The lure of remote working and working from home is seeing an increasing number of office based workers seeking more flexible working patterns.

In May 2016, The Cartridge People commissioned a study of 1096 UK workers, made up of both home workers and office workers, to identify the scale of home working in the UK, and discover how it effects staff productivity, effectiveness, wellbeing and overall morale – to assess the real impact it can have.

We have also examined whether workers really do prefer home working to working from an office, and what employers who are not able to offer this level of flexibility can do to ensure on-premises working environments are not only satisfactory, but enjoyable.

Andrew Davies, Cartridge People
Executive Summary

- 30.5% of workers currently work from home every day
- 14% of workers work from home once per week
- 38% of workers admit they work from home outside of normal office hours
- 22% of workers work from home in the evenings
- 18% of workers work from home at the weekend
- The UK cities with the highest numbers of home workers are London, Birmingham, Southampton, Manchester, Nottingham, Bristol, Leeds, Norwich, Newcastle and Plymouth
- 60% of workers feel happier when working from home
- 57% of workers say they manage to get much more work completed when working from home in comparison to working to the office
- Just 5% report being less productive when working from home
- Only a minority of 12% of workers believe they are more easily distracted when they work from home, in comparison to working in an office
- 86% of home workers ‘never’ feel lonely when working from home and only 1% report ‘always’ or 13% ‘often’ feeling this way
- 10% of home workers feel they attend more social occasions as a result of working from home
- 26% of home workers say home working allows them to work around their family and friends
Executive Summary

- Home workers are more likely to like their working environments – with 96% claiming to do so, compared with 87% of those who are based at their employer’s premises.
- 84% of workers will work from home during illness, instead of taking time off to recover.
- 29% will use home working to stay in touch with their employers and colleagues while they are ill – completing urgent pieces of work and checking emails.
- Home workers take fewer sick days than those based in their employer’s environment, taking an average of 2.4 days as sick leave per year, compared with 2.6 days.
- 59% of workers report feeling happier when working from home – compared with 18% who confess they prefer to work in an office environment.
- The top 10 aspects workers said they would like to see in their ‘ideal’ working environment were as follows: windows that open (49%), separate eating areas (44%), plants and flowers (40%), chill out zones (37%), fully working kitchens (29%), standing desks/workspaces (10.3%), flexible hot desk spaces (10.1%), a social media friendly environment (8.3%), playground/park equipment e.g. slides, water features, green spaces (8.2%) and sleeping pods/spaces (7.7%).
Home working is becoming increasingly common, as businesses feel more pressured to provide benefits in order to convince workers to stay in the long term, and remote working technologies make working from outside of company premises achievable, home working is becoming a reality for huge scores of workers and employers.

Indeed, a report by Virgin Media Business estimated that the next decade will see more than half of employees (60%) working from home.

The data shows that this prediction would see the number of workers doing so almost double – our research found that 30.5% of UK workers currently work from home every day, and 14% even do so once per week.

And the current scale of home working in the UK increases even more when it is considered that 38% of workers admit they work from home outside of normal office hours, 22% work from home in the evenings, and 18% at the weekend.
Which UK cities have the highest proportion of home workers?

The data has revealed something of a North-South divide in the culture of home working in the UK.

Manchester was the only Northern city to make the list of the top five cities with the highest numbers of home workers.

And Newcastle and Leeds were the only other Northern cities to make the entire top 10.

1. London 
2. Birmingham 
3. Southampton 
4. Manchester 
5. Nottingham 
6. Bristol 
7. Leeds 
8. Norwich 
9. Newcastle 
10. Plymouth
Happiness in the workplace can have a significant effect on productivity. If an employee is unhappy or stressed by factors such as their commute to work, working environment or even external personal issues this can have a negative affect on productivity.

Allowing workers to work remotely or even work flexible hours can have a positive effect on happiness, and as a result, their productivity. The research found that the majority – 60% - of workers feel happier when working from home. But not only this – the majority feel that they are more productive, with 57% saying they manage to get much more work completed when working from home in comparison to working to the office.

Indeed, the Happiness Advantage by Shawn Anchor found that the brain works significantly better when an individual is feeling positive – suggesting that there is more than just an accidental link between home workers feeling happier and more productive.

Just 5% report being less productive when working from home, and only a minority of 12% of workers believe they are more easily distracted when doing so.
Home working and productivity

Thinking about your workload when working from home, tick all that apply:

- I am less productive when working from home
- I am more productive when working in the office
- I get easily distracted when working from home
- I manage to get much more work completed when working from home
Working from home vs. working from the office

Whether it is a company premises or a home office, both working environments offer pros and cons. For example, many office workers may find working in an office too distracting, they may feel bothered by office politics, or even stressed out due to their commute.

And on the other hand, working from home is often perceived as lonely, as workers separated from office networks spend hours in the isolation of their own homes - or even find it hard to focus and avoid distractions.

The latter is also a particular consideration for employers, when deciding whether or not to authorise individuals working from home. So how true are these perceptions of home working, in reality?

The data tells us it is not very – the vast majority of home workers (86%) said they ‘never’ feel lonely when working from home. Indeed, only 1% report ‘always’ or 13% ‘often’ feeling this way when they work remotely.

In fact - 1 in 10 (10%) actually feel they are able to socialise more as a result of home working - attending more social occasions, as a result of the flexibility it affords them And more than 1 in 4 (26%) say home working allows them to work around their family and friends – suggesting it is not as lonely a picture as it necessarily seems.

Furthermore, the data shows that home workers are more likely to like their working environments – with 96% claiming to do so, compared with 87% of office workers – suggesting that, where happiness is concerned, home workers win out.
How do you feel about working from home?

- 86% I never feel lonely when working from home
- 13% I often feel lonely when working from home
- 1% I always feel lonely when working from home
Research by PricewaterhouseCoopers estimates that sick leave costs employers £29 billion each year - so when workers are feeling under the weather, it makes sense for employers to offer them the opportunity to work from home before illness has fully set in and incapacitated them.

But even then, once workers are struck down with illness, many workers use home working as a solution – a significant majority (84%) will work from home during illness, instead of taking time off to recover.

And almost 1 in 3 (29%) will use home working to stay in touch with their employers and colleagues while they are ill – completing urgent pieces of work and checking emails.
Health and home working

What are your reasons for working from home, or not

- 28.80%: I work from home when unwell but only complete urgent tasks and keep a check on my emails
- 16.40%: I do not work from home when unwell, I would take the time off to fully recover
- 9.80%: I do not work from home but will be available for any work related crisis or urgent queries from clients/colleagues
Health and home working vs. workplace working

Workplaces are renowned as hotbeds of germs – with air conditioning and high volumes of people spreading illness across the workforce.

The assumption would be, therefore, that home workers tend to be healthier than those who work on their premises – and as such, this should be taken into account by employers assessing whether or not to grant home working rights to staff requesting them.

In order to do so, however, it is vital to consider the facts, rather than the hearsay.

The data tells us that home workers are also more healthy than their office-based counterparts, taking an average of 2.4 days as sick leave per year, compared with the 2.6 days their on-premises counterparts go off ill.
As we’ve seen, thanks to an increasingly competitive jobs market and new developments in remote working technologies making working outside of the workplace more accessible, the trend for home working is unlikely to go away any time soon.

The data found that the majority of workers report feeling happier when working from home – compared with just 1 in 5 (18%) who confess they prefer to work from their employer’s property, suggesting that home working is the preferred option for many employees.

But having half of the workforce based outside of the workplace isn’t always practical, so how can bosses ensure that the on-site working environment is appealing enough, to ensure there continues to be a good proportion of the workforce based on the premises?
Workers were asked about the aspects of working environments which they considered essential.

Thankfully, for many employers, workers were most concerned with simple, achievable enhancements to their working environment, and were less interested in the flashier, more creative aspects:

- Windows that open – 49%
- Separate eating areas – 44%
- Plans and flowers – 40%
- Chill out zones – 37%
- Fully working kitchens – 29%
- Standing desks/workspaces – 10.3%
- Flexible hot desk spaces – 10.1%
- Social media friendly environment (e.g. selfie booths) – 8.3%
- Playground/park equipment – e.g. slides, water features – 8.2%
- Sleeping pods/spaces – 7.7%
Conclusion

The research has highlighted that the scale of home working in the UK is a significant portion of the workforce – and there is data to suggest that this is going to significantly increase in the next decade.

Examining how this effects wellbeing, morale and effectiveness of those working from home identified that many are not only less likely to take sick days, but also happier in their working environments, more productive and more likely to work through illness – suggesting that, as this becomes more commonplace, employers could do worse than to open up this more flexible working arrangement to a wider proportion of the workforce.

Those employers looking to tempt more workers into being based from the workplace, or for whom offering home working is not possible, can ensure offices or places of work are appealing to staff by introducing simple environmental enhancements, such as fully functioning kitchens, separate eating areas and chill out zones – with flashier features being far less key.
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