

## The working-from-home revolution

### Level 3 • Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

Many people are now working from home. Which of these jobs could be done from home and which cannot?

banker   construction worker   journalist   teacher  
computer programmer   driver   doctor   lawyer   police officer   pilot

#### 2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

wastage   remotely   commute   behemoth   dawns on  
lockdown   acknowledge   shift   pandemic   run on

1. A \_\_\_\_\_ is an occurrence of a disease that affects many people across the whole world.
2. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a situation where people are not allowed to leave their homes.
3. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a change in something.
4. A \_\_\_\_\_ is the journey to and from work each day.
5. If you work \_\_\_\_\_, you do not go to a workplace but work from home on a computer.
6. If things such as meetings \_\_\_\_\_, they continue for longer than expected or planned.
7. If you \_\_\_\_\_ something, you accept or admit that it is true or real.
8. A \_\_\_\_\_ is something that is very large, especially a company.
9. If something \_\_\_\_\_ you, you realize it for the first time.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ is a situation in which something, such as time or money, is not used effectively.

#### 3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. Which company is the world's biggest employer in the marketing and advertising sector?
2. How many people does this company have working from home?
3. According to three-quarters of US chief financial officers, what percentage of their workforce will become permanent work-from-home employees?
4. Which three business sectors does the article mention as 'likely, long-term losers'?
5. What percentage of the UK workforce worked from home before the coronavirus pandemic?
6. What percentage of US chief financial officers believe that 20% of workers will eventually work from home?

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#### From boardroom to spare room: the working-from-home revolution

*UK companies are grappling with a cultural shift on the back of the coronavirus lockdown*

**Mark Sweney**

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- 1 Before the coronavirus pandemic struck, 1.7 million people mainly worked from home in the UK or about 5% of the country's 33 million workforce. Since the pandemic, millions more have joined them in the spare room or at the kitchen table. Amid warnings that some lockdown restrictions could stay in place into 2021, companies are grappling with a sudden cultural shift in how we work.
- 2 Mark Read, the chief executive of WPP, the world's biggest employer in the marketing and advertising sector, welcomes a working-from-home revolution but says it is not right for everyone. "If you said to me five weeks ago that I would have 100,000 people working from home and we would function fine, I'd say you were mad," he says. "One of the most common questions I get is about working from home longer term. There is interest in it, but there is also a demand to come back to an office. Junior employees and those in shared accommodation find homeworking much more difficult than senior executives with houses and gardens."
- 3 For one London-based animation and special-effects business, Jellyfish Pictures, working from home has been a surprise success. In the future, its staff will find that, on certain days of the week, their new morning commute is limited to walking to the kitchen table. Jellyfish, which employs about 250 staff and has credits including *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* and *Black Mirror*, has continued to work on projects including a film for the *Shrek*-maker, DreamWorks, despite shutting its five UK studios at the beginning of March.
- 4 "What we have learnt from this is that there hasn't been any drop in productivity," the Jellyfish founder, Phil Dobree, says. "Some practices have improved, such as communication, which is actually more regular and efficient remotely. In the office, meetings often unnecessarily run on, or conversely people don't communicate enough – now they are."
- 5 The speed with which Silicon Valley companies such as Google, Facebook and Twitter ordered their employees globally to make the shift to homeworking in late February and early March makes a challenging transition for many companies look easy.
- 6 "Most Facebook employees are fortunate to be able to work from home," the company's chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg, acknowledged. "We know that most people can't work from home as easily as many of our employees can." Indeed, the companies that are most able to adapt to homeworking are limited to sectors such as media, tech and financial services. For others representing vast areas of employment – airlines, bricks-and-mortar retail, car manufacturing – it is impossible.
- 7 But adaptation is occurring where it can. A US survey by the research firm Gartner has found that three-quarters of chief financial officers believe that at least 5% of their workforce – who previously worked in company offices – will become permanent work-from-home employees after the pandemic ends. Of those CFOs, 17% believe a fifth of staff will move to working from home and 4% believe that half of employees will become remote workers.
- 8 The lessons learnt from lockdown could spark a more rapid and widespread "virtualization" of business practices, according to one investor. "It is clear to us that we are likely to see an increasing virtualization of business life," says Jamie Ross, a fund manager of Henderson EuroTrust. "Remote working has gone much more smoothly than many companies feared. We will see more people working from home, smaller office spaces, more meetings being conducted online and less corporate travel."
- 9 From that perspective, the likely long-term losers are airlines, hotels and a commercial property sector already reeling from the destruction being suffered by retailers. It will also change some industries that have been under pressure but can adapt at least. The publishing industry has had the technology to allow many staff to work from home for years, but many companies have been resistant to implementing widespread flexible working practices.
- 10 The impact of the coronavirus has accelerated the long-term pressures publishers have been

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battling, including the decline in print sales and drift of readership and advertising online to the behemoths of Google and Facebook. As balance sheets are further stretched, the cost savings from being able to reduce office space is likely to prove attractive.

- 11 “Coronavirus has concertinaed a lot of change we have been seeing over the last number of years in just three months, flexible working being one of them,” says James Wildman, the chief executive of the *Cosmopolitan* owner, Hearst UK, and a former executive at the publisher of the *Mirror* and *Express* titles. “Office space is costly and tends to be high density, and a lot of people will be uncomfortable with that even after the virus. Forward-thinking managers were already pushing flexible working, but in more traditional industries, like newspaper publishing, there has unfortunately been a cultural lag.”

- 12 City banks were some of the first to split their operations, with Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, HSBC and Barclays sending thousands of staff to work from home. John Cronin, a financial analyst at the stockbroker Goodbody, says it will start dawning on bosses that most banking roles – including research, trading and sales – are desk jobs that can ultimately be done from home. “This will be a revolution in terms of how we work,” he says. “There’s a lot of wastage. A lot of people travel abroad for one meeting, and I think those days are over.”

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#### 4 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer according to the text.

- According to the chief executive of WPP, how do people react to working from home?
  - Everyone likes it because they don't have to commute.
  - Most people dislike it because it's boring.
  - Some people find it more difficult than others.
- According to the founder of Jellyfish, what aspect of the business has particularly improved?
  - productivity
  - communication
  - film projects
- According to Mark Zuckerberg, which of these sectors can adapt most easily to working from home?
  - airlines
  - media
  - retail
- How might publishers save money in the future?
  - by reducing office space and encouraging flexible working
  - by transferring their readership and advertising to Google and Facebook
  - by making office space more high density so that more people can work in smaller spaces

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#### 5 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *try hard to solve a difficult problem* (para 1)
2. a four-word noun phrase meaning *traditional shops that do not operate on the internet* (para 6)
3. a noun meaning *the process of changing something so that it can be used in a different way or for a different purpose* (para 7)
4. a verb meaning *make something happen* (para 8)
5. a verb meaning *feel very shocked, upset or confused* (para 9)
6. a verb meaning *squeeze or press together* (para 11)
7. a two-word adjective meaning *planning for the future* (para 11)
8. a noun meaning *a period of delay between one event and another* (para 11)

#### 6 Expressions with prepositions

Complete the phrases from the text using prepositions.

1. resistant \_\_\_\_\_ implementing flexible working practices
2. a revolution \_\_\_\_\_ terms of how we work
3. working \_\_\_\_\_ the kitchen table
4. limited \_\_\_\_\_ walking to the kitchen table
5. most able to adapt \_\_\_\_\_ homeworking
6. a decline \_\_\_\_\_ sales

#### 7 Word-building

Complete the sentences using the correct form of the word in brackets at the end of each sentence.

1. The founder of Jellyfish complains that meetings in the office often run on \_\_\_\_\_. [NECESSARY]
2. For sectors representing vast areas of \_\_\_\_\_, homeworking is impossible. [EMPLOY]
3. The lesson learnt from lockdown could lead to a rapid \_\_\_\_\_ of business practices. [VIRTUAL]
4. Some lockdown \_\_\_\_\_ could stay in place until 2021. [RESTRICT]
5. At Jellyfish, they haven't noticed any drop in \_\_\_\_\_. [PRODUCE]
6. An \_\_\_\_\_ is someone who invests money in a business. [INVEST]

#### 8 Discussion

Discuss the statements.

- The age of business travel is over.
- If you work from home, you should be paid less.
- The idea of homeworking is unfair on people who have to work face-to-face.