Coronavirus Has Taken Remote Work Mainstream. Now What?

How organisations survive the COVID-19 stress test will reveal how ready they are for the future of work.

Let us know how you are working remotely. Click **here** *to access our survey.*

As academic researchers in the field of organisation design, we have watched with great interest as remote working has gradually drifted toward mainstream acceptance in recent years. The ultimate meaning of this gradual shift, however, is unclear. Even the very best technologies still lack many of the properties of in-person communication. Early adopters of extensive remote work have been only a specific set of individuals or companies who chose to or could afford to accept these constraints. It would have been difficult to draw universally applicable conclusions based on this highly particular, self-selected group.

In one fell swoop, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) changed all that. As we write this, millions of workers around the world have been ordered to self-quarantine, and a great deal more are pre-emptively **hunkered down at home** amid outbreak fears. Presumably, many of them would never have chosen to work remotely for this length of time. Without the previous self-selection bias to corrupt the data, the scientific value of studying remote working habits outside the lab is much, much higher.

To understand better how this shock to the system is affecting work and workers, we are launching a brief online survey about the impact of forced and sudden remote work on individuals and on the modes of working of the organisations affected by it. We invite you to participate in this **seven-minute survey**, especially if you have been remote working more than usual due to the coronavirus epidemic. The survey will be open until 24 March 2020 – we will then analyse the results and publish our findings on *INSEAD Knowledge* shortly thereafter.

Why study remote work?

Remote work in all its forms (**managing virtual teams**, **offshoring**, **open-source software development**, **tele-working,** etc.) has been grist for the mill of academic research for many years. Practitioners and consultants have suggested that remote working can be great for **productivity**. As suggested above, though, the coronavirus situation may bring more nuance to light. We do not yet know how working outside the office affects individual satisfaction and organisational practices when it is no longer seen as a perk but a necessity. Plus, the workplace's ability to withstand the lack of co-location at scale has never been stress tested to this extent.

Why launch the survey right now, with the full-scale impact of the newly declared pandemic still unclear,

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rather than during the crisis's mature stages or its aftermath? We feel this is a pivotal moment in which masses of people are being forced to adjust to accelerated change. Their immediate impressions – as well as their evolving strategies for coping with this new way of working – may reveal a great deal about the capacity of organisations to adapt and benefit from remote work. By telling us some (possibly uncomfortable) truths about how large-scale disruptive change impacts organisations on a general level, it will also allow us to develop timely prescriptions and potential solutions to address such challenges.

We have our own hypotheses about what the survey results will reflect. For now, we will keep silent on those so as not to influence the results. Thank you for your participation and watch this space for insights based on signals from remote workers around the world.

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