

# REMOTE WORK STUDY

## THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LONDON ECONOMIC  
REGION FEBRUARY 2022

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

COVID-19 has permanently changed the way we work by focusing the world attention on remote working. Although two years passed since this unprecedented shift happened, researchers, management and organizations are trying to understand remote work impact on individuals, management, organizations and society. The 2020 and 2021 allowed plenty of time for experimenting and testing various attributes, costs and benefits of working remotely. However, the field remains perpetually dynamic with wide implications on economy and society. Current study attempts to provide answers to a limited list of questions associated with remote work. Its unique contribution stands with the comparative assessment of opinions offered by employees, employers and job seekers and its focus on the London Economic Region.

EMOWPDB thanks all individuals and regional organizations involved in the community conversations for their insightful contributions.

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Guidance and expertise kindly provided by Debra Mountenay - Executive Director of EMOWPD) and Jessica Gowers – Communications Manager of EMOWPDB.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The current document describes the exploratory study of the opinions of workers, employers and job seekers regarding remote work in the London Economic Region. The study focuses on six areas of investigations associated with remote work: benefits, costs, performance, support, management, and job security. Data was collected using self administered web survey approach. A combination of convenience and web crowding sampling was used by the study. Among the unique contributions of the study are the comparative perspectives given by the opinions of three main participant groups in the labour market: employees, employers and job seekers. Moreover, the study focuses on the London Economic Region labour market, consequently attempting to capture the unique specificities of the remote work in this regional market. Sometimes investigations targeting larger geographies hide the unique features of smaller geographies in their averages.

Among the most significant findings of the study are:

- There is a split across the three groups regarding the perceived benefits and costs. While employees and job seekers shared some of the most likely felt benefits such as flexibility, reduced risk of contracting COVID, reduced commuting expenses and increased focus on job done, employers favoured health and safety of their employees, increased productivity and reorganizing work. There was no alignment across the costs perceived by the three groups. Employees most frequently selected working more, diminished communication, and mental health deterioration as perceived costs. Most of the employers felt that reduced productivity, increased operational expenses, loss of business and PPE were the costs of working remotely. Finally, job seekers expected that increased hardware and software costs, home office expenses, and diminished communication will affect them when they work remotely.
- Divergent preferences were seen between employees and employers regarding remote working. Large percentages of workers preferred to work hybrid or fully remotely, whereas large percentages of employers favoured hybrid work or fully returning to on-site work. The common ground between employees and employers is the hybrid arrangement, picked by a sizeable proportion of workers and employers. Large proportions of employees and employers favouring this arrangement chose 2-3 days of remote working combined with 3-2 days of working on-site.

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- Furthermore, there was a split in opinions between employees and employers regarding productivity. A majority of employees perceived themselves being more productive while working remotely or at least being as productive as working in the office. In contrast a majority of employers perceived their remote workers as being as productive as they were when working on-site or being less productive. Some temporal effects have been observed regarding confidence in being more productive expressed by employees. Almost all job seekers (89%) were convinced that they can effectively do their remote work.
- Employees indicated that technology (emulating face-to-face environment), permanency and duration of the remote work, and people's preference for remote work affected their productivity.
- All three groups, the employees, employers and job seekers thought that the assessment of remote work productivity should be multi-dimensional (output, quality, and time). However, employees and job seekers appear more focused on the quality of work criterium whereas employers were more drawn to output. However, assessing productivity of remote workers remains a very complex task that needs industry and occupational considerations.
- Both regional employees and employers acknowledged the unprecedented support they received and provided respectively during the pandemic. A large majority of remote workers (85%) specified that they "received the expected support from their employer to achieve their full potential while working remotely," Job seekers aligned their support expectations with employees and employers. Employees received equipment and software from their employers, talked one-on-one with their managers at least once per week, or engaged in team building activities. In the same time employers noted that they bought teleconferencing subscriptions for their remote workers, financed immediate needs of equipment and technology, and communicated clearly their expectations from remote workers. The remote work job seekers expected to receive clear instructions about performance expectations, receive performance equipment and software, and have at least once per week one-on-one meetings with management.
- Remote workers and job seekers somewhat agree about the expected incentives needed to perform at full potential. The remote workers most likely expect training and personal development, team building activities or career advancement to motivate them perform daily at their full potential, while wannabe remote workers expect training and personal development, financial rewards, or career advancement to energize them throughout most days.

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- The top three choices for training and professional development for remote employees and wannabe remote workers were aligned, but in a different order. These choices were associated with efficiently use of telecommunication software, employee wellness, and communication.
- Somewhat troubling, only one in three employers admitted changing their management style to fit closer the remote work.
- The top three challenging areas associated with remote work recognized by employers were properly motivating employees, on boarding new employees and effectively training employees.
- Almost a half of the employers considered redesigning jobs and activities to better fit the remote work arrangement. In significantly smaller proportions, around 1 in 4 employers considered either building hoteling stations for full and hybrid remote workers or changing the performance assessment metrics for the remote workers.
- Numerous versions of team building activities were practiced by employers in the London Economic Region.
- Almost all remote workers (90%) felt that remote work is a viable long-term alternative to the previous work arrangements

All across the report there are numerous implications of the findings on job, office and organizational design, as well as on the management of the remote workforce.

The limitations of the study are tied to the potential biases introduced by convenience sampling and web crowding data collection.

