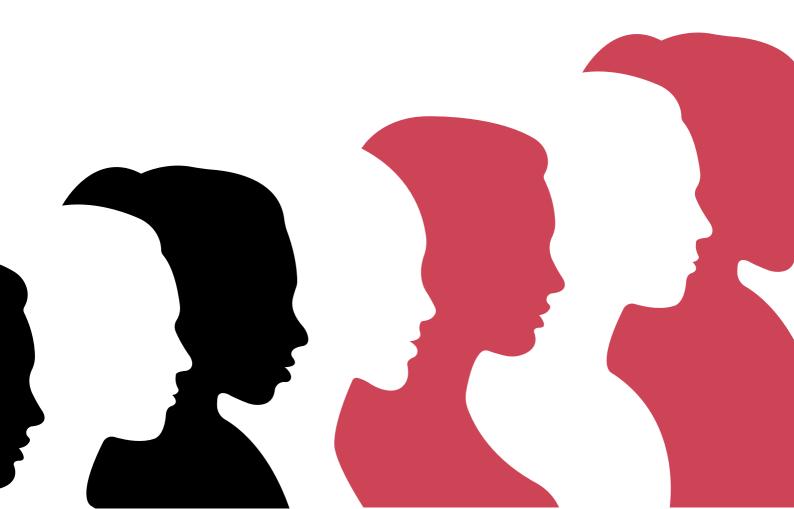# Veridata Insights

Working from Home provides women more opportunity for flexibility, mental wellness, and inclusion—or does it?

DECODING THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF TODAY'S WORKPLACE

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Redefining the Modern Workplace: The Post-COVID Dilemma for Women

Women Speak

Covid carved a new line in the workplace. Before Covid, we followed the norms and patterns in existence for decades. We drove to our place of business and worked in an office or cubicle during a designated time frame. We went to a conference room for meetings—and sometimes stayed there for hours. We frequented conference rooms for extended meetings, occasionally spending several hours in them. In order to meet with clients or make introductions to potential prospects, we would often take flights and stay at hotels.

Covid Changed Everything

Covid taught us to pivot. Covid forced us to utilize modern technology to continue to conduct business, in a world where we could no longer go into places of business or meet with our colleagues, where travel was taboo. Covid introduced a whole new set of norms, and tools.

Now we are in a post-Covid world, and one question arises among all others – do we go back, or do we move forward? Do we go back to the way things were, to the office and the meetings and the travel? Or do we move forward, holding onto our new tools and processes, and create a new norm, one that offers the enhanced flexibility and productivity, while also providing a stronger work-life balance? Does such a utopia even exist —can it?

This is the question Veridata Insights took to women across the country in late July. Through three focus groups representing a full spectrum of industries, experiences, and generations, we explored the modern workplace, with the goal of answering one provocative question -- Working from Home provides women more opportunity for flexibility, mental wellness, and inclusion—or does it?

Women and the Modern Workplace: Embracing Change, Challenging Norms

And The Answers Were Resounding!

- Working from home is here to stay– women are not going back to the way the workplace used to be

- The sky is the limit—opportunities and flexibility that once populated wish lists are now a reality

- Achieving a work-life balance is now more than just a catch phrase or pipe dream

- Women are experiencing a new kind of healthy

- Interpersonal relationships are more important than ever, with an enhanced focus on communication and visibility.

But It's Not All Sunshine And Roses

- Women are still battling misogyny and encountering glass ceilings

- A new kind of anxiety has settled in, largely fueled by The Imposter Syndrome

- Too often, the days never seem to end

- Generational cohort makes a difference—and so does personality type

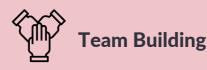# Unlocking Success in the Remote Work Era:
Key Factors and Learnings

Success Hinges On 3 Key Factors

Communication

Clearly defined roles and expectations

Team Building

Learnings

- The shift to remote work has had a complex impact, with both positive adaptations and serious challenges.

- There's a need for organizations to address communication, workload, home-office integration, and the fostering of culture in a remote setting.

- Companies must also consider robust solutions to technical difficulties and ensure that they are using the right tools to support remote work effectively.

- Finally, the ongoing conversation about returning to the office vs. continuing remote work should take these multifaceted experiences into account.

Voices of Women in the Modern Workplace: In-Depth Insights and Challenges

Detailed Findings

Women opened up about their experiences in the modern workplace, articulating how their day-to-day work lives have changed, and what remains the same.

Key areas of discussion include:

What the Modern Workplace Looks like

Key Drawbacks

The Role of Management

Opportunities

Work-Life Balance

Visibility and Image Building

The Role of Proximity

Relationships with Co-workers

Misogyny & The New (old) Boys Club

Health

Anxiety & The Imposter Syndrome

Transforming Workplaces: Women's Perspectives on the Modern Work Environment

The grass really can be greener!

When asked about the modern workplace, 6 key themes emerged, regardless of age:

Hybrid and Remote Models Dominate:

Most participants' companies followed a hybrid or fully remote working model, with only a few exceptions where the office environment was mandatory or preferred.

Increased Productivity:

Working from home has led to increased productivity, allowing them to focus more on tasks without distractions from the office environment.

Work-Life Balance:

The flexibility of working remotely provides rewards such as better control over schedules, the ability to multi-task, more time spent with families, and more time to engage in self-care.

Reduced Stress:

The majority of women felt the ability to exist outside a glass bowl, in an environment where they have ability to step aside, step outside, take a breath or make a cup of tea with no one watching or judging, significantly reducing their stress level.

Time and Commute Savings:

Women value the significant savings in time, particularly from no longer losing time commuting. This extra time allows for personal pursuits, relaxation, and even adopting animals.

Personal Health and Family Needs:

The ability to work from home is viewed as essential during personal health challenges, illness, or when handling family needs like nursing a baby or aging parent.

Transforming Workplaces: Women's Perspectives on the Modern Work Environment

The grass really can be greener!

While women overwhelmingly value the ability to work from home, a few differences emerged based upon age:
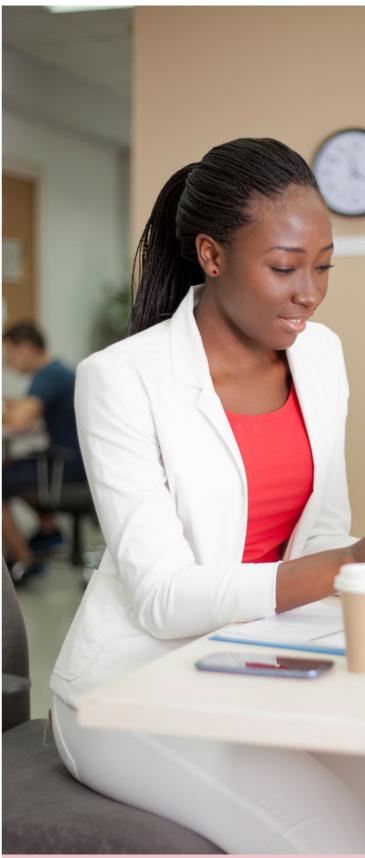
Preference of Work Model:

While women regardless of age embrace the hybrid work model, the preference is more pronounced among Gen Y/Gen Z. Baby Boomers/Gen X focused more on the impact of remote work on different industries and service models.

Engagement with Leadership:

Similarly, Gen Y/Gen Z indicated a stronger concern about being physically present and in proximity to leadership for career advancement. This is likely a function of this age group being earlier in their careers, whereas Baby Boomers/GenX are more established and often are the management younger women seek to be around.

Geographical Differences vs. Personal Experiences:

Older women shared opinions about the relationship between geography and opportunities/challenges, whereas the younger women focused more on personal experiences and how different working environments influence individual opportunities for growth.

Navigating the Modern Workplace: Challenges and Adaptations

And Yet, Challenges Still Exist

Across the board, women expressed key challenges emerging from the modern workplace, highlighting the importance of clear communication, flexibility, and understanding from employers in setting realistic expectations and boundaries

Clarity of Roles and Expectations:

Many women expressed feeling like they were on their own when it comes to figuring out what they're supposed to do and how they're supposed to do it. Instead of "stopping by a colleague's office," the new work model involves constant emails, texts, phone calls, and instant messages, many of which go unanswered, resulting in missed deadlines.

Work Boundaries:

A desire for clearer boundaries and a more regulated work schedule was expressed by the majority of women, emphasizing a universal challenge in managing work-life balance when working remotely. While some have strict cut-off times due to the nature of their work (e.g., teachers, social services), the majority face blurred lines between work and personal life, citing they don't feel comfortable stopping working, which means days can go on forever. A physically separate workplace created a sense of boundary, which is now missing for many.

- Gen Y/Gen Z, in particular, expressed a "catch-22" situation where they faced conflicting demands, such as the need to meet deadlines outside of regular working hours, but were questioned for logging in late.

Transition to Virtual Platforms:

For many, the shift to virtual platforms like Zoom, Google Classroom, Teams, and Slack has been a new experience, requiring adjustments and adaptation.

Management Preferences:

Some women indicated that while they strongly prefer remote work, there's a subtle preference from management for them to work from the office. However, this wasn't a universal experience across the groups.

Consideration of Business Needs and Costs:

Many companies are facing a re-evaluation of the utilization of existing office space, weighing the cost versus the utility.

Navigating the Modern Workplace:
Challenges and Adaptations

And Yet, Challenges Still Exist

Advantages of Office Work:
While women are embracing the remote workplace, most feel that something is being lost when it comes to collaboration and connecting with co-works. Furthermore, women in specific roles, such as education , social work and or manufacturing, pointed out that sometimes there's no substitute for face-to-face interactions.

Quality of Communication:
Across the board, women agree that while communication continues through email, text, and virtual meetings, the quality has declined, resulting in costly misunderstandings and delays.

Workload and Staffing Issues:
Today's women report they are wearing more multiple hats than ever before, resulting in increased workload and uncertainty.

Missed In-Person Interactions:
Despite the communication tools in place, many women miss being able to pop into a colleague's office to ask questions.

Building Relationships:
The shift to virtual communication has altered the way relationships are built, particularly affecting those who relied on in-person interaction with clients.

Home Interruptions and Difficulties:
Regardless of age, women cited interruptions such as children, doorbells, and external noise like mowing, as challenges.

Training Difficulties:
Onboarding new staff remotely, especially without sufficient resources like dual monitors, has been particularly challenging.

Impact on Organizational Culture:
Remote work has affected the culture within organizations, leading to a loss of cohesiveness, empathy and warmth among team members. Some women indicated that the culture within their teams has deteriorated rather than improved, as they missed the "warm feeling" of physical presence.

Balancing Act: Women, Work-Life Integration, and the Impact of COVID-19

Family Matters!

One key element resides at the heart of the work-from-home revolution– the need for work-life balance. Women were passionately outspoken about both the challenges and benefits of remote work, in particular as it relates to the complex balancing act between professional and personal responsibilities.

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Remote Work Flexibility:

On the plus side, working remotely allows women the flexibility of attending to family needs, such as caring for both children and parents.

Child Care Challenges:

Conversely, while women value the flexibility, concerns exist about the unpredictability of "personal responsibilities," such as daycare schedules and school closings. This creates additional stress, as they try to pivot on both a professional and personal standpoint, while not falling down on either.

Gender Roles and Expectations:

The ever-present push-pull highlights the issue of whether the responsibility for family care disproportionately falls on women. Many women maintain that remote work has reinforced traditional gender roles, even taking society "backwards" to attitudes and expectations from previous decades.

Balancing Act: Women, Work-Life Integration, and the Impact of COVID-19

Potential Career Regression:

While the ability to balance work and family commitments more easily is valuable, several women expressed concern about the long-term impact on their careers. There's a worry that embracing the flexibility provided by remote work could cast them in a negative light with management and therefore hinder their professional progress. In this regard, views are not monolithic. While some see remote work and the associated family responsibilities as an advantage, others view it as a disadvantage. Individual family dynamics, needs, and the nature of the work are factors that affect these perspectives.

Collaboration and Reciprocity:

Women stress that now is the time for women to stand up and support each other, not stand in judgment. The more women support one another, especially when dealing with family matters, the stronger the bonds will be that are formed.

Impact of COVID-19:

Universally, women express a leeriness in the wake of Covid-19, when family needs disproportionately fell to women, resulting in a reduction in female workforce across industries and roles. Now is the time to reshape the dynamic and ensure women never again find themselves making the choice between work and family.

Navigating the New Normal: Workplace Policies and the Balancing Act Between Management and Employee Needs

A Different Kind Of Work-Life Balance
Employees aren't the only ones juggling priorities and needs. Employers are facing new trade-offs, as they seek to find the balance between company needs versus employee needs.

Varied Needs:
Many management teams are facing unprecedented challenges with a widely-scattered workforce and expensive office space sitting empty.

Fluctuating Policies:
Companies face increased pressure to solidify corporate policies pertaining to work location, ranging from strict requirements to flexible remote working arrangements.

Impact of Seniority and Role:
Within many companies, the push to return to the office is driven by the seniority and nature of each employee's role in the organization. This results in different expectations even within the same organization.

Adjustments During the Pandemic:
Many of the companies adapted their policies to cope with the pandemic, but the enforcement and permanence of these changes vary.

Fairness and Equity Concerns:
Women expressed the overwhelming desire for fairness in work location policies, the lack of which often leads to tensions among workers.

Geographical and Sectoral Variations:
The participants' experiences differed based on geography, sector (e.g. education, healthcare, administration), and specific organizational cultures and policies.

Remote Work: Opportunities and Challenges for Women in the Modern Workplace

Working remotely has opened new doors for women, providing flexibility and opportunities that would not otherwise have existed. However, that opportunity can come with a cost that is often predicated by company culture, industry specifics, geography, and individual choices. Some women see remote work as the great equalizer, while others maintain putting women back in the home is actually contributing to existing disparities.

Wider canvas of job opportunities:

With physical location no longer being a barrier, many women are able to apply for and accept jobs all over the country—jobs they never before could have considered. This creates a much larger pool of jobs to consider, which in turn enables women to look for the best job fit, as opposed to settling for the best job close to their place of residence.

Access to larger base of colleagues and senior leadership:

Before, employees could easily build relationships only with co-workers in a nearby physical proximity. The remote world removes the walls and the miles, enabling employees to interact with others, regardless of their physical location. Women also expressed more confidence approaching members of senior management from the relative safety of behind their keyboard.

- In particular, the Gen Y/Gen Z cohort pointed out that for some, remote working can actually be more advantageous for networking and engagement. Tools such as Slack allow easier access to higher-ranking colleagues, resulting in a higher comfort level initiating conversations. This was particularly viewed as a benefit for employees who identify as introverted or socially awkward.
- Conversely, the Baby Boomer/Gen X cohort stressed that being physically present in the office is essential for leadership roles, particularly in a male-dominated field.
- These opposing viewpoints highlight the need for both management and employees to make sure no one is left behind/forgotten.

More opportunity for self care:

Yoga, sunshine, a quick walk or warm cup of tea, maybe just a breath of fresh air—women unanimously embrace the increased opportunities for self care that come with working remotely. In particular, women express they can take a self-break without fear of being watch or judged.

Remote Work: Opportunities and Challenges for Women in the Modern Workplace

But...

Fear of being left behind:

While some women view the digital workplace as the great equalizer, others expressed concerns that lack of physical visibility could lead to out of sight, out of mind, resulting in fewer opportunities for recognition and advancement. They fear being "left behind." The reasons are many, from the perception of not taking work as seriously due to the lack of proximity, with one participant stating "you have to be in the office in order to really get people's attention."

- This fear/concern reinforces the need for establishing formal processes to ensure that all remote employees are engaged and contributing.

More difficult to observe/mentor:

Historically, a significant amount of learning and growth comes through observing colleagues and leaders. Being remote makes this much more difficult, introducing concerns that the lack of in-person observation significantly hampers the opportunity to learn and emulate.

Lower pay:

Women also shared experiences of companies beginning to offer lower salaries to those who choose to work from home, labeling the work-arrangement as a benefit. The fear exists that working from home will increasingly be used as a counter-measure to increases in pay.

Veridata Insights

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<u>veridatainsights.com</u>   <u>info@veridatainsights.com</u>   888.517.8783

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