

Surviving remotely: What impact did remote work have on employee psyche?

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William Becker, associate professor of management in the Pamplin College of Business. Credit: Jim Stroup for Virginia Tech

On March 11, 2020, when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, life changed dramatically for most Americans.

While much of the world was already feeling the impact of the virus by that point, the declaration was when the virus "hit home" for Americans. Sports leagues shut down. Public schools closed. And many white-collar workers were forced to turn kitchen tables, spare bedrooms, or garages into "temporary" office space.

What impact did the massive and abrupt move to remote work have on the [employee](#) psyche? William Becker, associate professor of management in the Pamplin College of Business, attempts to answer this and related questions in his recently published research, "Surviving remotely: How job control and loneliness during a forced shift to remote work impacted employee work behaviors and well-being."

Becker's paper investigates the impact of job control—or a person's ability to influence what happens in the [work environment](#)—and work-related loneliness on employee work behaviors and well-being during the massive and abrupt move to remote work amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In the paper, Becker draws upon job-demands control and social baseline theory to link employee-perceived job control and work-related loneliness to emotional exhaustion and work-life balance. He then posits direct and indirect effects on employee deviant work behaviors, depression, and insomnia.

"Our findings reinforce that greater perceptions of job control are generally beneficial for employee well-being and productivity," explained Becker. "However, not all employees perceived high job control during the forced change to remote work, which could be due either to the fact that the change was forced by the COVID-19 pandemic or to the way organizations handled this shift, or both."

As the country approaches the second anniversary of the pandemic, many of the changes brought about by COVID-19 have become permanent fixtures in our day-to-day lives, including remote work.

Because of this, organizations and human resource professionals will need to adapt to the new dynamics of work.

Becker's research increases the data surrounding remote work, job control, and workplace loneliness. It also provides insights for human resource professionals to manage widespread [remote work](#) that is likely to persist long after the COVID-19 [pandemic](#).

"Organizations and leaders that take these lessons to heart will improve the well-being of their employees and their families and ultimately benefit their companies through decreased deviance and increased employee productivity," added Becker.

More information: William J. Becker et al, Surviving remotely: How job control and loneliness during a forced shift to remote work impacted employee work behaviors and well-being, *Human Resource Management* (2022). [DOI: 10.1002/hrm.22102](https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22102)

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