

SUCCESS FACTORS IN MANAGING REMOTE WORK: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction/background: This paper identifies and analyzes key considerations in managing online, work-from-home business operations. The literature review summarizes research done both previous to and during Covid-19 shutdowns. An original, international survey, conducted in August 2020, polled managers and professional leaders in multiple industries.

Aim of the paper: The best use of our survey is to learn about characteristics of remote work, and possible success factors in managing it, which tend to prevail across industry sectors and geographies. Further, our review of the literature is offered as a concise and practical summary of previous research. Altogether, we hope this paper will serve as a step toward building a wide-ranging, well-rounded body of knowledge on the management of remote work, which will be useful to practitioners and scholars alike.

Materials and methods: In August 2020 the authors conducted an international, cross-sector survey that drew responses from 158 individuals.

The LimeSurvey consisted of 26 questions exploring organizational responses to the pandemic and how people had been managing the transition to remote work. Along with the structured questions—which typically asked respondents to check one answer from a list of possible replies—there were spaces for open-ended comments.

Results and conclusions: Analysis and commentary on survey results has largely been done in the sections above. We would conclude, first, by repeating and summarizing a few key points. Providing technologies and tech support for remote work is necessary, but giving remote workers access to the information they need, when they need it, is mission-critical and may be more of a challenge.

Keywords: remote work, managing remote work, managing online, work-from-home, managing work-from-home, online productivity, online morale, management, pandemic management.

1. Introduction

What are the key factors that make work-from-home arrangements go effectively? The question came to the forefront after the Covid-19 pandemic drove most business operations to move online, but it was an important question before that and will remain so, as remote work predated the pandemic and will continue.

It is important for several reasons. One is to inform management of how best to manage remote work. Another is deciding whether to keep operations online, or choosing *which* operations (or which staff members) would be more effective online. The paper presented here is only a small part of a growing body of research in these areas. We have aimed to make it useful by providing two elements not frequently matched by others: a very concise review of the literature, and results of a distinctive survey we conducted in August of 2020. The survey polled managers and professional leaders in a range of industries on several continents, asking about their experiences with remote work during the pandemic. While no definitive conclusions should be drawn from either element of this paper, they combine to point out many key challenges, opportunities, and topics that deserve management attention.

2. Review of the Literature

To begin by stating the obvious: the most salient feature of remote work is physical isolation. Each person is in his/her own home or location of choice, separated from co-workers. It then follows that one way of optimizing remote work would be to leverage the potential advantages of isolation.

A number of research studies have found that enabling “autonomy” or “self-efficacy”, in any work environment, is associated with improved performance and well-being.

A definition and explanation of self-efficacy, from the American Psychological Association: *Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment. These cognitive self-evaluations influence all manner of human experience, including the goals for which people strive, the amount of energy expended toward goal achievement, and likelihood of attaining particular levels of behavioral performance (Carey, and Forsyth, 2009).*

In an early study of remote work, Staples et al (1999) found that “it may be possible to enhance employees' work performance through management efforts to improve employees' remote work self-efficacy”. In a study of “fly-in, fly-out” workers—i.e., those flown in

temporarily to remote job sites—researchers found that “day-level autonomy predicted day-level engagement” with the work (Albrecht, and Anglim, 2018).

Further: *Independence at work is commonly considered a job resource which fosters motivation and employee well-being. Somewhat paradoxically, it is embedded in a relationship, and employees' independence also hinges on their leaders' willingness to grant it* (Gatti et al., 2019).

One question then becomes how managers can be not only willing to grant autonomy, but can actively support and encourage it. In a study of nursing assistants during Covid-19, the researchers emphasized creating “empowered environments that optimize work output by ensuring that employees have access to important information, resources, and support ... and provide opportunities for growth and development” (Travers et al., 2020). Others have highlighted the value of a “transformational leadership” style, which one research team described as leaders who “act as inspirational role models, consider their employees individually, and support their employees’ development. Furthermore, they motivate their employees through an effective communication of a positive vision for the future” (Bark et al., 2016).

Along with autonomy, there is a need to stay connected to one’s company while working remotely. In a global survey done in April 2020, shortly after the pandemic forced many companies to move their operations online, employees listed “frequent” and “high quality communication” from management as a primary factor that helped them make the transition to working at home (Sull et al., 2020). The respondents valued “total transparency” on matters such as the reasoning behind management decisions, and how the physical shutdowns were impacting their companies’ business. They also found value in multimodal, interactive forms of communication, including live video sessions combined with email updates, and mechanisms that allowed them to ask questions and give feedback (Sull et al., 2020).

Some companies have even tried to re-create, online, the kinds of informal interactions that can lead to serendipitous exchange of useful ideas and information. After the pandemic began, one venture capital firm scheduled biweekly “watercooler meetings” on Zoom. The sole purpose of these meetings was to share news and thoughts related to the investment portfolio, and the firm reported that the meetings were “highly effective” for “staying on top of changing needs” (Manes, 2020).

There appear to be cases in which online interactions can actually work better than face-to-face meetings. For example, certain healthcare workers, who would normally attend professional conferences in person, found that social-media platforms were more than adequate substitutes during the pandemic: “Whether to exchange information, increase productivity or enhance interpersonal communications with colleagues, these platforms provide a vehicle for the rapid dissemination of knowledge” (Mulrennan, and Colt, 2020).

It is also important to address the potential downsides of remote work. One company, finding that motivation declined for many newly remote employees after the first few weeks of Covid-19 shutdown, initiated online “check-in meetings” once per week, so that people could voice their personal concerns and support each other (Couch et al., 2020). Other organizations have tried incorporating social aspects into virtual meetings, such as games and family time (Hope, 2020; Pavlik, 2020).

Although family members in the home can be a distraction for remote workers (see for example Craig, and Churchill, 2020), their occasional presence online can sometimes produce positive effects. According to a previously cited research team, when coworkers get to see one another’s “domestic and professional spheres colliding”, it helps them to recognize their colleagues as “whole people” (Couch et al., 2020). Similarly, psychiatrists in a practice group noted that seeing their patients by means of virtual “home visits” allowed them to meet “family members who were previously difficult to access” (Crowley, 2020).

2.1. Equipment, Training, and Focus

Multiple sources point out that remote workers can only be effective when they are adequately equipped and trained for working virtually. A broad-ranging study in Poland during the pandemic found that “For many, information and communication technologies (ICTs) turned out to be a blessing, allowing them to work from home or to participate in the remote education system ... [But] some could not take advantage of this opportunity due to the lack of digital skills, equipment deficiency or insufficient infrastructure” (Kuc-Czarnecka, 2020). During the same time period, an in-depth analysis of six U.S. companies found some adjusting to remote work much better than others. One success factor appeared to be scoring at level 3 or better on the 5-level CMMI (Capability Maturity Model Integration) scale, which could be seen as a general proxy for sophistication in IT management (Conger, 2020). Still, the author noted that *... most non-IT users in all of the companies had to learn VPNs and the on-line communications software used in their company, such as Zoom, MS Teams, or Skype. Successful remote technology use requires not only the ability to implement basic connective functionalities, such as joining a Zoom meeting, but the mastery of new etiquette for signaling you want a turn, signaling when you are done, chatting on the side, whether or not you show your face and the implications, recording meetings, and so on* (Conger, 2020).

Other findings suggest that training people in advance for remote work can be valuable, because when the transition is forced suddenly upon people—as it was at the start of the pandemic—in-person coaching sessions may no longer be possible, and training becomes more difficult. A researcher in the U.S. wrote: *There are many Web-based tools and tutorials available from vendors and through online sites such as YouTube, but ... these tutorials may not suit everyone, nor will they always be able to provide the answers desired. Some organizations may consider hiring on a temporary or contract basis persons to conduct specific organizationally-focused training. Regardless, organizations that forego or place minimal*

emphasis on training could find that employees may become frustrated which could easily affect how a person does his/her job (Mykytyn, 2020).

Further, simply knowing how to use remote technologies may not be enough. Managers and employees alike are advised to learn methods for dealing with the unique stresses and fatigue that can come from working virtually. For example, one research team observed that “videoconferences force us to focus differently, and more intently, than we do in comparable co-located interactions”. This is because participants must struggle to maintain personal connection without getting the subtle feedback cues that “reward” such attention in face-to-face meetings, and the result can be “Zoom fatigue” accompanied by distraction and loss of effectiveness (Ebner, and Greenberg, 2020).

One possible solution is suggested by researchers in online education, who reported that “shorter, more frequent sessions” work better than long sessions requiring extended focus (Thistlethwaite et al., 2020). Similarly, “building in downtime between videoconferences” and taking occasional short breaks away from the screen can help (Ebner, and Greenberg, 2020). However, sustaining focus during online meetings is not the only issue that may arise. People working from home may feel they can never really step away from their jobs; they experience “work intensification and a greater inability to switch off” (Felstead, and Henske, 2017).

2.2. General Conclusions from the Literature Review

Ultimately, it would seem that a line should be drawn between what managers can do to make remote work go well, and what the individuals must do for themselves. According to one research team, persons involved in highly demanding “creative” work tend to do best when they practice “proactive vitality management”, using the methods that suit them for “managing physical and mental energy to promote optimal functioning” (Op den Kamp et al., 2020).

Key responsibilities of management—to summarize the various sources cited in this review—would include: providing the necessary equipment and training for remote work. Giving remote workers access to the information they need for their jobs, along with “transparent” information on the company’s progress and management decisions. Providing mechanisms for questions, suggestions, and feedback. Being mindful of remote workers’ emotional issues and needs, and devising ways to address them. Finding the right balance between autonomy and oversight, and last but not least, designing online interactions with an eye to the particular issues raised by virtual media.

3. Research Design: An Original Survey

In August 2020, the authors conducted an international, cross-sector survey exploring impacts and management responses across a broad range of organizations during the pandemic, with an emphasis on the adoption of remote work. The August timing made it possible to capture several month's experience with remote work, along with the initial period of adaptation.

The survey consisted of 26 questions. Along with the structured questions—which typically asked respondents to check one answer from a list of possible replies—there were spaces for open-ended comments. These were organized as follows:

- 5 *identifying* questions on topics including the organization's type of business (a choice of 12 broad categories, such as manufacturing, retail, education, etc.); the respondent's position; and the extent to which operations were either in-person or online before the pandemic.
- 21 questions about *impacts* of the pandemic and shutdowns, and management *responses and results*. The more general topics included overall impacts on revenue and staffing levels, observed changes in productivity and morale, and lessons learned. There were also specific questions on topics ranging from the challenges of particular kinds of remote work, to customer interaction and managerial workload.

The survey was emailed to a non-random but diverse list of people. They were drawn mainly from these sources: former graduate business students of the authors, who had finished their studies and were now working; and contact information provided by private- and public-sector associates of the authors. Given that one author is based in the United States and the other in Poland, we were able to survey people throughout North America and Europe, as well as some in South America and the nation of South Africa.

Approximately 400 persons received the survey and 158 responded. Results are summarized and discussed in the sections below (*Percentages are rounded to whole numbers: e.g., 25% instead of 24.8 or 25.13*).

4. Profile of Survey Respondents and their Organizations

Responses came from a wide range of industries and sectors: all 12 categories in the "Type of business" checklist were checked by multiple respondents. Only 10 of the 158 (6%) reported working in manufacturing or related businesses, perhaps since the authors and many of their contacts live in highly developed regions that are not centers of contract manufacturing.

Dominant categories included retail and consumer services (37% and 28% respectively), education (16%), and software/IT and transportation/logistics (each slightly over 10%).

Of the persons who responded, 10% identified as C-level executives or founder/owners. The majority identified as either managers or professionals with leadership responsibilities (each 27%). A surprising 17% checked “Other”, and we could not determine what this meant. Given the economic impact of the pandemic, perhaps some respondents were currently out of work or forced into jobs below the professional level. However, it is also possible that our list of choices for “position” was not broad enough or worded clearly enough.

Prior to the pandemic, most of the respondents’ organizations—70%—were operating on a physical/in person basis “with minor or no online/O2O (online-to-offline)” components to their business. The remaining 30% had either “significant” online components or operated “entirely/almost entirely” online or O2O.

5. Survey Findings on General Impacts of the Pandemic

Most respondents were in organizations that have moved some or all activity from an in-person basis to remote work since the pandemic began. A minority, 11%, reported that their particular work units were operating “pretty much as before, with physical protective measures”. The latter tended to be doing so-called essential work (For example, in the open-ended comments, one person explained that his unit operates an electric power plant and must be at the work site constantly).

As for general business impact of the pandemic, responses ranged between two extremes.

- 30% reported a “Large or total drop in volume of business”,
- 42% reported “Major cuts to staff”.

And conversely:

- 17% reported an “Increase in demand and revenues”.
- 22% reported “Adding staff”.

As expected, there was considerable overlap between the pairs in each group—i.e., organizations with big drops in business also cut staff, while gainers tended to add staff. All other respondents reported only minor changes in business volume and staffing, or said that these levels were “about the same” as pre-pandemic. In a section to come, we will correlate these patterns of response with responses to other parts of the survey.

6. Problem Areas and Success Factors in Remote Work

Delving now into details, we wish to call attention first to an important distinction.

- The vast majority of respondents (80%) said their organizations provided the *technologies* needed for remote work, to most people if not to all. Only 11.6% declared technology access “a problem with no good solution in sight”.
- Access to *information and reference materials* needed for remote work was a different matter, however. Nearly half (49%) identified these as problem areas, with 28% seeing “no good solution” ahead.

We believe this is a significant finding. It paints a picture of IT for remote work in which many people have the “T”, the technology, but lack the “I”—the very information that the technology is supposed to help them acquire and process. One can see how this might happen. Computing devices and online technologies are fairly standardized and widely applicable, whereas the information needed for particular jobs can vary greatly and may also change as new needs arise. Indeed, we received open-ended comments that appear to support this explanation.

On the technology issue, one respondent wrote: “Video conferencing and file sharing have become so convenient that we are satisfied with the telecommunication technologies”. On information and communication, however, there were complaints, such as “More internal communications for planning [are needed]”. And, “Email response from some employees is very slow”. Whatever the case, the implication seems clear: *Communication and access to information are critical areas for management to address when using remote work.*

In another set of findings that seem significant, but not surprising, most respondents judged the results of remote work and interaction to be inferior to in-person interaction.

- 44% said *meetings and group sessions* went “not nearly as well” remotely, and 19% answered “not quite as well”.
- 38% said *interaction with customers* went “not nearly as well”, and 28% answered “not quite as well”.

In trying to analyze the responses by industry sector, we found these problems turning up most consistently in *education*. A bit of confusion arises here, as it was not always clear whether teachers and professors in the survey considered online classes to be “group sessions” or “interactions with customers”. However, virtually all reported difficulties with one or the other. In open-ended comments, educators gave varying insights into the nature of the difficulties. Some reported that students had trouble with the online systems that were set up by their schools, or did not have—and were not provided with—the digital equipment and network service needed in their homes. Some noted that students could easily view remote classes as an excuse for shirking their studies, e.g.: “Most students’ expectation is good grades, no work”. Meanwhile, other educators found the difficulties piling up at their own end. “It was a difficult

time for a teacher: answer a lot of personal emails”, wrote one person, while another voiced a need for “more staff to support full-time instructors.” And one instructor, noting that many colleagues have struggled with moving their courses online, even made this suggestion: “Have IT department design the classes”.

Problems and solutions in remote education have been very intensively studied. We do not think our survey can contribute much to the body of knowledge within that sector. However, we hope that managers in other industries might glean some value from the survey results—and we would advise them that there is hope for success when moving interactions online.

- 15% of survey respondents said working remotely had *improved* meetings and group sessions.
- 21% said customer interaction was improved.

Judging from open-ended comments, one key to successful online meetings is to see that they move briskly and stay on purpose, with little wasted time. Similarly, customer interaction can be improved when remote customers are able to have rapid, complete access to the information and ordering capabilities that they need, whether it is through a web portal or a person. None of this may seem to be news. We would, however, point out the common thread—which is *leveraging the advantages of the online realm*. Remote interactions of any kind have the potential to be convenient and fast: People do not need to travel or commute, and if information access is set up properly, they can rapidly find what they need.

Looking further into management issues, survey results indicate that some aspects of remote work are tougher to manage than others. When survey participants were asked what is most challenging to manage and accomplish remotely:

- 31% said “Keeping people on task” is the greatest challenge,
- 28% said “Dealing with crises or urgencies” is the toughest,
- 26% chose “Making and implementing new plans” as the number one challenge,
- “Small-team collaboration” and “Inter-unit collaboration” were only rarely cited, by 8% and 6%, respectively.

One possible conclusion is that remote workers can be expected to work together reasonably well, as long as no significant new needs emerge—but that when they do, such as in emergencies or in times of planning and change, managers should devote extra effort to assuring the job gets done.

As for the “Keeping people on task” issue: Survey results suggest that in some respects, this may be largely an individual issue which varies from one person to the next. For example, 33% of survey participants reported that “duties and distractions in the home” interfered significantly with their own work or that of their close colleagues—while the rest found it to be only an occasional problem, or no problem at all.

6.1. Morale, Motivation, and Productivity

The findings on employee morale and motivation appeared to send a relatively clear message. 42% of survey subjects reported that morale and motivation have become “more of an issue” with remote work. And here, we can trace some possible contributing factors.

- Most notably, out of those 42%, the great majority (75%) were in organizations that had little or no online elements to their business before the pandemic-related shutdowns. They were filled mainly with people who had been *forced* to work remotely, without having much prior experience in it, within companies that did not have much experience in managing it.
- Furthermore, out of the 42% with morale and motivation issues, 32% were in organizations that had experienced substantial drops in business. This could well be another factor, as it would seem difficult to maintain a high-morale, highly-motivated workforce in a company where people are struggling to adapt to a new mode of work amid worries about lost revenue and fears of resulting job loss (Two typical comments: “We service only one-fourth [as many] customers now”. And “I’m worried about my job”).
- The above point may also be reinforced by an opposite finding. Out of *all* survey subjects, 15% reported that morale and motivation had improved. And half of these were in companies where demand and revenue were increasing.

One obvious conclusion might be that remote workers are more likely to be happy and motivated when their companies are doing well. However, this doesn’t tell us much that is useful for managing remote work. For nearly all managers, helping to maintain or grow revenues is a core part of the job to begin with. We believe the most significant takeaway from this analysis can be found in the first bullet-point: When remote work is instituted in companies or work units that have little to no prior experience with online operation, managers should be prepared to deal with morale issues.

Two other points are worth considering here. First, we must acknowledge the effects of the pandemic itself. Our August 2020 survey was done at a time when it had been going on for several months. People were growing weary of both the health concerns and the restrictions on activity, while initial hopes for a quick recovery and return to normal were fading. In response to a specific question on the topic, 39% of survey subjects reported increased overall levels of anxiety or depression, while 29% chose the response saying they felt “Fine now, but concerned about the future”.

The second point, a positive one, is that quite a few people in fact prefer remote work. Among survey subjects who reported that morale was either improved (15%) or holding constant in their organizations (11% saw no change), positive comments were numerous and in some cases vividly descriptive: “Love working alone”. “Honestly, I prefer working from home”. “My pets, being able to cook food and get sunshine outside really improved my well

being”. One response even turned the morale question on its head: “In the office, morale is an issue. From home, I could make my happy place”.

Next, we turn to the issue of productivity. Survey responses on this topic closely tracked the responses on morale and motivation. 38% said productivity in their group was “Not nearly as high” as before the shift to remote work, while another 30% said productivity was “Not quite as high”.

Although the numbers look daunting, we think they should be weighed in light of considerations just mentioned: (a) many organizations and people were forced into remote work rather than choosing to do so, and (b) the survey was taken amidst unusual and trying times. This viewpoint is informed, in part, by the many positive responses that came in. 33% reported that productivity had either improved (18%) or stayed about the same (15%).

6.2. Analysis by Industry Sectors

A pertinent question can be raised about all of the survey results covered thus far, on topics from collaboration and interaction to morale, motivation, and productivity. Namely: How did these results vary across industry sectors? As noted earlier, survey respondents in the education sector reported near-universal problems working remotely with groups of students. But we hesitate to draw conclusions about patterns in other industries. Aside from education, we find it difficult to tell how (and whether) the type of business conducted by the organization makes a difference. It would probably be misleading for us to even present such an analysis.

One reason is that the industry categories listed in our survey were broad and general. It is possible that within the software and IT category, or within “retail” or “consumer services”, there are sub-sectors that lend themselves well to remote work while others do not. Products, business models, customer bases, and competitive environments within all of these industries vary much more than they do in education. For example, a software firm focused on mobile apps or gaming is fundamentally different from an ERP or CRM company; and retailers in clothing are very different from grocery chains.

Also, it is possible that the culture or structure of an organization is a crucial factor in managing remote work. Future research of a more targeted nature is needed to yield useful industry-specific insights. The purpose of our survey was to cast a wide net, looking for patterns that might be prevalent across industries and types of organizations. We included identifying questions about the general industry sector, size, and form of the organization (i.e., whether for-profit, nonprofit, etc.) in order to determine whether a wide sampling was in fact obtained, which it was.

6.3. Management Workloads and Lessons Learned

This section concludes our report of survey results. When we asked all respondents how their workloads as managers or leaders had been affected by the movement to remote work, a striking polarity emerged.

- 34% chose the reply “I must do much more to adjust and accommodate,” with another 14% needing to do “somewhat more”.
- 38% reported the opposite: “My work as a manager/leader is made easier”.

Only a small minority answered in between. We did not expect this pattern of responses. And, while it would obviously be helpful to learn how the managing of remote work can be made easier, this is another case where factors not captured by our survey seem to play a part. We included no follow-up questions (such as “In what ways, exactly, was your workload reduced?”), nor could we find correlations to other survey responses that might explain this sharply polarized result. We do, however, offer our raw data as a starting point to anyone interested in further research.

Finally, a question near the end of the survey asked about key lessons learned in the shift to remote work. The two most common replies chosen, by far:

- 33% said “Seeing who, among the staff, responded well and who did not”.
- 30% said “Seeing weaknesses or failure points in the organization”.

Here too, the pattern surprised us—and we find it enlightening. It indicates that many survey respondents found *diagnostic value* in moving to remote work amid the pressures of a pandemic. The process helped to reveal who the top performers were, and where the organization as a whole could stand to be improved.

One survey subject elaborated on the first point, as follows: *There are many employees who are taking extra initiative to prove themselves to the organization in these testing times. There are others who have shunned responsibilities. We are recognizing that the people who are rising to the occasion could possibly be promoted in the near future or the company could extend certain benefits for them.*

7. Survey Summary and Concluding Remarks

Analysis and commentary on survey results has largely been done in the sections above. To repeat and summarize major findings that can be useful to managers, with some further commentary added:

- Providing technologies and tech support for remote work is necessary, but giving remote workers the information they need, when they need it, is mission-critical and may be more of a challenge.
- Collaboration and interaction often become more difficult and less fruitful with remote work—but, there are opportunities to actually improve in these areas, as many survey subjects have reported. One potential key is to leverage the benefits of the online/virtual realm (convenience, time savings, rapid access to information and people) as much as possible.

- In general, it appears that small teams tend to interact and collaborate well remotely. However, managers should devote particular attention to managing change—as when crises or urgencies come up, or when new plans are being made and implemented.
- Morale and motivation often become issues among remote workers, *especially* in cases where remote work is introduced to a group that has little or no prior experience with online operation. As to what can support morale and motivation, useful indicators may be found in our literature review. Research by others has shown, for instance, that granting autonomy to remote workers can help, as can taking steps to inquire after and support their emotional well-being.
- The education sector faces numerous issues in moving to remote work. This fact was well known before our survey. What may be helpful to managers in other industries, however, is to study the problems that arise in education, along with best practices used by educators to address the problems.
- Results in all aspects of remote work may depend, to a large degree, on the individuals involved. Individuals may vary significantly in their ability to stay on task, in their tendency to be distracted (or not) by what is happening at home, and in how well they respond to unusual pressures and demands. All of these findings suggest that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to managing remote work.
- A sizable number of individuals prefer and eagerly embrace working from home. Are there ways in which these people can serve as co-leaders in the movement to remote work?
- Finally: Putting employees on a remote-work basis is a learning experience, which managers can use for broader diagnostic purposes. The experience can help to identify promising performers and reveal organizational weaknesses that need to be bolstered.

7.1. Limitations and Best Uses of This Research; Areas for Future Research

Perhaps the greatest limitation of our survey is that it was conducted during extraordinary times, when the pandemic and shutdowns had massively disrupted business as usual. This has likely colored many of the responses that we received, and should be taken into account by anyone consulting our research for possible guidance on future management of remote work—when macroeconomic conditions may (we hope) be otherwise.

The survey had geographic limitations, too. Although we reached out to people and organizations across North America, Europe, and some other parts of the world, we were not aware of having any significant coverage in Asia—a massively populated region, and a pivotal one in the ongoing development of today’s global economy. Also, due to a technical issue plus measures to preserve anonymity, we were not able to trace the locations of those who responded to the survey. This means we do not know if world regions were represented in proportion to their share of global population or GDP, and it means we could not attempt any analysis of survey responses by location.

The best use of our survey is to learn about characteristics of remote work, and possible success factors in managing it, which tend to prevail across industry sectors and geographies. Further, our review of the literature is offered as a concise and practical summary of previous research. Altogether, we hope this paper will serve as a step toward building a wide-ranging, well-rounded body of knowledge on the management of remote work, which will be useful to practitioners and scholars alike.

We also hope it will point to promising areas for future research. As noted throughout the paper, these areas include: industry-specific studies, studies of difficulties versus “make-easy” factors in managing remote workers, and studies of remote work in rapidly emerging economic regions such as Asia.

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