

CAN JOB AND LOCATION BE DECOUPLED?
CONSIDERATIONS FOR A MORE FLEXIBLE WORKING MODEL

A Robert Walters Group Company

ROBERT WALTERS

Introduction

Technology and now Covid-19 have transformed the way we live and work. Organisations all over the globe were forced to swiftly respond to the pandemic by implementing telework arrangements. Throughout this transition, some professionals have realised they are able to carry out their jobs from home effectively and would like their employers to offer more flexible work options post-pandemic.

This global telework experiment has raised important questions about the future of how we work and whether fully remote concepts, such as digital nomads and lifestyle migrants, will become a part of talent strategies. If work itself is no longer confined by geographical and physical presence at a fixed place and time, will this lead to paradigm shift? Can a job and location be decoupled and still be productive?

To better understand how organisations are responding to the growing desire for more work flexibility, we interviewed organisations with experience in managing remote employees as well as leaders across Robert Walters who talk daily to our clients about their experience.

This guide provides an overview of the current and emerging trends in remote working, discusses what jobs would benefit most from a more remote workforce, and how organisations can adopt a talent strategy without borders to combat talent shortages and increase workplace diversity.

As organisations charter unfamiliar waters in the post-pandemic era, Robert Walters is here to help successfully navigate and adapt to the new world of work.

Contents

- 1 | Introduction
- 2 | Current and emerging remote working trends
- 3 | A knee-jerk reaction or the next era of work-life balance?
- 5 | Are all jobs created equal for remote work?
- 7 | Talent strategy without borders
- 8 | Maintaining engagement in a remote workforce
- 9 | Key findings
- 11 | Contact us



Current and emerging remote working trends

This e-guide looks at three remote working concepts organisations can consider when developing talent strategies.

Telework

The most common practice of remote working, also known as ‘work from home’. The practice involves employees working from their home and using technology to complete tasks and communicate with colleagues. Teleworking is a hybrid of working from the office and home.

Lifestyle migrants

A trend with greater emergence as a result of Covid-19, is where individuals leave urban and city environments and migrate to rural areas for lifestyle reasons. For the purpose of this guide lifestyle migrants are professionals who want to retain their city-based job, while living remote and working from home majority full-time, only visiting a physical office when necessary.

Digital nomads

Often part of the gig economy, digital nomads are location-independent and practice full-time remote work. Digital nomads are individuals who utilise technology to perform their work remotely from anywhere in the world, and it is not uncommon to see them working from coffee shops and co-working spaces, as well as working unconventional hours. Countries across the world have started to realise the economic benefits of digital nomads and have created visas to support this workforce. Some countries include Bermuda, Estonia and Barbados.



“Going forward, professionals will place more value on flexible working styles and will want to have as many options as possible whether it is working in the office, working remotely, or a mix between the two.”

Tomokazu Betzold
Director of Tech & Transformation
📍 Japan, Robert Walters

A knee-jerk reaction or the next era of work-life balance?

By forcing organisations to figure out how to make telework happen and succeed, Covid-19 has accelerated the digital shift of the workplace by years. No one could have ever expected that a global pandemic would be the catalyst for a long overdue revolution for workplace flexibility. Now as organisations gradually transition back to the office with many keeping telework as an option for employees, business leaders are contemplating their future working models.

So, has Covid-19 been enough of an experiment for organisations to change their workplace flexibility practices forever and think beyond telework? Here are some areas organisations need to consider in their decision-making process.

Cost savings

Many organisations have realised the potential cost savings of a remote workforce and impact it can have on their bottom line. Some organisations are looking to reduce their physical office space to accommodate fewer employees, and organisations considering lifestyle migrants and digital nomads will be looking at salary cost savings these models can deliver with the often lower cost of living in rural areas and countries supporting a location-independent workforce.

Wider talent pool

Implementation of a remote workforce strategy can have huge benefits in talent short markets or for organisations wanting to create a more diverse workforce. When location is no longer a key requirement in the job description, the world can be an organisation's oyster.



“Many elements that make co-located teams effective are rooted in informal and ad hoc processes. For remote teams, with the absence of these moments — like running into someone in the kitchen — we need to intentionally craft interactions that encourage vulnerability, which leads to trust and in turn belonging.”

Dan Pupius, CEO & Co-Founder

📍 San Francisco, Range



“Whilst businesses are going through a transition journey normalising remote working, our people are adapting to this and going through an evolutionary journey, becoming more mindful of others, investing more in their team’s development and prioritising meaningful connections.”

Pia Neema
Head of HR Business Partnering
📍 Australia & New Zealand, Kraft Heinz

Productivity

In our global survey, 45% of professionals worldwide said their productivity increased while working remotely, due to no commute time, less distractions and more flexibility in how they structure their work schedule. However, as the novelty of working from home starts to wear off, organisations are starting to see cracks in productivity as a result of less face-to-face interactions, diminished social capital and incidental office interactions.

Burnout

While not a new concept, workplace burnout has been exacerbated by Covid-19 and the blurring of lines between work and home. Organisations need to understand the impacts of a remote workforce and develop strategies to support the wellbeing of their employees. [Our guide](#) provides advice for combatting workplace burnout.

Culture and unity

A major consideration is how to instil and maintain company values and culture. A growing concern among organisations that have transitioned to remote work is how to ensure the values that are at the core of its success are not lost in the process. However, a loss in physical interaction does not necessarily result in a weakening organisational unity.

Improved work-life balance

Greater workplace flexibility can have positive impacts on employees’ ability to attain work-life balance. For example, working parents who occasionally need to adjust their working schedules to accommodate school events greatly benefit from more flexibility. A happier and healthier workforce can lead to increased productivity, retention and a stronger employer brand in the market, making it easier to attract top talent over the competition.

Are all jobs created equal for remote work?

Placing personal preferences and working personalities aside, some jobs can be more easily carried out remotely than others. For organisations planning to shift to a partially or fully remote workforce, analysing which roles transitioned smoothly can help in deciding which functions do not require being in the office.

Broadly speaking, digital nomads and lifestyle migrants usually suit jobs that are complex or autonomous, and require very little collaboration and social interaction to perform the role productively.

Professionals whose roles are collaborative, require innovation and are relationship-focused will have more difficulty in reaping the benefits of fully remote work. Knowledge and idea sharing is more productive face-to-face and can often be a result of incidental 'water cooler' conversations. Teleworking is more suited to these types of jobs.

When determining which roles can effectively be done remotely and to what extent, it's helpful to start by answering the following questions:

- Do the job responsibilities require the employee to be physically present in the office?
- What level of face to face communication is needed for the employee to be effective in their job?
- Does the employee's role frequently involve handling information that requires a high level of data security which cannot be done out of the office?
- Does the employee have all the tech tools needed to carry out their responsibilities out of the office?
- Can the majority of the employee's tasks be completed through technology and virtual communication?
- Is the role largely autonomous or does it require collaboration?

Types of jobs that suit digital nomads or lifestyle migrants:



Marketing/Creative

- Content writer
- SEO specialist
- Social media specialist
- Graphic/web designer
- PR specialist



Tech

- Software developer
- Programmer
- Web/app developer



Finance

- Payroll specialist
- Accountant
- Bookkeeper



Human Resources

- Coaching consultant
- Talent development specialist

Talent strategy without borders

Once an organisation understands which jobs are more location-independent, it provides an opportunity to broaden the talent pool without the constraint of location.

For job markets facing talent shortages in often emerging skill sets, securing top, in-demand talent is a major challenge for organisations. Remote workplace strategies can be an effective solution in widening the talent pool beyond the physical office location, filling the local market skill gaps and increasing workplace diversity.

8 things to consider before pitching a talent strategy without borders

- 1 Compliance:** do the employment laws and work visas support remote working and what requirements need to be met? What are the tax implications? It's important organisations carefully look at both the country they are located, as well as the country where the remote employee will be based to avoid any legal risk.
- 2 Remote onboarding:** does your organisation have a robust remote onboarding plan? [Read our e-guide](#) to find out more on how to effectively implement remote onboarding.
- 3 Remote management:** are managers equipped with the right training, tools and technology to effectively manage a remote workforce? [Read our e-guide](#) on how to lead teams remotely.
- 4 Technology:** what access will remote employees need to technology systems and infrastructure to successfully and productively carry out their job?
- 5 Cost:** location-independent employees can be more cost efficient. To ensure this is the case it is important to understand where they will be based i.e. if they are located in a city the cost savings will decrease compared to living in rural or developing nations where the cost of living is lower.
- 6 Culture:** what impact will a remote workforce have on the company culture? Will the culture be diminished or will it thrive?
- 7 Readiness:** how ready are the organisation's executives to accept? Is the organisation still very traditional in how it operates? If your organisation is not ready it can impact the performance of remote employees because they will feel isolated.
- 8 Talent mapping:** where do the professionals with the desired skill set live and what companies do they work for? Even though the location scope has increased, it's important the search remains targeted.

Maintaining engagement with a remote workforce

A major challenge for organisations adopting more flexible work arrangements is keeping employees engaged. Maintaining engagement is not only crucial to employee productivity and performance but also to the organisation's overall success. If there is a lack of engagement, this can lead to employees to harbour feelings of isolation and unhappiness as well as diminished passion for the organisation's vision or goals. When managers and senior leaders prioritise employee engagement, regardless of an employee's location, the organisation thrives.

“The digitalisation of tools and processes is one of the keys for companies to make jobs more nomadic. Rethinking organisations and decision-making processes or working methods is the other lever.”

Philippe Artero, Associate Director

📍 France, Robert Walters



Tips on how to engage a remote workforce

Establish regular check-ins

For teleworking or other remote work practices to work effectively, it is vital managers regularly make time for and schedule virtual video catch ups. At Range, a software company in San Francisco, their solution is asynchronous check-ins to provide ambient awareness of what's happening, as well as scheduled video chats for teams to collaborate. Organising these sessions with an open agenda works best as this allows employees to raise any topic whether it's to give a progress update, discuss plans or specifics, or gain context on a decision or project.

Develop an outcome-based evaluation system

Managing remote teams requires a shift from behaviour-based monitoring to an outcome-based mindset. Rather than solely assessing performance according to what an employee is seen to be doing, managers need to set deliverables and establish an environment of mutual trust. It's a good idea for organisations to examine how they measure productivity and whether their method can capture both outcomes measured by hard data as well as other intangible aspects of work. Employing a merit-based evaluation will ensure employees working in the office and those working remotely are equally assessed.

Create opportunities for virtual networking

A potential major drawback to a partial or fully remote workforce is the inability to engage in organic conversations with colleagues that normally occur when everyone is present in the workplace. Based on our global survey, social isolation and lack of interaction with peers were the biggest frustrations faced by professionals when working remotely. Fortunately, today's technology offers solutions for creating an online space for remote employees to interact, collaborate and engage (e.g. virtual coffee catch ups, trivia, town halls).

Ensure employees' wellbeing

When working in an office there is a clear distinction between our professional and personal spaces. For remote employees, the line separating work and home is often blurred. According to our global survey, the inability to separate home and working life was one of biggest factors contributing to negative mental health. Therefore, instilling the importance of unplugging and maintaining a healthy balance among teams is vital.

Practices such as setting diary reminders to encourage employees to wrap up the working day and silencing email notifications in the evening can encourage employees to take valuable personal time and withdraw stress from their system. Organising virtual wellness programs such as yoga sessions or offering online counselling are also great ways to ensure employees' overall health.



86%

of organisations plan to continue offering telework after Covid-19



45%

of professionals worldwide said their productivity increased while working remotely

Key findings

- 1 Although some professionals would like to work fully remote, **most professionals simply want more options** for working styles in the post-pandemic era.
- 2 While Covid-19 has helped organisations realise the advantages of remote work, it has also reminded them of the importance of coming together in the workplace. Finding the right **balance between more flexibility and keeping organisational culture and values** intact is the key.
- 3 When considering which roles can be done remotely, review all the responsibilities of the role and determine **whether working remotely will enable the employee to increase their productivity and performance.**
- 4 Adopting a **talent strategy without borders** for jobs that do not require physical presence in the workplace **can remedy talent shortages and diversity**, as location and jobs can be truly decoupled.
- 5 When planning a talent strategy that includes remote workers, organisations **need to ensure they have the necessary tech, remote onboarding practices and training** in place to support effective remote work.
- 6 Employee engagement is integral to an organisation's success and maintaining engagement among remote employees calls for different approaches. **Switching to a more outcomes-based management style** and creating opportunities for connecting are crucial.

About Robert Walters

Robert Walters is a global, specialist professional recruitment consultancy.

Over the last 35 years the business has grown and so has our ambition. We now operate across 31 countries and employ over 3,200 people. It's a powerful success story built on the strength of our people. Organisations rely on us to find high-quality professionals for a range of specialist roles. Professionals who are looking for a new role, whether it's on a permanent, interim or contract basis, trust us to find them their ideal job.

Our core recruitment disciplines are:

- Accountancy & Finance
- Banking
- Engineering
- HR
- Legal
- Sales
- Marketing
- Secretarial & Support
- Supply Chain & Procurement
- Technology

Contact us

If you are searching for a new role or looking to hire, please email us at contact@robertwalters.com or visit our website www.robertwaltersgroup.com



AUSTRALIA
BELGIUM
BRAZIL
CANADA
CHILE
CZECH REPUBLIC
FRANCE
GERMANY
HONG KONG
INDIA
INDONESIA
IRELAND
JAPAN
LUXEMBOURG
MAINLAND CHINA
MALAYSIA
MEXICO
NETHERLANDS
NEW ZEALAND
PHILIPPINES
PORTUGAL
SINGAPORE
SOUTH AFRICA
SOUTH KOREA
SPAIN
SWITZERLAND
TAIWAN
THAILAND
UAE
UK
USA
VIETNAM