

The largest working from home experiment

Many people have been asked, where possible, to work from home as a means of containing Covid-19. This is resulting in a working-from-home experiment of significant scale



Working from home is nothing new

But the nature of how people work has been changing for a long time. Hot desking has replaced personal desks in many cases, mobiles have superseded the traditional desk phone, remote personal assistants manage multiple executives in different countries, video conferencing enables collaboration among disparate teams and chat platforms provide alternative ways of sharing information.

It's not only office-type environments where these changes have been happening. Universities and educational facilities provide online learning materials that can, in some cases negate any need for students to attend a physical classroom. In the medical world, remote access is increasingly relevant and is of particular benefit where, as we're seeing today, reducing the spread of Covid-19 means limiting personal contact. Much of how people access financial services is now online as well, meaning these services can also be supplied remotely, by humans or even bots.

Tech driven

Much of these changes to the ways we work are underpinned by technology. We are now at a point where remote activity is not only possible but can provide a service or output that is close to, if not identical to what would be produced if done so in person.

And businesses have an interest in supporting their employees to work from home. If working from home does end up working out long-term, organisations stand to save money on space and furniture, drive positive environmental impact through reduced commuter travel and boost productivity through attracting diverse teams.

But we don't all do it

So, working from home is possible and potentially beneficial for a range of professions and has been for some time. But the presence of Covid-19 is now quickly accelerating the adoption of new practices.

This hadn't already happened for a number of key reasons. It's difficult to change a habit, particularly if there is no clear reason for doing so. If output is similar when working at work or at home, there is no obvious benefit to starting to work from home long-term. There is also no urgency, meaning people could always change later, prolonging adoption.

Until now, some have made the switch based on anticipated benefits though. Some studies suggest working from home boosts productivity. Quieter home environments offer fewer interruptions and distractions and time saved not commuting. Working from home has also been shown to increase productivity, employee satisfaction and overall work-life balance. In one [study](#), employees who didn't come into the office over nine months were also less likely to quit or to take sick days.

We are social creatures despite commuting hell

But different ways of working mean changing our social habits, and this is likely a deterrent for some, particularly if considering the practice long-term. Working from home is different from working in an office for many reasons. But a key one is having opportunities to interact with colleagues, see people face-to-face and share experiences in person. We are naturally social creatures, and this is likely a big reason for why people brave the uncomfortable commute each morning. To chat to their mates.

Commutes are rarely enjoyable, but they are done every single day. Astoundingly, one [study](#) found that couples in which one partner commutes for longer than 45 minutes are 40 percent likelier to divorce. The researchers could not explain why, but another [study](#) finds that mood is lower during the commute than other daily activities and stress can be induced by congestion, crowding and unpredictability. Satisfaction also decreases with duration of commute.

Once we have braved the commute, socialising is not just for fun. Informal knowledge works are essential in a range of professions, they provide opportunities but require maintenance. And for many, their profession plays an important role in their identity, with networks key to their life outside of what strictly constitutes as 'work'.

Different roles require different levels of interaction or socialisation, meaning that what role

someone has can reflect how likely they are to enjoy working from home or find it beneficial. For example, one [study](#) found that the beliefs, attitudes and quality of social interactions of those working from home are strongly associated with productivity at home. This indicates it will suit some more than others. Indeed, in the previously mentioned 9-month [study](#), after the experiment, some employees chose to return to office-based work because they liked the social aspects of work. This was also the reason many employees didn't opt into the study in the first place. Those who returned had decided working remotely didn't work for them. And they actually performed better once they were back in the office.

Working remotely [requires](#) adjusted management styles, clearly defines roles and responsibilities, manageable (usually shorter) delivery timeframes, trust and technology that supports collaboration and productivity. Satisfaction with how [performance](#) while working from home is tracked and the technical and emotional support offered are also important. Making these types of changes can feel risky which is also why we haven't all already been doing it.

Working from home has challenges

And it's not all rosy productivity outside of the office. The link between work and home-life can get blurred when working from home, potentially increasing stress levels. At home, we also arguably have a different type of accountability and varying routine. While one [study](#) found little impact of interruption based on the home environment, we don't have a lot of evidence of the impacts of working from home over extended periods, such as anticipated will be required to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

And it suits some activities more than others. One study suggests that productivity when working from home is higher for 'robotic' work, while [another](#) indicates that the effects may be positive for 'creative' tasks, but less so for 'dull' activities. Indeed, the characteristics of a position and the company have been found to affect the satisfaction of employees working from home more than how they work, or the features in their environment.

Wide scale experiment

We don't currently know how this large-scale working-from-home experiment will impact productivity and wellbeing in the long-term, particularly across a broad suite of roles. While working from home is not something new, an aversion to unnecessary or uncertain change, a preference for social engagement and the fact that some things are simply better done in person mean that only a few have trialled working remotely over extended periods.

But now that we have to, if something positive is to come from this, it is an opportunity to measure the impact of workplace flexibility at a much bigger scale.

Author

Amrita Naik Nimbalkar

Junior Economist, Global Macro

amrita.naik.nimbalkar@ing.com

Mateusz Sutowicz

Senior Economist, Poland

mateusz.sutowicz@ing.pl

Alissa Lefebvre

Economist

alissa.lefebvre@ing.com

Deepali Bhargava

Regional Head of Research, Asia-Pacific

Deepali.Bhargava@ing.com

Ruben Dewitte

Economist

+32495364780

ruben.dewitte@ing.com

Kinga Havasi

Economic research trainee

kinga.havasi@ing.com

Marten van Garderen

Consumer Economist, Netherlands

marten.van.garderen@ing.com

David Havrlant

Chief Economist, Czech Republic

420 770 321 486

david.havrlant@ing.com

Sander Burgers

Senior Economist, Dutch Housing

sander.burgers@ing.com

Lynn Song

Chief Economist, Greater China

lynn.song@asia.ing.com

Michiel Tukker

Senior European Rates Strategist

michiel.tukker@ing.com

Michal Rubaszek

Senior Economist, Poland

michal.rubaszek@ing.pl

This is a test author

Stefan Posea

Economist, Romania
tiberiu-stefan.posea@ing.com

Marine Leleux
Sector Strategist, Financials
marine.leleux2@ing.com

Jesse Norcross
Senior Sector Strategist, Real Estate
jesse.norcross@ing.com

Teise Stellema
Research Assistant, Energy Transition
teise.stellema@ing.com

Diederik Stadig
Sector Economist, TMT & Healthcare
diederik.stadig@ing.com

Diogo Gouveia
Sector Economist
diogo.duarte.vieira.de.gouveia@ing.com

Marine Leleux
Sector Strategist, Financials
marine.leleux2@ing.com

Ewa Manthey
Commodities Strategist
ewa.manthey@ing.com

ING Analysts

James Wilson
EM Sovereign Strategist
James.wilson@ing.com

Sophie Smith
Digital Editor
sophie.smith@ing.com

Frantisek Taborsky
EMEA FX & FI Strategist
frantisek.taborsky@ing.com

Adam Antoniak
Senior Economist, Poland

adam.antoniak@ing.pl

Min Joo Kang

Senior Economist, South Korea and Japan

min.joo.kang@asia.ing.com

Coco Zhang

ESG Research

coco.zhang@ing.com

Jan Frederik Slijkerman

Senior Sector Strategist, TMT

jan.frederik.slijkerman@ing.com

Katinka Jongkind

Senior Economist, Services and Leisure

Katinka.Jongkind@ing.com

Marina Le Blanc

Sector Strategist, Financials

Marina.Le.Blanc@ing.com

Samuel Abettan

Junior Economist

samuel.abettan@ing.com

Franziska Biehl

Senior Economist, Germany

Franziska.Marie.Biehl@ing.de

Rebecca Byrne

Senior Editor and Supervisory Analyst

rebecca.byrne@ing.com

Mirjam Bani

Sector Economist, Commercial Real Estate & Public Sector (Netherlands)

mirjam.bani@ing.com

Timothy Rahill

Credit Strategist

timothy.rahill@ing.com

Leszek Kasek

Senior Economist, Poland

leszek.kasek@ing.pl

Oleksiy Soroka, CFA

Senior High Yield Credit Strategist

oleksiy.soroka@ing.com

Antoine Bouvet

Head of European Rates Strategy

antoine.bouvet@ing.com

Jeroen van den Broek

Global Head of Sector Research

jeroen.van.den.broek@ing.com

Edse Dantuma

Senior Sector Economist, Industry and Healthcare

edse.dantuma@ing.com

Francesco Pesole

FX Strategist

francesco.pesole@ing.com

Rico Luman

Senior Sector Economist, Transport and Logistics

Rico.Luman@ing.com

Jurjen Witteveen

Sector Economist

jurjen.witteveen@ing.com

Dmitry Dolgin

Chief Economist, CIS

dmitry.dolgin@ing.de

Nicholas Mapa

Senior Economist, Philippines

nicholas.antonio.mapa@asia.ing.com

Egor Fedorov

Senior Credit Analyst

egor.fedorov@ing.com

Sebastian Franke

Consumer Economist

sebastian.franke@ing.de

Gerben Hieminga

Senior Sector Economist, Energy

gerben.hieminga@ing.com

Nadège Tillier

Head of Corporates Sector Strategy

nadege.tillier@ing.com

Charlotte de Montpellier

Senior Economist, France and Switzerland

charlotte.de.montpellier@ing.com

Laura Straeter

Behavioural Scientist

+31(0)611172684

laura.Straeter@ing.com

Valentin Tataru

Chief Economist, Romania

valentin.tataru@ing.com

James Smith

Developed Markets Economist, UK

james.smith@ing.com

Suvi Platerink Kosonen

Senior Sector Strategist, Financials

suvi.platerink-kosonen@ing.com

Thijs Geijer

Senior Sector Economist, Food & Agri

thijs.geijer@ing.com

Maurice van Sante

Senior Economist Construction & Team Lead Sectors

maurice.van.sante@ing.com

Marcel Klok

Senior Economist, Netherlands

marcel.klok@ing.com

Piotr Poplawski

Senior Economist, Poland

piotr.poplawski@ing.pl

Paolo Pizzoli

Senior Economist, Italy, Greece

paolo.pizzoli@ing.com

Marieke Blom

Chief Economist and Global Head of Research

marieke.blom@ing.com

Raoul Leering

Senior Macro Economist

raoul.leering@ing.com

Maarten Leen

Head of Global IFRS9 ME Scenarios

maarten.leen@ing.com

Maureen Schuller

Head of Financials Sector Strategy

Maureen.Schuller@ing.com

Warren Patterson

Head of Commodities Strategy

Warren.Patterson@asia.ing.com

Rafal Benecki

Chief Economist, Poland

rafal.benecki@ing.pl

Philippe Ledent

Senior Economist, Belgium, Luxembourg

philippe.ledent@ing.com

Peter Virovacz

Senior Economist, Hungary

peter.virovacz@ing.com

Inga Fechner

Senior Economist, Germany, Global Trade

inga.fechner@ing.de

Dimitry Fleming

Senior Data Analyst, Netherlands

Dimitry.Fleming@ing.com

Ciprian Dascalu

Chief Economist, Romania

+40 31 406 8990

ciprian.dascalu@ing.com

Muhammet Mercan

Chief Economist, Turkey

muhammet.mercan@ingbank.com.tr

Iris Pang

Chief Economist, Greater China

iris.pang@asia.ing.com

Sophie Freeman

Writer, Group Research

+44 20 7767 6209

Sophie.Freeman@uk.ing.com

Padhraic Garvey, CFA

Regional Head of Research, Americas

padhraic.garvey@ing.com

James Knightley

Chief International Economist, US

james.knightley@ing.com

Tim Condon

Asia Chief Economist

+65 6232-6020

Martin van Vliet

Senior Interest Rate Strategist

+31 20 563 8801

martin.van.vliet@ing.com

Karol Pogorzelski

Senior Economist, Poland

Karol.Pogorzelski@ing.pl

Carsten Brzeski

Global Head of Macro

carsten.brzeski@ing.de

Viraj Patel

Foreign Exchange Strategist

+44 20 7767 6405

viraj.patel@ing.com

Owen Thomas

Global Head of Editorial Content

+44 (0) 207 767 5331

owen.thomas@ing.com

Bert Colijn

Chief Economist, Netherlands

bert.colijn@ing.com

Peter Vanden Houte

Chief Economist, Belgium, Luxembourg, Eurozone

peter.vandenhoute@ing.com

Benjamin Schroeder

Senior Rates Strategist

benjamin.schroeder@ing.com

Chris Turner

Global Head of Markets and Regional Head of Research for UK & CEE

chris.turner@ing.com

Gustavo Rangel

Chief Economist, LATAM

+1 646 424 6464

gustavo.rangel@ing.com

Carlo Cocuzzo

Economist, Digital Finance

+44 20 7767 5306

carlo.cocuzzo@ing.com