandemic.

## Key Comments

“I miss serendipitous interactions with people outside my immediate coworkers.”

“We have seen a wide variety of employee responses. Some employees wanted to be back in the office 5 days a week as soon as they were allowed, some never want to come back.”

“Productivity can be managed to an acceptable level but will never be optimized without face to face meetings with team and clients.”



# Other Considerations

Over the course of the survey results, a few concerns and triumphs relating to remote work and work from home productivity were raised which did not emerge as significant trends, but are worth touching upon in a discussion of these topics.

One issue that came up, but is probably a larger problem than such a targeted survey as this could expose, is the issue of rural internet connectivity. For those who live or have team members living in rural areas, this poses a real challenge and the problem of unreliable service, calls getting dropped, and insufficient bandwidth were cited by those who struggle with it as major blockers for remote work success.

A second issue that emerged in the open-ended comments were the unique challenges of working from home with “the entire family” whether that consisted of a partner and/or children. Several people shared that they enjoyed aspects of working from home, such as flexibility and reclaimed time from their commute, but that logistics of childcare and/or remote schooling are serious challenges in maintaining focus and productivity.

Finally, there was a repeated concern from multiple respondents that employees were shouldering an uneven cost burden due to companies not adequately managing the necessities of remote work.

While many said they are overall saving money by working from home, there still arose some frustration that they were responsible for carrying work-related costs that would usually be absorbed by their employer without any support. From additional equipment, such as a second screen, to internet provider costs, and even the sudden disappearance of in-office perks, respondents called upon employers to be more thoughtful and to take more initiative in carrying work-related expenses.

All three of these issues reflect employee sentiment that even though there are many benefits to be had from remote work, companies generally still have much to consider to create the best conditions possible for their workers to succeed.

“If this is going to continue I think business needs to better plan how to support those at home and ensure they have what they need to be productive, whether it is providing hardware/software or even providing a stipend for the employee who is now [providing] their own supplies, internet, etc.”

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- Executive Survey Respondent

## Conclusion

The sudden shift to large-scale remote work was unexpected and unprecedented. Despite this, senior-level professionals feel that they are generally successfully productive, that their teams are at least as productive as in the office, and that they derive personal benefits and satisfaction from working from home.

Given the right conditions, the right support, and the right implementation of employee feedback, companies could actually find that offering even partial remote work options to their employees creates business benefits in the long run. Employee satisfaction cannot be understated as a critical element for business success. However, the ability to create these ideal environments is currently constricted by the ongoing pandemic. Our survey respondents reported that they crave human interaction, even just the occasional team-building activity. Feelings of isolation, burnout, and worry plagued even those professionals who have found remote work to be generally positive.

There are steps that employers can take now to support remote work productivity and satisfaction, such as making an extra effort to facilitate smooth communication, offer employees engagement opportunities, and thinking creatively about morale-boosting and appreciation activities. Additionally, employers should expect to see an increase in the demand for remote work flexibility even from their senior and C-suite employees in the long-term, beyond the pandemic.

In the years to come, whether the pandemic ends soon or continues to stretch on, it will be to business' own benefit and ability to retain high-quality talent to consider how they can thoughtfully yet strategically enable productive remote work capabilities among their teams.



## About Ivy Exec

Ivy Exec provides our clients with meaningful insights by leveraging our internal network of professionals. We offer white glove recruitment of industry experts for qualitative and quantitative marketing insights studies. Our Market Insights team offers fast, reliable results for businesses seeking professional or subject matter experts across a variety of industries.

As an elite online business community, Ivy Exec supports and connects the very professionals that researchers seek to serve. Because of the trust built between Ivy Exec and executive professionals, and the unique strategies implemented to reach these individuals, Ivy Exec has successfully recruited more than 1,000 market research projects with over 140 distinguished clients since 2012. Of these projects, 85% were conducted using qualitative methodologies that offer deeper, more thorough insights. These projects have spanned a variety of industries and focus areas from healthcare to HR, from technology to finance, as well as CPG and high-net-worth consumer habits.

With a network of over 2 million professionals, Ivy Exec is able to source the right people for projects and facilitate actionable insights from industry leaders.

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