MAKING
THE CASE FOR
THE OFFICE

Latest insights into the number of days employees should spend in the office each week to create the best outcomes for them and their employer

Ipsos KARIAN AND BOX

To the office or not to the office, that is (and continues to be) the question…

Ghassan Karian

CEO, Ipsos Karian and Box

Here we go again. Yet another report about hybrid working. Has there not been enough said? What more is there to know?

The after-effects of pandemic working patterns have not gone away.

This report seeks to provide new insights into the impact that hybrid and remote working are having on both workplace culture and employee experience.

A fast-changing tide

Many CEOs from across different industries have set out their stance, asking their people to come back to the office in pursuit of better productivity, collaboration and innovation. Workers, on the other hand, seem less than keen to comply with these requests.

In 2022, we published a report ('Hybrid working: The never-ending search for the right approach') focused on the clash of views between leaders and employees. We concluded that, for the time being at least, the shortage of labour supply (particularly in the UK) meant the power was in the hands of employees. Now, as many economies are experiencing slower growth and employers are taking cautionary action on costs, the tide is changing.

A different way of looking at the issue

Too much research on this topic relies on asking people what they think about hybrid working and its impact on their performance and motivations.

The flaw with this is that, if people like working from home, they tend to say it is great regardless of how productive they feel, for fear someone might take it away. Research conducted by Ipsos Karian and Box is founded on asking questions in a way where we can understand the true impact of different factors on work.*

The research in this report is based on a representative sample of UK office workers.[†] Most of the data in this report comes from 1,401 who work full time.

We asked these office workers about their experiences at work and have looked for patterns and differences between those spending different amounts of time at their employer's location.

This has helped identify what remote working is great for and where it is holding employees and organisations back. It provides evidence of the impact that home working is having on both cultural and employee outcomes, offering CEOs and leaders a manifesto for persuading employees back into the office.

However, the report also demonstrates quite clearly that being in the office all of the time is not the panacea that some leaders think it is. We offer clear evidence that full-time, five-days-a-week office working adds little more to positive outcomes compared to employees working in a more balanced hybrid way.

Thinking long term about the effects on younger workers

Critically, this report highlights the risks posed to younger workers' careers by spending less time at their employer's location. Being in the office enhances learning key skills and behaviours, and makes it more likely they are coached by their managers. This risk is compounded by the societal impact that home working has on the loneliness younger office workers experience.

This poses a moral and cultural dilemma for organisational leaders. To what extent do they use evidence and experience to 'tell' employees (especially younger, newer ones) that it is in their interests to come back to the office more?

Should they take such a paternalistic approach and experience the likely irritated response from their people? How much carrot is needed, and when should a clear and unambiguous stick be used to force people back in for their 'own good'?

These and a range of other issues, underpinned by our research results, are explored throughout the report. I hope it is useful and aids your organisation's own planning and decisions.

Ghassan

* This is why you never ask an employee if they think they get paid enough… Why would you say 'yes' even if you were happy? It will only lead your boss to think they don't have to pay you more.

† The term 'office workers' is used throughout this report to refer to those who said they either "Mainly work in an office environment – I am going into an office all or most of the time"; "Mainly work in an office environment – I am working at home most of the time" or "Mainly working from home doing a desk-based role".

Headline results

1

Majority of UK full-time office workers are spending most of their time at their employer's location

67% of full-time office workers are spending three or more days a week at their employer's location, with two in five there full time

2

But only half are spending their preferred amount of time there

53% of full-time office workers are currently spending their preferred amount of days at their employer's location

3

Innovation, transparent decision making and career development peak when employees spend 3–4 days at the office

12pt difference in employer advocacy* when employees spend less than one day per week at their employer's location vs. when they spend four days per week there

4

Loneliness is higher among younger full-time office workers – especially when they spend more time working from home

53% of 18–24-year-old full-time office workers who spend three days a week or less in the office feel always or frequently lonely

5

Better work-life balance and saving from the cost of commuting are among the biggest benefits of working from home

34% of office workers said saving on the cost of commuting is one of the biggest benefits of working from home

6

Employees who spend more time at home report less strain and better work-life balance

36% of office workers who work remotely report feeling under constant strain at work, compared to 45% of those who work hybridly and 40% of those who spend all their time at a company location

7

A smaller proportion of people come into their employer's location regularly when their employer has a fully flexible approach

60% of employees spend two to four days in the office when their employer has set anchor days, compared to only 35% when allowed full workplace flexibility

8

Men and women benefit differently from spending more time at their employer's location

12pt difference in the proportion of women who say they have enough opportunities to grow the skills they need for the future when they work from their employer's location full time (50%) vs. when they work remotely (62%) – compared to a 3pt difference for men

* The proportion of employees who would recommend their employer as a great place to work.

FINANCIAL TIMES

Have CEOs lost patience with hybrid working?

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

A New CEO Says Employees Can't Work Remotely After All, and They Revolt

B B C

Why hybrid return-to-office mandates aren't as flexible as they seem

Forbes

While CEOs Blame Remote Work For Decreased Productivity, Here's The Bigger Picture

Forbes

Hybrid Work Is Now The Norm For The Year Ahead – And Beyond

The Guardian

What have the past three years taught us about hybrid working?
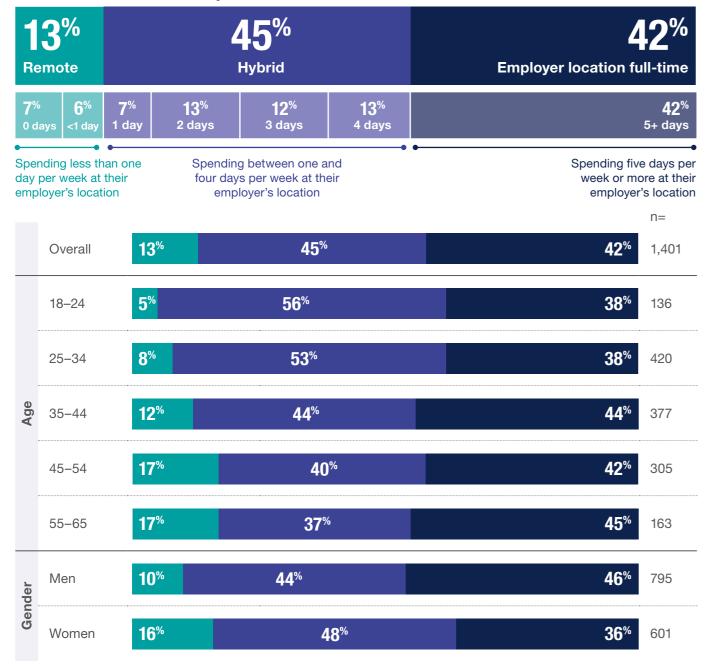
RESEARCH FINDINGS

After three years of headlines about hybrid working, we surveyed UK office workers to understand the impacts of working remotely, hybridly and fully from the office.

Majority of UK full-time office workers work from their employer's location most of the time

How often do you usually work at your employer's location (office, contact centre, etc.)?

Full-time office workers only

13% Remote	45% Hybrid	42% Employer location full-time

7% 0 days	6% <1 day	7% 1 day	13% 2 days	12% 3 days	13% 4 days	42% 5+ days

Spending less than one day per week at their employer's location

Spending between one and four days per week at their employer's location

Spending five days per week or more at their employer's location

		Remote	Hybrid	Employer location full-time	n=
	Overall	13%	45%	42%	1,401
Age	18–24	5%	56%	38%	136
	25–34	8%	53%	38%	420
	35–44	12%	44%	44%	377
	45–54	17%	40%	42%	305
	55–65	17%	37%	45%	163
Gender	Men	10%	44%	46%	795
	Women	16%	48%	36%	601

What the data says

Two thirds of full-time office workers (67%) are spending three days or more per week at their employer's location (office, contact centre, etc).

- Over two in five (42%) work from their employer's location full time, with almost half (45%) spending between one and four days a week there.
- 13% spend less than one day per week in the office.

Younger full-time office workers are less likely to work fully remotely.

- Only 5% of those in the 18–24 age group are spending less than one day per week at their employer's location, compared to 17% of those aged 45–54 and the same proportion of those aged 55–65. However, they are also most likely to be working in a hybrid pattern, balancing home and office working.
- Men are also more likely to spend time at their employer's location, with 46% spending five days a week there vs. 36% of women.

Thoughts and questions for employers

When the most experienced employees work from home

- While age and seniority or experience do not always increase together, it is not unreasonable to ask: What happens to those at the start of their career when older employees stay at home?
- "Many employers we have spoken to raised concerns about the learning and development of their graduate and trainee populations – especially when this cohort were hit so hard by disruption to their learning during the pandemic," says Ghassan.
- With those aged 46+ most likely to work remotely, are younger workers missing out again on learning by watching?

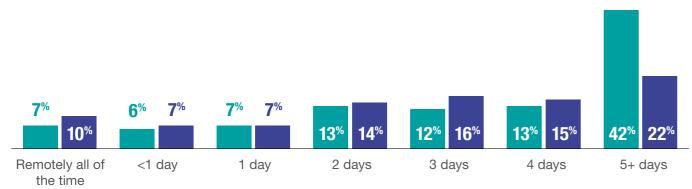**The impact of fewer women working from the office**

- The UK's new 'right to request flexible working' law has been heralded by many as a leap forward for enabling more people to join the workforce, particularly women who still take on the majority of childcare.
- A **recent study**[1] revealed that, in the UK, only 28% of women are in full-time work three years after having a child vs. 90% of men.
- But, as organisations seek a more balanced gender ratio in leadership roles, what impact does women being less likely to be present in the workplace have on this goal?
- This report shows that women report better support from their managers and more opportunities to develop their skills when they spend more time working from home than at their employer's location (pg. 23). But it is too early to tell whether a lack of in-person visibility affects who gets promoted.
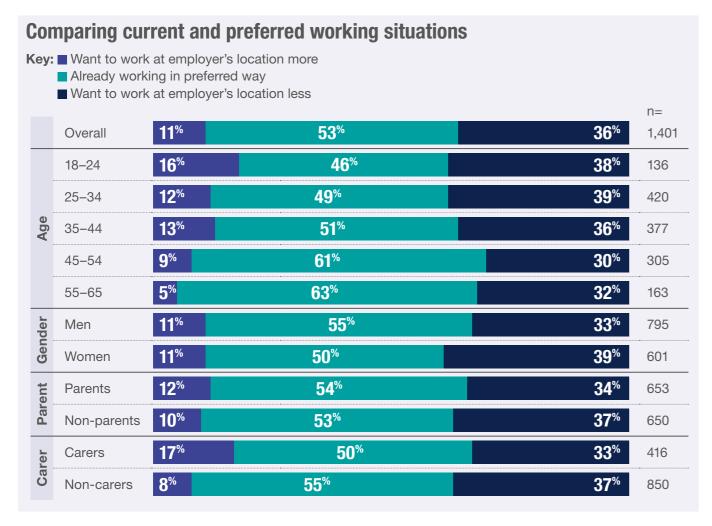
A smaller proportion want to work 5 days a week at their employer's location than currently do

Current vs. preferred time spent at employer's location, per week

Key:
- How often do you usually work at your employer's location (office, contact centre, etc.)?
- Regardless of your current work arrangement, how often would you prefer working at your employer's location moving forward?

Category	Current	Preferred
Remotely all of the time	7%	10%
<1 day	6%	7%
1 day	7%	7%
2 days	13%	14%
3 days	12%	16%
4 days	13%	15%
5+ days	42%	22%

Comparing current and preferred working situations

Key:
- Want to work at employer's location more
- Already working in preferred way
- Want to work at employer's location less

		Want more	Already preferred	Want less	n=
	Overall	11%	53%	36%	1,401
Age	18–24	16%	46%	38%	136
	25–34	12%	49%	39%	420
	35–44	13%	51%	36%	377
	45–54	9%	61%	30%	305
	55–65	5%	63%	32%	163
Gender	Men	11%	55%	33%	795
	Women	11%	50%	39%	601
Parent	Parents	12%	54%	34%	653
	Non-parents	10%	53%	37%	650
Carer	Carers	17%	50%	33%	416
	Non-carers	8%	55%	37%	850

Source: 1,401 full-time office workers aged 18–65 in the UK, surveyed online between 9–12 June. Preferred working situation excludes "Don't know" (3%) and "Not applicable – my job has to be undertaken at the employer's location" (6%)

What the data says

Just over half of full-time office workers (53%) are currently spending their preferred amount of days at their employer's location.

- For those whose number of current and preferred days don't match, most want to spend less time at their employer's location (36%) – particularly those currently spending five days a week or more there.

- Less than a quarter (22%) of full-time office workers want to spend five days or more at their employer's location – a much smaller proportion than those currently spending five days or more there.

- The most popular 'hybrid mix' is three days a week at an employer's location, with 16% preferring this number of days compared to only 12% currently working this way.

Younger full-time office workers are most likely to want more time at their employer's location.

- Younger full-time office workers (aged 18–24) are most likely to want to spend more time at their employer's location (16%).

- Even though women currently spend less time at their employer's location than men, they want to spend even less time there – 39% of women would like to spend less time at their employer's location vs. 33% of men.

Thoughts and questions for employers

Given only around one in 10 UK full-time office workers (11%) want to spend more time at their employer's location, it is not surprising that many organisations' drives to get employees back into the office have hit barriers.

- We have seen a range of negative reactions from employees when their employers have tried to get them back in the office for more of the week.

- Polls like this one[2] have even gone as far as to say two in three workers would quit their job if forced back full time – although this is an increasingly dubious position at a time of economic uncertainty.

But, despite some resistance, many employers are also getting the mix right…

- "Many UK employers we work with have introduced a minimum 'in office' attendance, setting expectations at two to three days a week in the office. With 74% of office workers saying they prefer to spend two or more days at their employer's location, they have probably set their sights at the right level," says Ghassan.

Bloomberg
Google Union Pushes Back on Three-Day Return-to-Office Mandate

FORTUNE
Goldman junior bankers are publicly threatening to leave Wall Street for tech as CEO demands full-time return to office

CNN
Apple employees demand more flexibility from company as three-day office return looms

[2] 64% of workers would consider quitting if asked to return to the office full-time, *CNBC*

Set hybrid days winning out over fully flexible policy

Which of the following statements best describes your employer's approach to / policy towards hybrid working?

Key: ♡ Advocacy – the proportion who would recommend their employer as a great place to work

📅 Average number of days spent at employer's location

27% Fully flexible
Employees have complete freedom to choose when and where they work, subject to performance expectations and team needs.
♡ 63%
📅 2.8

8% Informal policy
There is no formal policy, but working from home is allowed on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of management.
♡ 55%
📅 3.6

1% Other

4% Don't know

36% Hybrid with set hours or days
Employees are required to come into the office for a set number of days each week / set hours each day or week, with the option to work remotely for the remainder.
♡ 56%
📅 2.9

23% No hybrid work policy
There is no formal policy, with employees expected to work from an office most or all of the week.
♡ 49%
📅 4.7

How much time employees spend at their employer's location, per week

	n=	1 day or less	2–4 days	5+ days	Average number of days at employer's location
Fully flexible policy	410	33%	35%	30%	2.8 days
Hybrid policy with set days / hours	550	18%	60%	20%	2.9 days

Source: 1,401 full-time office workers in the UK, aged 18–65, surveyed online between 9–12 June 2023.

📊 What the data says

Around a quarter of full-time office workers (27%) work for an organisation with a 'fully flexible' approach to hybrid working, where employees have complete freedom to choose when and where they work.

- Employees with full freedom to choose when they work at their employer's location (27%) are the most likely to recommend their employer as a great place to work (63%).

- The most common employer policy is one where the employer sets days or a minimum number of hours that an employee needs to be at their employer's location, with an option to work remotely for the rest of the week. These employees are less likely to be advocates for their employer (56%).

- Employers with no hybrid policy (and who have a much higher, near five-days-a-week office presence) have the least engaged employees.

Set hybrid days see much higher in-office presence.

- The difference in the number of days reported working at an employer's location is similar for those working for an employer with a fully flexible policy compared to those given a set number of office days each week (2.9 vs. 2.8).

- However, this average hides very different patterns. In a fully flexible workplace, a third of employees go in one day a week or less, while a similar proportion go in five days a week. A hybrid policy with set hours and days results in much more regular attendance, with 80% of employees spending two days or more per week at a company location.

💡 Thoughts and questions for employers

A more prescriptive approach makes it more likely people will actually come to the office more.

- Anchor days make it easy to monitor adoption of any policy around minimum expectations of time spent in the office – particularly important when **31% of employees**[3] think nothing will happen to people who work from their employer's premises for fewer days than requested.

- They give organisations more control to choreograph teams coming into the office together – there's nothing worse than making the trip into an empty office to sit on Zoom.

- There is also an economic benefit to organisations giving different teams different set days: when planned well, it can dramatically reduce the amount of office real estate required.

But a more flexible approach seemingly leads to happier employees.

- The data shows that employees are more likely to be advocates for their employer when they have choice.

- However, is this cause or effect? Other factors and employer policies may be at play, as fully flexible employers are likely to also have a wider, more empowering culture (with empowerment often acting as a key driver of engagement).

- Furthermore, organising individual teams being in the office together may feel helpful for collaboration. But is it in fact the random meeting of minds from totally different teams that creates those sparks of innovation over the coffee machine?

[3] Research: Where Managers and Employees Disagree About Remote Work, *Harvard Business Review*

Negative impact of home working on workplace culture and employee career conversations

I would recommend my employer as a great place to work

n=	94	85	101	192	184	198	542

52% 48% 49% 55% 57% 60% 56%

Agree (%)

Remotely all of the time	<1 day	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5+ days

Time spent at employer's location, per week

Impact on key employee experience measures

Key: ■ I regularly discuss my career development with my manager
■ Where I work, people respond quickly to opportunities or challenges
■ Where I work, the decision-making processes are transparent

n=	94	85	101	192	184	198	542

	Remotely all of the time	<1 day	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5+ days
I regularly discuss my career development with my manager	39%	38%	45%	47%	53%	50%	44%
Where I work, people respond quickly to opportunities or challenges	48%	44%	54%	60%	61%	63%	57%
Where I work, the decision-making processes are transparent	40%	43%	45%	53%	53%	54%	52%

Time spent at employer's location, per week

What the data says

Advocacy (whether employees would recommend their employer as a great place to work) peaks when employees spend four days per week at their employer's location.

- Employee advocacy (which is often used as a proxy in employee surveys for overall employee engagement) is highest among those working four days or more at their employer's location.

Employees become more positive about specific aspects of their workplace experience when they spend three to four days per week at their employer's location.

- Full-time office workers are more likely to have regular career development discussions with their manager when they spend three days per week at their employer's location.

- Employees who spend four days per week at their employer's location are also much more likely to say that people around them respond quickly to ideas or challenges and that decision-making processes are transparent – all hallmarks of a growth mindset and an innovative organisational culture.

Thoughts and questions for employers

Is time spent at your employer's location the chicken or the egg?

- Does working from the office more often result in better employee engagement and experience, or do engaged employees want to come into the office more?

- It is difficult to pin down cause and effect. However, employees who work from home are also less positive about transparency of decision-making processes and their colleagues' response times to challenges and opportunities (which inherently feel like things the office would be better for).

- Therfore, there is a strong argument for suggesting that spending more time in the office does in fact support building more innovative and transparent cultures – critical for business success.

The CEO perspective

- It is this point around career development and innovation that many CEOs have been focused on in their 'return to the office' announcements.

- This includes **IBM's Arvind Krishna**[4] ('Your career does suffer'), **OpenAI's Sam Altman**[5] (going remote was 'one of the tech industry's worst mistakes') and **Lyft's David Risher**[6] ('Things just move faster when you're face to face').

- Our report suggests CEOs have a valid point. A number of research studies (like **this one**[7]) have shown the impact that in-person connections have on human relationships, including trust and confidence. In addition, visibility of achievement has been identified as a key factor in leaders making promotion decisions.

Source: 1,401 full-time office workers aged 18–65 in the UK, surveyed online between 9–12 June. Excludes those who responded "Don't know" to the time they spend at their employer's location each week.
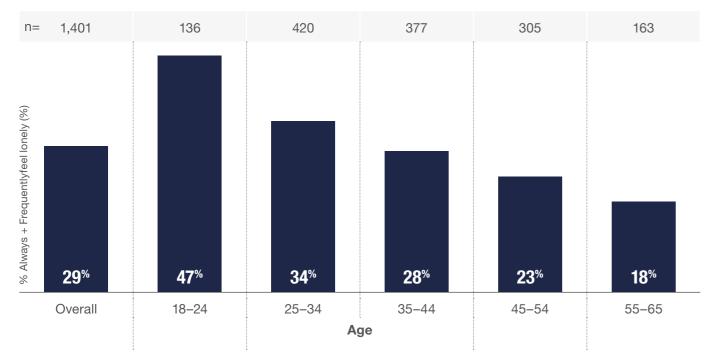
4 IBM Chief's Message to Remote Workers, *Bloomberg*
5 OpenAI CEO Sam Altman says the remote work 'experiment' was a mistake—and 'it's over', *Fortune*
6 Lyft Employees Told to Return to Office as New C.E.O. Lays Out Vision, *The New York Times*
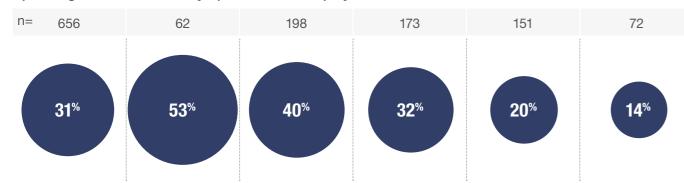7 Creating and sustaining trust in virtual teams, *Business Horizons*

Loneliness is highest among younger workers who spend more time at home
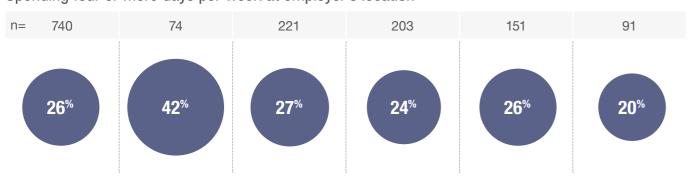
On balance, how often do you feel lonely?

n=	1,401	136	420	377	305	163

% Always + Frequently feel lonely (%)

Overall	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–65
29%	47%	34%	28%	23%	18%

Age

Spending three or fewer days per week at employer's location

n=	656	62	198	173	151	72
	31%	53%	40%	32%	20%	14%

Spending four or more days per week at employer's location

n=	740	74	221	203	151	91
	26%	42%	27%	24%	26%	20%

Source: 1,401 full-time office workers in the UK, aged 18–65, surveyed online between 9–12 June 2023.

What the data says

Out of all age groups, full-time office workers aged 18–24 are the most likely to say they always or frequently feel lonely (47%).

- When 18–24-year-olds spend three or fewer days a week at their employer's location, 53% of them feel always or frequently lonely. When they spend four or more days a week at their employer's location, this drops to 42%. While still high, this is a marked improvement.

- This impact of working in the office holds for those aged 25–34 and 35–44. These age groups experience less loneliness when they work from their employer's location four or more days per week.

Full-time office workers aged 45–54 and 55–65 are the least likely to feel lonely (23% and 18% respectively).

- For these age groups, spending more time in the office has the opposite effect on loneliness to younger office workers.

- Those aged 45–54 and 55–65 report less loneliness when they spend three or fewer days a week at their employer's location.

Thoughts and questions for employers

Why is home working having so much impact on younger employees?

- Longer-serving employees often have more established networks of workplace associates (if not friends) and people they turn to for information and to simply 'chew the cud'. The younger you are (and therefore often the shorter your tenure within an organisation), the more likely it is that you have fewer and/or looser connections across your organisation.

- **Research by Ipsos**[8] has shown that younger people are more likely to feel lonely – potentially due to a lack of meaningful connections in their everyday lives.

- It is easy to imagine that older employees are more likely to have family or other connections who they rely on to help them take their minds off work or other life issues. Unlike young, sometimes more isolated employees, working from home for older employees does not mean being totally disconnected and without a social support mechanism to discuss the travails of the working day.

The critical role of 'in-person' connection

- **Microsoft's 2022 Work Trends Index**[9] reported that 59% of hybrid employees have fewer work 'friendships' since going hybrid or remote. This is likely to be contributing to feelings of loneliness.

- Microsoft's data showed that 55% of hybrid employees feel lonelier at work than before going hybrid.

- The study has also shown that online 'social connection' is not a great substitute for in-person connection. 66% of respondents say virtual coffee chats feel like "more of a chore" than an in-person get together.
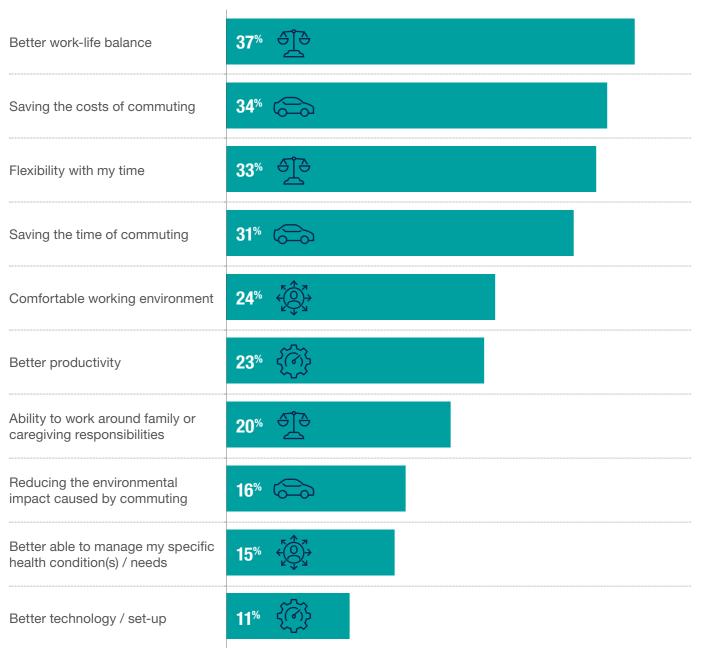
[8] AXA Mind Health Report, *Ipsos*
[9] Great Expectations: Making Hybrid Work Work, *Microsoft*

Better work-life balance and time/cost savings are the biggest benefits of working from home

Thinking about when you are working from home, which, if any, of the following do you benefit from the most?

Select up to three options

Key: ⚖ Work-life balance   🚗 Commuting   ⚙ Work enablers   ⊕ Work environment

Better work-life balance	37% ⚖
Saving the costs of commuting	34% 🚗
Flexibility with my time	33% ⚖
Saving the time of commuting	31% 🚗
Comfortable working environment	24% ⊕
Better productivity	23% ⚙
Ability to work around family or caregiving responsibilities	20% ⚖
Reducing the environmental impact caused by commuting	16% 🚗
Better able to manage my specific health condition(s) / needs	15% ⊕
Better technology / set-up	11% ⚙

📊 What the data says

While around a quarter of full-time office workers (23%) say they are more productive when they work from home, the most common benefits relate to personal factors, like better work-life balance (37%) and saving on commuting costs (34%).

- 37% of office workers ranked better work-life balance highest among the factors they most benefit from when working from home. Similarly, 33% chose 'flexibility with my time' and 31% 'saving the time of commuting'.

- 34% of employees chose 'saving the costs of commuting'.

- While the differences between age groups was subtle, younger employees (aged 18–24) are the most likely to say reducing the environmental impact caused by commuting. Nearly one in three (30%) rank this among their top three benefits of working from home.

💡 Thoughts and questions for employers

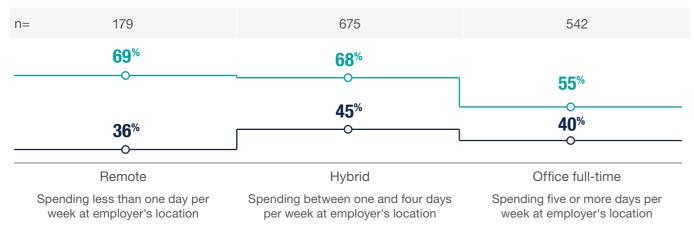**Do perks and incentives work in helping employees go back into the office more regularly?**

- Organisations can do many things to improve the experience their employees have at work, but what they cannot do (without significant economic impact) is refund employees for their commuting costs or give them back the time they spent travelling to the office.

- So, when organisations get creative with return-to-office perks designed to lure people back in (which according to **this BBC article**[10] can include free beer, wellbeing zones, dog hotels and team holidays) it is not surprising that employees often feel they miss the point of what people are really struggling with – particularly in an ongoing cost of living crisis.

- "These so-called return-to-the-office perks seem to be universally hated by employees. They are often seen as bribery by employers who cannot put together a data-led rationale for why employees should come back into the office – for their benefit and for the organisation's," says Ghassan.

- This highlights the need for employers to identify and implement simple, practical measures to help employees back into the office in a way that reflects the associated commuting costs.

Remote workers report less work strain

Strain and work-life balance

Key: ■ I am able to balance my personal and working life in a way that works for me
■ I feel under constant strain at work

n=	179	675	542

69%	**68%**	**55%**
36%	**45%**	**40%**
Remote	Hybrid	Office full-time
Spending less than one day per week at employer's location	Spending between one and four days per week at employer's location	Spending five or more days per week at employer's location

Which, if any, of the following are the biggest barriers preventing you from doing your job effectively? Select up to three

Top mentions

Volume of workload	**23%**
Pay and benefits	**19%**
Internal processes / bureaucracy	**17%**
Lack of recognition	**16%**
Lack of team resources	**15%**
Too many meetings	**14%**
Lack of communication between teams	**13%**
IT / equipment to do my job	**13%**
Ongoing change	**12%**
Lack of training	**12%**

What the data says

While advocacy and other employee experience questions peak at three to four days per week in the office, perceptions of strain and work-life balance buck this trend.

- Employees who work remotely (spending less than one day per week at their employer's location) are less likely to say they feel under constant strain at work (36% vs. 45% of those working hybridly or 40% of those working fully from the office).

- Those who work remotely or hybridly are the most likely to say they are able to balance their personal and working life in a way that works for them.

- The effect of working from home on work-life balance has a similar impact on men and women (see pages 22–23).

Barriers differ based on where you work.

- When it comes to the barriers that stop both full- and part-time office workers doing their job effectively, volume of workload comes out on top, with around a quarter (23%) choosing this option. Internal process and bureaucracy also get in the way for almost one in five (17%).

- There are also some slight differences between the barriers home / remote workers experience compared to colleagues who work either hybridly or in the office full time. Those who work remotely are more likely to experience internal processes and bureaucracy holding them back, while those who work hybridly are slightly more likely to say they have too many meetings.

Thoughts and questions for employers

How can you support employee wellbeing at work?

- There are many great wellbeing initiatives and solutions on the market that organisations can provide for their employees – from employee assistance programmes to wellbeing days, mindfulness apps and lunchtime yoga sessions.

- While these can offer great benefits for employees, they don't offset more ingrained cultural or environmental barriers to wellbeing.

- Workload is the usual culprit that prevents people finishing on time. Similar proportions of people say they have too much work on, regardless of whether they work at home, in the office or hybridly.

- Having too much to do at work makes work-life balance even more of a priority for employees, and harder to achieve. It is no surprise employees might want to skip the commute home when they are already feeling overstretched.

Source: 1,743 full and part-time office workers aged 18–65 in the UK, surveyed online between 9–12 June 2023.
Top ten choices displayed, excludes "There are no barriers to me doing my job" (17%).

Men and women benefit differently from spending more time at their employer's location

Key:
- ● Remote – spending less than one day per week at their employer's location
- ● Hybrid – spending between one and four days per week at their employer's location
- ● Spending all time their at employer's location

- 🏠 Better when remote
- ◑ Better when hybrid
- 🏢 Better when at employer's location full time

Impact of spending more or less time at an employer's location for men

Agree (%)

	Remote	Hybrid	Full time
I am able to balance my personal and working life in a way that works for me	57%	70%	71%
My colleagues and I collaborate well to develop ideas and solutions together	61%	68%	74%
My manager provides practical advice and support to help me develop in my role	54%	58%	64%
I have enough opportunities to share or receive feedback at work	58%	64%	68%
I regularly discuss my career development with my manager	35%	47%	51%
Where I work, people respond quickly to opportunities or challenges	49%	59%	66%
My organisation has clearly communicated our organisation's goals for the coming year	52%	60%	61%

Impact of spending more or less time at an employer's location for women

My manager provides practical advice and support to help me develop in my role	51%	56%	67%
I am able to balance my personal and working life in a way that works for me	52%	65%	66%
I have enough opportunities to grow the skills I need for the future	50%	54%	62%
I have enough opportunities to share or receive feedback at work	53%	62%	64%
I feel under constant strain at work	33%	38%	48%
Where I work, the decision-making processes are transparent	34%	49%	50%
Where I work, people respond quickly to opportunities or challenges	44%	53%	55%

Source: 1,391 full-time office workers in the UK who specified how many days they spend per week at their employer's location, aged 18–65, surveyed online between 9–12 June 2023. Base sizes: Remote Women (100), Men (77); Hybrid Women (300), Men (371); Office Full-time Women (198), Men (344).

📊 What the data says

Men working hybridly or from their employer's location full time report better communication around goals from their employer than those who work from home.

- Only around half (52%) of men who work remotely say their employer has clearly communicated their organisation's goals for the coming year vs. around six in 10 of those who work hybridly or from the office full time.

- When men work remotely, they report better work-life balance and are more likely to say they collaborate well with their colleagues.

Women who work remotely are more likely to get practical advice and support from their manager and feel they have enough opportunities to grow the skills they need for the future.

- Only half of women who work from their employer's location full time (51%) say their manager provides practical advice and support to help them develop in their role vs. 56% of hybrid working women and 67% of remote working women.

- Similarly, only 50% of women who work from their employer's location full time say they have enough opportunities to grow the skills they need for the future vs. 54% of hybrid working women and 62% of remote working women.

- Women who work from their employer's location full time or in a hybrid way, however, are more likely to say people around them respond quickly to opportunities or challenges vs. those who work remotely (55% and 53% vs. 44% respectively).
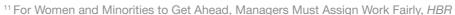
💡 Thoughts and questions for employers

Does working from home provide women with an escape from office 'housework'?

- It is striking that women feel they have more opportunities to develop when they work from home. Could it be because they have more time to focus on themselves and their own personal development when they aren't taking on so-called 'office housework'?

- 'Office housework' refers to all the admin jobs and mundane activities that are not valued and are perceived as trivial despite being essential for a smooth-running, happy workplace and requiring a fair amount of time and energy. Think taking notes, ordering coffee, organising staff events and remembering birthday cards.

- **Research suggests**[11] that women tend to perform approximately 29% more office housework than White men.

- **Studies**[12] show women are more likely to take these tasks on – either voluntarily or as a result of a direct request. Not because they want to, but because they feel compelled to based on the ingrained gender stereotype that women have to be helpful both at home and at work.

- If time away from the office means women can focus on more 'promotable tasks' then it's not surprising more women opt for hybrid and remote working. But being relegated to working from home to avoid office housework is not an ideal long-term solution, so employers should be spending time examining the division of office housework among their teams and redistributing responsibilities accordingly.

[11] For Women and Minorities to Get Ahead, Managers Must Assign Work Fairly, *HBR*
[12] Gender Differences in Accepting and Receiving Requests for Tasks with Low Promotability, *American Economic Review*

WHAT NEXT?

Given what we have discovered about remote and hybrid working, let's explore the next steps for employers.

A manifesto for the office

Ghassan Karian, CEO of Ipsos Karian and Box, sets out how employers can use the research from this report to build their own manifesto for getting employees back to the office.

In my eyes, the evidence is compelling. Spending five days in an office is not what most employees want to do – and nor does it add much to an organisation's productivity or culture. But being in the office more often is a good thing – for both employers and employees.

Reflecting on the research in this report, three days in the office comes out as the optimum solution. It strikes the right balance that realises the benefits of office working for both employer and employee, while also giving individuals the ability to think, work and manage their home lives in a flexible way.

If employers want to get their people back in the office for more of the week, this report provides them with the data to set out their manifesto.

Ghassan

The benefits of the three-day week in the office

By working alongside colleagues in the office for three days, and at home for the rest of the week, individuals will benefit from the following (if organisations hold up their side of the deal):

Better career development opportunities

The benefit for employees

- Three days a week at their employer's location is the optimum for focusing on career development, with employees being more likely to have career-focused conversations with their managers.
- These conversations and resulting guidance are critical to career progression.

Employer's side of the bargain

- Career conversations are an important start, but not the whole story.
- Employers need to ensure 'promotable tasks' are divided among all employees (especially women and those from a minority ethnic background) who then have equal opportunities to grow and showcase their skills, and can benefit from the time in the office, without being burdened by 'office housework'.

More efficiency, less bureaucracy

The benefit for employees

- Many things just work better in person – like knowing who can make decisions and being able to react quickly to new opportunities and challenges.
- Employers that can embrace this agility will see better innovation and create stronger, more sustainable organisations.

Employer's side of the bargain

- Inefficient internal processes and aggressive workloads are the enemy of innovation.
- To get maximum benefit from in-office time, organisations must invest in identifying and eliminating what gets in the way of doing what matters.

More investment in the next generation

The benefit for employees

- More frequent office time is of benefit to younger workers, reducing loneliness and helping them grow new skills through learning by observing.
- But three days a week isn't just a benefit for younger workers – everyone benefits when new recruits get up to speed quicker.
- It means longer-tenured and more senior workers can move onto more skilled, valuable work.

Employer's side of the bargain

- Having younger employees in the office won't result in better onboarding by itself. Employers need to invest in the right networking and skills development opportunities for those joining the workforce.
- It's important to remember the opportunity to learn the 'softer skills' that those starting their career during the pandemic lost out on.
- Now is the time to invest extra effort into this population, remembering they are our future managers and leaders.

Better connections and teamwork

The benefit for employees

- It's easier to build strong, trusting relationships when employees work together in person – and these types of relationship are vital for collaboration and great at-work experiences.
- While virtual interactions can go some of the way to making up for what you miss out on in person, employees report they can feel like more of a chore than a joy.

Employer's side of the bargain

- When it comes to building trust between leaders and employees, organisations need to help lay the groundwork by creating space and opportunity for engaging, two-way conversation.
- Leaders also need to 'walk the talk' and make sure they are available and visible in the office for at least the minimum time employees are expected to be.

What now and what next?
Six steps that can make a difference

Bite the bullet

Many organisations have procrastinated over moving to a hybrid policy or insisting on more in-office days for fear of losing team motivation and engagement. Inevitably, some people will leave. But it will be short term. The longer you leave it, the more entrenched employees will be in both their expectations and personal circumstances.

Use evidence

Lead with the data. Show how employees working from home long term negatively impacts both the organisation and them as individuals. Use industry data – such as that provided by this report – but also conduct your own analysis and insights to show how more office-based working provides positive benefits to employees.

Create role models

Asking middle to junior ranks to go to their employer's location more often will fall flat if senior leaders are not setting an example. The CEO and their next in line should insist on visible leadership. Ipsos research has shown the powerful impact that in-person leadership communications (and 'walking the floor') has on trust, confidence and engagement. This was the case before the pandemic. It is even more the case now, with leaders reinforcing the benefits of human interaction by doing it themselves.

Be intentional about collaboration

As **Brit Insurance did in 2021**,[13] get team squads from across the organisation (mixed by level and generation) to work on specific problems and challenges. Using diagnostic tools and 'hackathon' concepts, the teams should work together to develop practical solutions that can be implemented back in their respective teams. The key is to make in-person working and solutions development more of a habit – and one connected to making working life better.

Design meaningful incentives

Free pizza won't make up for the deep-rooted reasons employees do not want to come back into an office environment more regularly. Understanding what will make a difference is key. And fundamental to this is addressing the thorny issue of commuting costs. Some are addressing this challenge through pre-tax season ticket loans, cycle-to-work schemes, free EV charging points, shuttle buses and localised work hubs – all focused on tackling the cost of getting to an office. Other organisations are making anchor day office hours flexible, helping employees avoid rush hours and peak fares.

Create individual spaces

Quiet 'library' environments to help people think are just one example of how organisations can mimic the benefits of home working for some. Equally, getting rid of 'chicken farm' rows of desks and replacing them with collaborative workspaces (for example, desks formed in quads to enable both 'heads-down' working and team discussions) enables employees to get the best of both worlds. Creating Zoom-free zones is also part of the solution – bringing people together physically with the intent of working alongside each other. Some organisations are also providing more personalised spaces – for prayer, lactation, reading, making food (with real kitchens) and much more to meet individual needs.

[13] How to do hybrid right, *HBR*

Technical note

This survey was commissioned by Ipsos Karian and Box and a total of 4,466 UK adults aged 18–65 were interviewed as part of our regular i-Omnibus survey. A nationally representative quota sample of adults was interviewed online with quotas set by age within gender, working status and region. Data was weighted to the known population of the target for age, employment status and social grade within gender and for region, education and ethnicity. Interviewing took place online between 9th and 12th June 2023.

The survey audiences of interest for this survey fell naturally from the full nationally representative sample with a total of 2,653 participants employed (2,020 full time working 30 or more hours a week / 633 part time working 8–29 hours a week). A total of 1,743 were 'office workers' defined as those who:

- "Mainly work in an office environment – I am going into an office all or most of the time" (1,105)
- "Mainly work in an office environment – I am working at home most of the time" (430)
- "Mainly working from home doing a desk-based role" (350)

Of these 1,743 office workers, 1,401 worked full time (i.e. 30 or more hours a week)

Within this document we report on the results of 1,401 office workers who work full time, with some sections reporting on all 1,743 office workers (working both full and part time). Where the base size differs from these numbers, exclusions are explained under each chart.

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