

Face-time pressure may force us back to the office, new research reveals

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Employees feel they need to go back into the office in order to be promoted according to new research conducted within the “Reinventing Work” chair at ESCP Business School.

Marie-Colombe Afota, Yanick Provost Savard, Ariane Ollier-Malaterre and Emmanuelle Léon looked at 4,000 employees of a leading multinational in the thick of the Covid crisis. They found that almost a third of respondents, the great majority of whom were working remotely, felt that physical attendance was implicitly preferred and rewarded by their organisation, to the extent that an employee working from home should not expect the same career prospects as an employee clocking in at the office every day.

The more employees feel that their organisation implicitly prefers physical attendance – that is a “face-time climate” – the more they feel they have to show they are constantly available when remote working, thereby compromising their well-being and productivity.

In other words, when they are unable to show their commitment through sheer physical presence in the office, it seems that employees resort to another type of signal: availability.

According to the authors: “The first thing we noticed was that there was no significant difference in terms of the number of hours worked. Those employees who continued to commute to the office reported working an average of 45.22 hours per week, compared with 45.17 hours for those working remotely full-time.

“What our results demonstrate is that the open scepticism of some organisations toward their remote workers is not only unfounded; it is also harmful to their well-being and performance and, ultimately, to the organisations themselves. It may well be true that some people make the most of being at home to work less, but nothing suggests that such laziness is any worse than that of employees who, sitting at their desks in full view of everybody, spend their working hours taking care of personal business.”

According to Emmanuelle Léon, associate professor of human resource management and scientific director of the Reinventing Work chair, “we have experienced telework in an unusual manner, due to the pandemic. Now that we are moving towards hybrid models, telework will only be beneficial if the following conditions are being met: a real willingness from top management to embrace remote work, appropriate training and coaching of both employees and managers, and organisational structures which make sense (size of the teams, length of the assignment, level of task interdependence).”

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