



# THE MOVE TO DISTANCE WORKING



## WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED ABOUT WORKING FROM HOME IN THE PANDEMIC

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, and in a state of haste, many employers around the country (and in fact the world) quickly transitioned their workforce to 'Working from Home'. This allowed business continuity during the crisis and ensured the protection of employees from the virus, in line with Federal and State Governments' directions.

While initially, the very idea of transitioning an entire business (in a matter of weeks) to a remote model seemed just plain crazy, it has, in fact, been rather life changing for employers and employees alike. A recent Australian survey commissioned by the NBN identified that **81%** of people say the experience of working from home has had a **positive impact** on the way they think about work/life flexibility and how they manage it.

Quite frankly, COVID-19 has changed the way employees view work. For many, who had never worked from home before, they have been able to view their working life through a very different lens and they like what they see. For many it has provided a glimpse of life without long commutes (and the associated costs), greater flexibility (hanging out washing during a lunch break) and a realisation that their job, that has always been done from a 'workplace', can just as effectively be done from home.

On the flipside, many businesses have identified some real benefits with having employees working from home. A collation of survey results by Forbes magazine (which included research by Gallup, Harvard University, Global Workplace Analytics, and Stanford University), identified that allowing workplace flexibility positively impacted the business bottom line in 5 key areas: **Productivity, Performance, Engagement, Retention and Profitability.**



The survey showed that remote workers are 35%-40% more productive than their office-based colleagues and had an output increase of at least 4.4%. It also showed employees produce 40% fewer quality issues, absenteeism is 41% lower in remote employees and there is a 12% reduction in turnover.

Importantly, the research highlights that organisations with a remote workforce had either 21% higher profitability or they saved an average of \$11,000 (USD) per year per part-time employee.



The research is compelling and should incite some curiosity around business requirements and whether working from home post COVID-19 is worth some serious consideration.

Even if you aren't entertaining the thought of having your business move to a more remote model, the NBN research suggests your employees are thinking otherwise. The survey showed that a staggering 67% of people expect to work from home more after the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

What does this mean? Be prepared to be approached by your employees with compelling proposals for working from home post the pandemic.





Whether you are open to these requests or not, at the end of the day, the decision of whether an employee can work from home (longer term) is up to the employer. Do keep in mind that there are certain requests (for Flexible Working Arrangements) that form part of the National Employment Standards and these requests can only be refused on ‘reasonable business grounds’. Ensure you are across these requirements and get necessary advice when you need it.

In the space of a few months, the world has significantly evolved. It has given many of us ‘food for thought’ and allowed us to operate in a way that we have never even considered pre-COVID-19. Research suggests that there are some significant changes ahead for businesses.

In the next article, we will examine **how to deal with employees refusing to return to the physical workplace.**

For any help navigating this landscape or general HR advice, please book a [complimentary Discovery Session](#) with one of our Experts

