18 May 2023
The View at the Royal College of Surgeons
@ThelFS

## IFS Annual Lecture 2023: Does working from home have a future?

## Does Working From Home Have A Future?

Nick Bloom (Stanford)

IFS Annual Lecture

May $18^{\text {th }} 2023$


## Start by two sets of thanks



## Background and Data on Working From Home

- Research on WFH starting in 2004
- Monthly surveys of 10,000 working age adults and 5,000 firms
- Discussions and consulting with 100s of organizations globally



## Going to cover three sections

>>>> Current state of working from home
>>>> Thoughts on managing hybrid-WFH
>>>> Five impacts on the economy

## WFH is stabilizing at about 25\% of days: a 5-fold jump vs 2019

US full days worked from home, \%


Source: $\quad N=131,225(S W A A)$ $\mathrm{N}=364,540$ (HHP). SWAA data from survey responses weighted to match the US population. Pre-covid data from the American Time Use Survey. CHPS respondents weighted to match the US population aged 20 to 64 in households with incomes above \$25,000.

Survey of Workplace Attitudes and Arrangements (Barrero, Bloom and Davis 2021) https://wfhresearch.com/

# Globally (graduates): North America and UK highest, then Northern Europe and Australia, with Southern Europe lower and Asia lowest 



## Similar Global Pattern in Return to Office - US and UK Lowest, Europe and Australia Middle, and Asia Highest





## English Speaking Countries Job-Postings Data

## Percent of job-postings offering hybrid or remote work



Notes: Share of vacancy postings that say a job allows one or more days remote working per week, covering fully remote and hybrid. Natural language processing of all online jobs in the US, around 43 million in 2022 from Lightcast. From the research paper "Remote work across jobs, companies and space" by Stephen Hansen,

Peter Lambert, Nicholas Bloom, Steven Davis, Raffaella Sadun and Bledi Taska. Data from www.wfhmap.com

Employees are split into three groups - most firms have some of all


The graph back to 1965 shows the size of the pandemic-era WFH jump


This rise in WFH is permanent - online shopping is back to its pretrend, but WFH has stabilized at about $5 x$ its pre-pandemic value

Share of retail spending online, \%


Share of days worked from home, \%


## WFH particularly high in tech and (to a lesser extent) finance

Current WFH: all wage and salary employees by industry


| Notes: | Survey of | of Workplace |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Attitudes | and | Arrangements |
| ww.wf | search.com | m Sample |
| from Nover | ber 2022 to | to April 2023 |

## Percentage of paid full days worked from home


*Pre-COVID estimate taken from the 2017-2018 American Time Use Survey SWAA data from May 2020 to February 2023

Source: Responses to the questions:

- Currently (this week) what is your work status?
- For each day last week, did you work a full day ( 6 or more hours), and if so where?

Notes: For each wave, we compute the percent of paid full days worked from home in the SWAA. The horizontal-axis location shows when the survey was in the field. The preCOVID figure is from the 2017-2018 American Time Use Survey. Before November 2020, we asked the first question above. Since November 2021, we have asked the second question. From November 2020 to October 2021, we back-cast responses to the current question using a regression model based on current-question responses and another question (not shown). We re-weight the sample of US residents aged 20 to 64 earning $\$ 10,000$ or more in 2019 or 2021 to match CPS shares by age-sex-education-earnings cells. $\mathrm{N}=119,797$

## The big WFH gap is in education: university grads have $\approx 2 x$ non-grads



Source: Responses to the questions:

- Currently (this week) what is your work status?
- For each day last week, did you work a full day ( 6 or more hours), and if so where?

Notes: For each wave, we compute the percent of paid full days worked from home in the SWAA. The horizontal-axis location shows when the survey was in the field. We re-weight the sample of US residents aged 20 to 64 earning $\$ 10,000$ or more in 2019 or 2021 to match CPS shares by age-sex-education-earnings cells.
$\mathrm{N}=119,797$

SWAA data from May 2020 to February 2023
Smoothed with a 3 month centered moving average

Four key benefits of Hybrid why this is popular for professionals

1. Employees are happier
2. Productivity is increased (if well organized)
3. Supports diversity, equity and inclusion
4. Saves space (maybe)

## Happier: Employees value hybrid-WFH as about an 8\% pay increase



Source: Data from 17,087 responses through 2021, reweighted to match US population. Industries with 1000+ respondents. Details on https://wfhresearch.com/

## Results for a recent RCT on 1612 engineers, marketing and finance professionals found WFH reduced quit rates 35\%

Tweets
Tweets \& replies
Media

## Nick Bloom @I_Am_NickBloom • Jul 25

New RCT on 1612 employees, finding hybrid \#WFH

1) Reduced quit rates by $1 / 3$
2) Shifted hours from WFH days to office days \& weekends
3) Increased messaging and video calls (even in the office)
4) Generated a small productivity increase

Paper: bit.ly/3J4rL5|

Hybrid WFH lowered employee quit rates by 35\%


Source: Attrition rates for 1612 engineers, marketing and finance professionals of Trip.com who were randomized between September 2021 and February 2022 by even and odd birthdays into control (5-days a week in the office) and treatment (Mon, Tue and Thur in the office; Weds and Fri working from home). Difference statistically significant at the $5 \%$ level. Details in Bloom, Han and Liang (2022) "How Hybrid Work from Home Works Out".

## Note, most employees do not want to WFH every day



Percent who want full-time remote work


Responses to the question: As the pandemic ends, how often would you like to have paid workdays at home?
Sample: Data are from the April to June 2022 SWAA waves from www.wfhresearch.com. The sample includes respondents who have work-from-home experience during the pandemic and pass the attention-check questions. We re-weight the sample of US residents aged 20 to 64 earning $\$ 10,000$ or more in 2019 or 2021 to match Current Population Survey on age, sex, education, and earnings. $\mathbf{N}=\mathbf{8 , 7 8 8}$ (both figures)

Productivity: For professionals fully remote typically lowers productivity (but cuts costs) while organized hybrid raises productivity a little (1\% to 3\%)

Fully Remote


## Organized Hybrid (e.g WFH Mon \& Fri)



The two drivers of higher organized hybrid WFH productivity are: (i) quiet for concentration "deep" work, and (ii) time saved commuting

How did you use the commuting time you saved by working from home, percent


## WFH employees save 9 minutes a day on less personal grooming




Percent who wear fresh clothes when:


Percent who put on makeup when:


Percent who brush their teeth when:


Percent who use deodorant when:


## Diversity: Data suggests Hybrid-WFH can help support diversity in various dimensions (race, gender, age, politics and religion)



Desire for flexibility remains strongest among underrepresented groups Percentage of US survey respondents who prefer a hybrid or fully remote work arrangement, by race/ethnicity


Source: Data from 10,000 US responses in through 2021, reweighted to match the US population. Details on https://wfhresearch.com/

Source: Survey of 10737 knowledge workers in US, Australia, France, Germany, Japan and the US conducted November 1-30, 2021. Details on https://futureforum.com/

Space saving: So far not that much..... l'll come back to this later...


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## Coordination matters - the benefit of the office is being with colleagues

What are the top 3 benefits of working on
your employer's business premises?


|  | Face-to-face collaboration | $\square$ |
| :--- | :--- | :--- |
| Work/personal life boundaries <br> Face time w/ manager | $\square$ | Socializing |
| $\square$ | Quiet |  |

Notes: The sample includes respondents to the February 2022 SWAA who passed the attention check questions and worked from home at some point since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The SWAA samples US residents aged 20 to 64 who earned \$10,000 or more in 2019. $\mathbf{N}=\mathbf{2 , 9 7 3}$.

## So large firms mostly planning team or company coordinated hybrid

Qu: "Who decides which days and how many days employees work remotely?"


Source: Survey of Business Uncertainty conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Stanford University, and the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

If you pick WFH days I would suggest Monday and Friday...


Source: Flex Index (flex.scoopforwork.com) employee surveys and publicly available data on companies with a specific day/week office requirement. $N=229$ companies. The Flex Index is presented by Scoop (scoopforwork.com).

## ...but worth noting enforcement is not always easy

What happens when employees stay home on office days


Notes: SWAA participants asked "How has your employer responded to employees who work on business premises fewer days than requested?" over June to September 2022 re-weighted to match US working population 20 to 64. $\mathrm{N}=$ 17,875. www.wfhresearch.com SBU participants asked "Currently, how does your firm deal with employees who work fewer days on business premises than required by company policy?" in September 2022 reweighted to match US firms. $\mathrm{N}=335$. www.atlantafed.org/SBU

## So, how Leaders Can Make the Most of Hybrid WFH

1) Coordinate your team to come in on the same 2 or 3 days each week (eg T, W \& Th)
2) Promote in person meetings, events, coffee, training, lunches on those office days
3) Suggest cross-office zoom meetings and reading, writing, data etc on home days
4) Treat anchor day attendance like 2019 in person attendance - exemptions only for emergencies like a sick child, burst water pipe or illness.
5) For new hires (< 1 or 2 years) add an extra day in the office for mentoring

## Indeed, appears more mentoring happens on in person days



Responses to the question: How many minutes of your working day did you spend on each of the following activities last Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday/Friday?

Notes: We randomized respondents across days of the week. Each figure shows the average number of minutes for the activity in question among respondents who either worked from home or worked on business premises. The sample includes persons who were asked about Monday thru Friday, who are able to work from home, and participated in the March 2023 SWAA. We re-weight the sample of US residents aged 20 to 64 earning $\$ 10,000$ or more in 2019 or 2021 to match CPS shares by age-sex-education-earnings cells. $\mathbf{N}=\mathbf{2 , 4 1 8}$

## Three other tips for managing a hybrid office

1) Performance reviews

2) Cameras on

3) Offices designed for socializing


## (A) strong performance reviews for managing WFH

- Office employees can be (partly) evaluated by observing inputs - hours \& activity
- WFH employees instead need output evaluation - data, evaluations \& discussion
- Importantly this is not surveillance, but "output" performance reviews



## (B) Encourage cameras on in video zoom meetings

During work meetings on Teams/Zoom/Webex how does having your camera on impact your engagement?



Notes: Respondents to the January 2023 SWAA and April SBU who worked during the previous week or who worked from home at some point since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. We re-weight the SWAA sample to match the Current Population Survey on age, sex, education, and earnings. $\mathrm{N}(\mathrm{SWAA})=4,240 \mathrm{~N}(\mathrm{SBU})=\mathbf{3 3 7}$
(C) More meeting rooms, Teams/Zoom rooms and lounge seating, less cubicles and small offices

Massed offices and desks are out


Video-cubicles, meeting rooms and virtual conference rooms are in


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## 1) The "Donut Effect" - people have left city centers

Cumulative net flows Feb 2020 - November 2022 as \% of population


Source: Arjun Ramani and Nicholas Bloom "The Donut Effect", NBER Working Paper 2021 (updated 2023) using US Postal Service Change of Address Data https://nbloom.people.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj4746/f/w28876.pdf

## "Donut Effect" is shifting spending from city centers to the suburbs

Spending in city centers minus suburbs, 4 cities


Spending in city centers minus suburbs, 40 city average


Notes: Current Mastercard data covers 48 global cities; donut represents monthly transaction value plotted as a difference in growth from the 2019 average (Central Business District - Suburbs). CBDs defined by pulling coordinates of "city hall"/"city center" from Google Maps.

## 2) Public transport journeys have plummeted $\rightarrow 1 / 3$ down

Feb 2020, 100\%


Notes: US Passenger trips in the National Transit Database, covering around 8 m passenger trips per month in February 2020. Data de-seasonalized and on a 3-month moving average (except from 2020/22020/9 due to the rapid impact of the pandemic).
https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd
3) Start-up rates are surging - WFH provides a cheaper way to start a
new company (no rent, do this on the side of your main WFH job....)


Source: US Census Bureau: Business Applications with a high-propensity of turning into payroll businesses. 3-month moving average (except from 2020/2-2020/9 due to the rapid impact of the pandemic). https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/B AHBATOTALSAUS

## 4) Firms increasing outsourcing/offshoring of IT, HR and finance to access talent, save costs and free up space

What has increased remote work changed at your firm?


Notes: Survey conducted in August 2022 by the Atlanta Federal Reserve Bank's Survey of Business Uncertainty. $\mathrm{N}=481$. Firms reweighted to match all public and private US firms.

## 5) Golf has increased $52 \%$ since 2019 , almost all on weekdays...



Note: Data for August 2019 and August 2022 for a sample of trips. Those included are trips in the INRIX database, which includes trips in vehicles with GPS and phones with location tracking turned-on. The trip needs to be to one of the 3,400 satellite identified gold courses and to have lasted more than two hours. We estimate we sample about $5 \%$ of total golf trips.

...the weekday increase happened throughout the day - for example a 178\% increase at 3pm on Wednesday


Note: Data for August 2019 and August 202 for a sample of trips. Those included are trips in the INRIX database, which includes trips in vehicles with GPS and phones with location tracking turned-on. The trip needs to be to one of the 3,400 satellite identified gold courses and to have lasted more than two hours. We estimate we sample about $5 \%$ of total golf trips.


## Longer run technology will continue to build WFH momentum

Share of New Patent Applications Supporting WFH


- New WFH technologies are being rapidly developed as the market for WFH products has increased 5x
- For example, scheduling software, better AV, virtual reality and holograms
- Should make WFH more appealing and space scheduling easier


## Conclusions

1. WFH is here to stay - typically 2 days a week for the average office worker
2. Key to succeed is coordinate so employees in together to work socially
3. Offices are being designed to focus on social working together


## Back-Up

Surge in start-ups post pandemic - four firms I am working with:

## https://radious.pro/

## https://kadence.co/

https://www.takescoop.com/
https://ro.am/
http://projectpair.org/

## We offer close-to-home, collaborative spaces.

Work together in person;

And get some work-life separation;

## With no/low

 commute;In unique spaces, distributed across town.
radious Learn more ${ }^{-}$Rentaworkspace Manage listings Employers (S)V

Backyard Oasis: Private Office with Shared Outdoor Meeting Space


Shared Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) in Portland hosted by Becky 1 workstation $\cdot 1$ meeting space $\cdot 1$ bathroom
Ask host a question

Come experience our thoughtfully crafted eco-industrial detached studio. The studio has great day light with two large French doors that open up to a shared covered deck and expands the space for meetings, a working lunch or taking a mental break.

| Start date | End date |
| :---: | :---: |
| $\mathrm{mm} / \mathrm{dd} / \mathrm{yyy}$ | $\mathrm{mm} / \mathrm{dd} / \mathrm{syyy}$ |

Number of people 5

Check availability


## A B2B SaaS model for on-demand workspaces

1. Companies prepay via subscription;
2. Employees book spaces for free;
3. Homeowners earn cash;
4. Radious keeps $25 \%$.


## EKadence

"Hybrid work represents the biggest shift to how we work in our generation - it will require a new operating model, spanning
, and

- Satya Nadella, CEO - Microsoft


## Supercharging employee's hybrid experience

Coordinate with colleagues, reserve flexible spaces, organize events and discover the perfect hybrid rhythm


Aaron Levie
Box
"I'm confident that quantum mechanics is far easier to understand than trying to figure out how teams will manage their schedules in a hybrid workplace."

## Make every trip to the office count.

ज1 Calendar Today < > August 2022

Never go into the office, find out your teammates aren't there, and spend the day stuck on Zoom. Team Sync is free to use.


## Hybrid without the heavy lift

Say goodbye to the back and forth of figuring out who's working where. With automated routines and one-click work status updates, teams stay in the loop without all the noise.

```
Add to Chrome for Free
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## Roam is Your Whole Company in one HQ

There's a lot of debate about the future of work, and while nobody knows what the future holds, we do know with absolute certainty: It will never be the same.

Companies like Zoom solved the videoconferencing technology problem, but today things that used to take two people five minutes right now are being scheduled for 60 minute calls next week. There are too many meetings, companies don't feel connected and culture is off, and there are too many software tools that don't work and add up to a large cost.

We need to get back to technology that supports the workflow, not the reverse.
Roam is an all-in-one Cloud HQ designed to bring a whole distributed company together in one headquarters.

Roam makes companies:

- more productive with shorter meetings
- more connected with a map that gives a feeling of working together without meeting

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# Stanford team piloting the future of hybrid work 

Helping match Bay Area companies to split office space


## WFH highest in large cities and university towns



