

Post-Pandemic Future: Adopting a Work-from-Home Model

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With the global spread of COVID-19, a comprehensive transformation in work patterns emerged worldwide to halt the spread of the virus, acting as a catalyst for new forms of work and forcing many institutions to adopt work-from-home (WFH) schemes. This brief focuses on presenting public attitudes toward work-from-home models in Qatar and investigating their features for future policy interventions to improve labor-market conditions and maintain family–work balance.

The International Labor Organization defines work-from-home (WFH) or telework as the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for work conducted away from employer's premises¹. Telework has been widely integrated into urban areas with growing economies, high human development status, and mainstream organizational arrangements². As a result, many governments have invested in augmented broadband infrastructure, including business and digital applications that provide mobile and internet-ready home connectivity in WFH settings³.

Understanding teleworking facilitators and constraints is crucial to developing policies for long-term labor markets. Telecommuting is a great way for employees to better control their work schedules and family obligations and, in turn, to increase job satisfaction and productive organizational outcomes. The WFH model has also challenged pre-COVID-19 norms concerning employees' work–family resilience, well-being, mental health, reduced job satisfaction, negative impacts on interpersonal relationships with colleagues, and decreased work performance due to conflicts between job

roles and family responsibilities⁴. Prior empirical research on telework arrangements and their impact on Qatar's organizations, employees, and societies is scant. Therefore, it is essential to examine post-lockdown situations to measure the impact of telework on individual, familial, cultural, societal, and organizational contexts.

To address this gap, the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) surveyed 1,496 Qatari citizens and white-collar expatriate residents via a nationally representative telephone survey exploring employees' remote work experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, and their interest in future remote work.

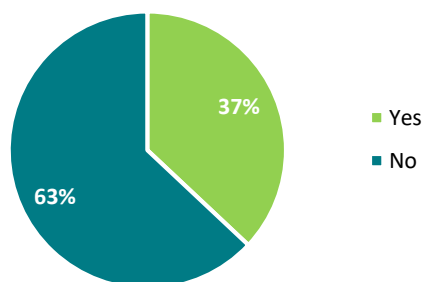
Teleworking during the Pandemic

In Qatar, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in February 2020, and immediate measures were taken to prepare for the pandemic, as recommended by the World Health Organization. These measures included preparing residential buildings for quarantine, avoiding unnecessary travel and social gatherings, and implementing

WFH for specific periods to minimize the spread of the virus.

In this study, participants were asked whether they worked from home at any point during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results showed that 37% of respondents practiced WFH during the pandemic, compared to 63% who did not. The transition from office to remote work was easy for most participants, with remote work allowing them to remain both productive and autonomous.

Figure 1. Proportion of Respondents Teleworking during the COVID-19 Pandemic



Attitudes toward Job Performance and Motivations while Teleworking

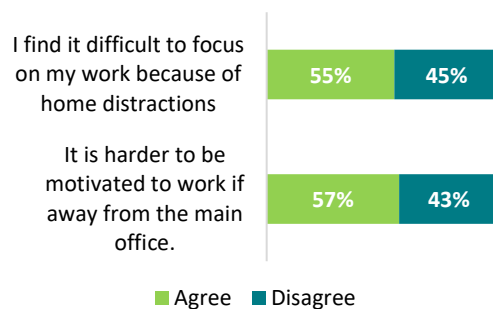
To determine employees' attitudes toward their job performance, productivity levels, and motivation while working from home during the pandemic, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with several WFH statements.

Teleworking and Work Motivation

The findings showed that remote working arrangements had a negative impact on employee motivation. 57% of

respondents reported finding it harder to stay motivated while working away from the main office. In addition, 55% of respondents agreed that they found it difficult to focus on their work because of home distractions. However, 75% of respondents with children agreed that WFH enabled them to take better care of their children. Additionally, 76% of respondents reported saving money during teleworking due to decreased expenses on petrol, clothing, etc., which might motivate them to work from home.

Figure 2. Teleworking and Work Motivation



Teleworking and Job Performance

Telecommuters can modify and customize their work environments, thereby increasing job performance. Working remotely also reduces some of the costs and time associated with commuting to an office, which can positively impact job performance.

On one hand, respondents reported several benefits from teleworking, including improved work-life balance, increased productivity, and financial benefits. The results indicate that employees' work performance was positively influenced by flexible job arrangements. Respondents reported

that working from home allowed them to better manage their time (71%) and be more productive due to the absence of work-related distractions (64%).

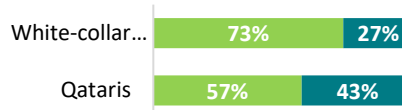
On the other hand, working away from the main office hindered employees' ability to take initiative at work, as 61% of respondents reported a reduction in their ability to take initiative. However, among those 61% respondents, more males (45%) agreed with the idea that working from home negatively affects initiative compared to females (16%). The study findings show that decreased motivation does not always mean decreased productivity.

Teleworking and Social Interaction

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement: "I felt socially isolated from my co-workers in the workplace." Among the white-collar expats, 73% agreed with the statement, while among Qatari employees, 57% agreed that they experienced social isolation from co-workers. As expats living alone or not with extended family, higher levels of social isolation may have been experienced. Similarly, when asked about a lack of professional interaction in the workplace, among the white-collar expats, 78% felt that they missed the social interactions at work, while 65% of Qatari employees expressed that they missed social interactions.

Figure 3: Teleworking and Social Interaction

"I felt socially isolated from my co-workers at the workplace"

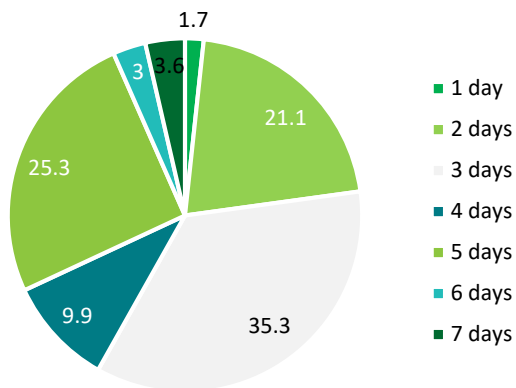


Post-Pandemic: Remote Working Preferences

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on employees and employers' work perspectives, which persisted even after the end of the pandemic. The study's findings showed that respondents viewed teleworking as beneficial. As a result, they strongly disagreed with the statement, "I do not see any advantages to teleworking." Many employees preferred their organizations to adopt more flexible hybrid virtual-working models, allowing them to alternate between working on premises and working remotely.

The respondents were asked about their interest in continuing WFH practices in the future and their ideal number of days per week for working from home. The results showed that about 51% of the surveyed employees were interested in a WFH option post-pandemic. The majority of respondents preferred an average of three days per week to work from home in the future.

Figure 4: Preferred Number of Days per Week to Work from Home



The results indicate a general intention among employees to embrace hybrid virtual work arrangements going forward, which may lead to the highest levels of work motivation, productivity, work–life balance, and childcare. This study also acknowledges that not all jobs are conducive to adopting a teleworking model. The following policy recommendations offer insights for policymakers considering a hybrid teleworking model.

References

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Policy Recommendations

1. Issue teleworking strategies to promote flexible working arrangements, achieve work–life balance, and encourage female participation in the workplace.
2. State clear guidelines and eligibility criteria for industries and employees to partake in a teleworking model, including when and how often an employee may telework.
3. Invest in secure communication channels and storage systems to avoid data leaks.
4. Invest in strong ICT infrastructure and new technologies to ensure steady access to teleworking platforms and smooth communication.
5. Ensure healthy socialization by providing support and face-to-face interactions for employees working outside the office to ensure that they do not feel isolated from the rest of the team.