

Remote working is a 'mixed bag' for employee well-being and productivity, study finds

April 22 2022



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Adapting remote and hybrid work policies to employees' specific work-life situations can result in increased well-being and productivity, but

many employees are stuck in an increasing number of low-quality meetings when working remotely, according to a new study.

The shift to remote working for many office-based workers at the start of the pandemic initially led to an increase in productivity, especially by reducing commute times, but a new large-scale study has outlined the many ways in which remote working has affected well-being and productivity over the past two years, both positively and negatively.

One of the big changes for remote workers was the number and quality of meetings. As outlined in a new article in *MIT Sloan Management Review*, the study from Cambridge Judge Business School and the Vitality Research Institute, part of the wellness and financial services group Vitality, found that the average number of meetings increased by 7.4% from June 2020 to December 2021.

The study, based on more than 1,000 Vitality employees, also found that people in most departments spent more hours in low-quality meetings—defined as meetings in which participants multitask, are double-booked into competing meetings or tasks, or are accompanied by another person with a similar role.

"Low-quality meetings often translate into less productivity and high levels of multitasking can increase stress," said study co-author Thomas Roulet from Cambridge Judge Business School.

The study, which looked at employees from four Vitality locations in the UK and across all business units, is based on automated [data collection](#) using Microsoft Workplace Analytics complemented by weekly surveys.

The authors focused on five core workplace behaviors that have the most significant impact on a range of well-being and work outcomes: collaboration hours (meetings, calls, dealing with emails); low-quality

meeting hours; multitasking hours during meetings (including sending emails); 'focus' hours (blocks of at least two hours with no meetings); and workweek span (number of hours worked per week).

Work capacity was captured based on four factors: life and work satisfaction, anxiety and stress levels, work energy, and [work-life balance](#).

The relationships emerging from the data are clear: employees were working longer (a higher workweek span), spent time in more low-quality meetings, and had higher levels of multitasking, all of which are associated with worse outcomes, including a decline in work-life balance and quality of work.

More after-hours work predominantly affects one's sense of work engagement but has no real impact on work productivity and quality. Increased focus hours affect work outcomes but not work engagement.

The authors conclude that the shift over the past two years toward remote or hybrid working has improved well-being for some workers but not others, so they caution against a "blanket approach" to workplace rules, such as requiring employees to come into the office for a set number of days or under specific conditions.

The research found, for example, that increasing "focus" hours was beneficial to senior employees who may need to concentrate on more [complex tasks](#), but it decreased well-being for junior employees who want more social interactions rather than working in isolation from their team.

More information: [How Shifts in Remote Behavior Affect Employee Well-being](#)

Provided by University of Cambridge

Citation: Remote working is a 'mixed bag' for employee well-being and productivity, study finds (2022, April 22) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-04-remote-bag-employee-well-being-productivity.html>

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