



COVID-19

A Leader's Guide to Developing a Work-From-Home Strategy

GALLUP®



From mid-March to mid-May 2020, the percentage of U.S. employees working from home more than doubled, from 31% to 65%, accounting for more than 100 million American workers.¹

And these at-home workers aren't just working from home. They are working from home during a pandemic — taking Zoom calls from the kitchen table, absorbing troubling health-related news and adapting to new life routines. For families, their home isn't just their new workplace. It's also a classroom and a day care.

How employees feel about their situation is fluid, as is the business environment in which they work. For this reason, every organization needs a clear plan for transitioning from the makeshift solutions created in early stages of this crisis to a remote work strategy that makes sense for their unique business circumstances and employees' wellbeing in the long term.

Gallup researchers have mined multiple databases, covering 550-plus jobs summarized into 35 roles across 20 industries, to assess how remote work influences the demands for success in each job, both historically and during COVID-19.

In this guide, we review key considerations that leaders should evaluate as they determine which roles and employees will continue working from home and in what capacity.

Considerations for Developing Your Work-From-Home Strategy

Your Organization

The Role

The Team

The Individual

¹ Number of workers based on 2019 average of total employed (full time and part time, aged 18 and older), according to <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat08.htm>.



Consider Your Organization

Examine your organization's business needs, consider your culture and determine the potential impact on customers when making remote work decisions.

Leadership decisions during a crisis leave a lasting impression on your organization's reputation with employees, customers, investors and communities. In many organizations, the CEO, CFO and CHRO are collaborating to discover the most efficient and effective way for employees to reenter the workplace.

In an uncertain business climate, finding ways to increase revenue and cut costs before eliminating jobs can seem like a leadership imperative. Increasing an organization's remote workforce can lead to real estate and overhead savings. However, financial considerations should not be the only factors that influence an organization's work-from-home strategy.

Along with financial risks and opportunities, leaders need to consider the following culture-related questions:

- 1 Consistency:** Does our decision convey our culture?
- 2 Clarity:** Is there a hidden or unclear agenda behind the decision?
- 3 Authenticity:** Is our rationale credible?

Decisions about how to bring employees back to work must reflect what the organization stands for and how leaders want the organization to be known.

In addition, the best organizations consider how remote work affects their customer experience — for better or worse. What kinds of organizational capacities and customer value can the organization generate by thinking afresh about space, talent, processes and experiences?



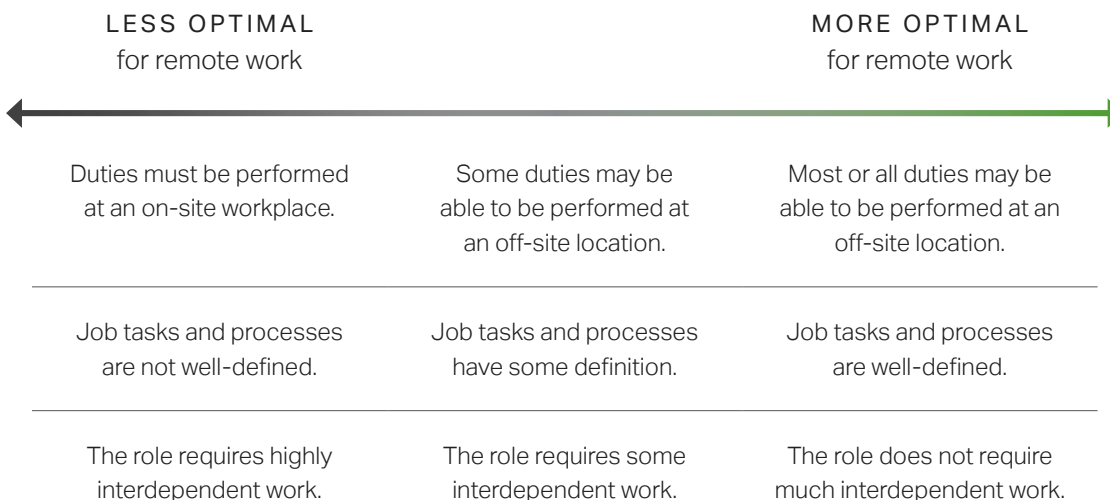
Consider the Role

Leaders should evaluate a role's optimal fit for long-term, at-home work based on its task definition and an employee's ability to work independently and effectively in the role outside of a traditional workplace.

Using our extensive Gallup Panel™ survey databases, Gallup examined how working from home affects key aspects of the employee experience, such as employee engagement, burnout, meaningful feedback and job preparedness.

We found that an optimal remote work role meets three criteria:

- 1** Employees can perform their duties outside of an on-site workplace.
- 2** Most of the role's tasks and processes are well-defined.
- 3** The role does not require highly interdependent work for success.



The obvious starting point for evaluating if a role should be done from home long term is to consider if the job even can be completed in a work-from-home environment. Evaluating the tasks and collaboration requirements of roles such as transportation drivers, food servers, farmers and electricians is pointless; these roles must be performed on-site.

For roles that could be performed at least in part from home, it is important to consider criteria two and three. Tasks and processes that are well-defined have clear timelines, expectations and measures of evaluation. Highly interdependent work means the work needs more than simple communication and collaboration. It requires simultaneous or synchronized input from multiple partners to complete tasks and move a project forward.

A paralegal role, for instance, tends to be made up primarily of clearly defined tasks, timelines and expectations. In addition, this work can be completed with minimal interdependence between team members.

In contrast, some analyst positions may not have inherently distinct tasks or deadlines, requiring the employee to generate their own work tasks or complete projects that require frequent input from a variety of partners. Someone working from home in a role like this may get frustrated by limited interaction with a manager or key stakeholders and by the challenges of trying to connect frequently with physically distant peers and team members.

Managers of people in these types of roles need to be even more intentional about the support, structure, coaching and development they provide to ensure that the location of work does not hinder their employees' engagement and productivity.

To be clear, the three criteria are not a formula for guaranteed success or failure. Workers who do not meet all of these criteria may still be able to work from home — in fact, an employee may be avidly requesting it. But, based on Gallup's analysis of remote worker engagement and burnout, roles that do not meet all three will likely require additional manager and organizational support to produce exceptional performance.



Consider the Team

Fifty-five percent of managers say they will allow their employees to work remotely more often than they did before COVID-19.

Many employees are feeling more team-oriented right now. Employees have performed heroically to adapt to a new, challenging work environment. People are inviting team members into their homes via video chats. They are sharing more about their personal lives and bonding through new virtual experiences. Those are positive outcomes, and hopefully they last. But not every team will thrive long term in a virtual work environment. When managed poorly, remote work can dramatically erode productivity.

To evaluate which teams are best suited for consistent remote work, consider the following:

- 1 Interdependency of team members:** Do team members frequently work on detailed, complex projects that require intense partnership? As mentioned in the previous section, interdependent work requires more than simple communication. To complete the work, multiple team members must provide direct input in a coordinated way.
- 2 Dynamics of team member contributions:** Which roles may cause bottlenecks that could affect downstream work?
- 3 Team engagement:** Is the manager equipped to manage well through remote work challenges?
- 4 Trust:** Has the team achieved past accomplishments in the face of challenges and proven the team members' ability to depend on each other when it counts?

The location of the team is less important than the person who is leading it. A key to success is the amount of meaningful feedback that team members are getting from each other, their managers and their leaders. In general, fully remote workers should be receiving meaningful feedback a few times per week. Gallup has found that, when managed well, remote teams can experience significantly higher engagement than fully on-site teams.



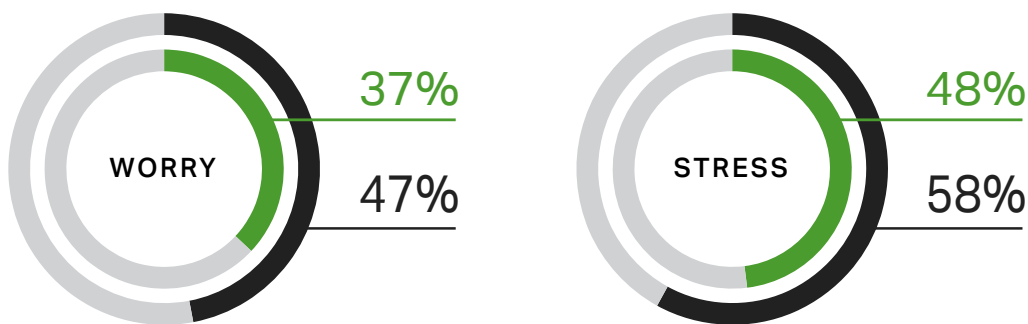
Consider the Individual

More than half of at-home workers say they would prefer to continue working remotely as much as possible once restrictions on businesses and school closures are lifted.

Millions of U.S. workers are reporting high levels of emotional distress during the pandemic. Among U.S. full-time and part-time workers, daily worry increased from 37% before the crisis to 47% in late April to mid-May 2020. Reported stress also increased, from 48% to 58% in the same time period.

Did you experience the following feelings during a lot of the day yesterday?

%Yes ■ Before the crisis ■ Late April to mid-May 2020



Although it may not be realistic for leaders at the top of an organization to consider the unique needs of each employee, not empowering managers to create flexibility within new processes is a recipe for failure. Leaders must allow and encourage managers to individualize plans that reasonably honor the needs of their employees.

Managers who want to create successful work-from-home plans for their team members need to evaluate the following criteria for each person on their team:

- 1 Readiness and comfort:** Is this person comfortable with the protocols and precautions that the organization is implementing? What are the individual's health and safety concerns — for themselves and their family members?
- 2 Life circumstances:** What personal demands is this person experiencing regarding childcare, elder care or responsibilities for tending to sick family members? What type of transportation is required for the person to return to the work site, and is that type available? Does the person have a well-defined space at home that is suitable for productive, engaging long-term remote work?
- 3 Performance:** How has this individual performed before and after shifting to at-home work? Tracking and supporting low performers may be more difficult from a distance.
- 4 Strengths:** Even if a role aligns well with remote work, it is important to consider that people have different talents and, therefore, different ways of achieving the same outcome. Some people work remotely with a high degree of success despite minimal interventions. Others may be in the same role, but they perform better with the interactions and structure of on-site work.

The Employee Experience Continues to Change During COVID-19

Gallup's extensive data on work-from-home trends and opinions pre-COVID-19 can and should help inform the way forward, but it would be irresponsible for leaders to ignore the ever-changing effects of the current pandemic when building a work-from-home strategy for the next normal.

Gallup is continuing to monitor the experiences, emotions and wellbeing of workers across the U.S., and leaders also must stay informed on the latest effects of this pandemic and adjust their strategies as needed to ensure their employees are engaged and their approach to remote working is sustainable.

How Gallup Can Help

Gallup is continually tracking the engagement, burnout and wellbeing of U.S. workers during COVID-19. We can help you analyze your organization's workforce as well, providing ongoing monitoring and expert insights and advice that reflect how your people are experiencing the new American workplace.

Gallup can help your organization:

- craft a work-from-home strategy informed by Gallup's extensive database and analysis to build a resilient culture
- train managers to coach, develop and lead remote workers effectively
- design a remote work onboarding process to prepare for and address the needs of remote teams
- provide strengths-based development for individual contributors and teams to enable optimal remote work
- refine your talent acquisition strategy to build your remote workforce for the future

[Contact Gallup today](#) to explore next steps for developing your organization's work-from-home and other workplace strategies amid COVID-19.

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