

# Companies that Discontinue Remote Work and Other Forms of Flexibility Undercut Productivity and Collaboration Gains

*New national research suggests lack of strategy and training is to blame, not the flexibility*

**Madison, New Jersey, March 19, 2018**—Flexibility in where, when and how you work – including remote work—leads to innovation, as well as communication, creativity, productivity and engagement, according to new national research from the [Flex+Strategy Group](#) (FSG). This is among the key findings from a national probability telephone survey of 595 full-time employed adults conducted for FSG by ORC International. The results suggest major corporations including IBM may have gotten it wrong when they cited remote work as a barrier to innovation and collaboration and asked employees to re-locate back to company offices. The research also found a significant lack of training required for successful flexibility.

“Organizations that blame flexibility for their performance challenges risk missing out on the very business gains they’re trying to achieve,” says flexible workplace strategist [Cali Williams Yost](#), CEO, Flex+Strategy Group. “The flexibility is not the problem. It’s that organizations don’t know how to use the flexibility and remote work strategically to transform their business.”

## Remote Work Here to Stay and Mostly Done by Men

While IBM attracted notice last year when it discontinued its remote work program, more than one-third of U.S. full-time employees now do most of their work from a remote location, 34 percent in 2017. That’s up slightly from 31 percent in 2013 and men remain the majority of remote workers. Regardless of where employees are located, almost all (98%) report some form of work flexibility.

## Flexibility Improves—Not Impedes—Communication, Creativity, Productivity and Engagement

Of those who do work flexibly, 45 percent feel that flexibility increases their ability to “communicate, create and innovate with colleagues.” Only 5 percent report a decrease, with 49 percent saying it remains the same. Further, 60 percent who have flexible work options feel they’re “more productive and engaged.” Only 4 percent said they are less so, with 34 percent feeling their level of productivity and engagement is consistent.

Remote workers also noted the same performance benefits. Among remote workers, 41 percent feel their flexibility increases communication, creativity and innovation, with only 4 percent reporting a decline. A majority also feels more productive and engaged (58%), with only 2 percent saying they are less so.

## Training Key but Lacking for Majority of Flexible Workers

While almost all employees report having some degree of work flexibility, the majority (57%) receive no training or guidance on how to manage it. Fewer reported receiving such instruction than previously—only 42 percent in 2017 compared to 47 percent in 2015. That’s a red flag for Yost who notes the investment in training and resources to support flexibility has significant and positive business impacts.

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## ***Flex Strategy Group 2018 Research Findings/2***

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“You can’t simply give employees a laptop and say ‘just get your job done’ without meaningful training on how to strategically use flexibility, technology and workspace options to work smarter,” says Yost.

There was a notable difference between those employees who received training and felt their flexibility makes them more productive and engaged (70%) versus those without training who also noted an increase (53%). Similarly, there was a significant difference between those flexible workers who did receive training and report their ability to communicate, create and innovate increases (53%) compared to only 39 percent among those who didn’t receive guidance.

“This national data validates the productivity and collaboration increases we’ve seen firsthand following training and pilot programs with clients, including Con Edison and Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center,” explains Yost. “Organizations that invest in building a high performance flexible work culture—with the right training, tools and techniques to best facilitate how, when and where employees work—see positive and measurable results.”

### **Technology Fuels Collaboration and Flexible Work but Remains Old-School**

More than three-quarters (76%) of all respondents feel advancements in workplace technology have made it easier to team up with and communicate with colleagues, and 58 percent said it has made it easier to work flexibly. Employees that received flexibility training were more likely to note those positive views. However, despite widespread availability of collaborative technologies that improve efficiency, most employees (65%) go old-school using email, spread sheets and word documents as their “frequently” used tools to update supervisors and colleagues about work progress and performance. Only 17 percent noted frequent use of video/web conferencing and just 8 percent frequently used cloud-based project management software.

“Not everyone needs to be ‘shoulder to shoulder’ five days a week for successful team work,” Yost says. “With a purpose-driven flexible work strategy and infrastructure, organizations can match work to how, when and where it’s most effective, and retain employees who value control over how to manage their work and lives.”

This research is the most recent installment in a biennial series of FSG studies that have monitored the national progress of issues related to work life flexibility from the individual’s point of view since 2006. The most recent survey was conducted November 2–5 and 9–12, 2017 with a margin of error of +/- 4 percent. A summary report with additional data, organizational assessment and infographic are available at [www.flexstrategygroup.com](http://www.flexstrategygroup.com).

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