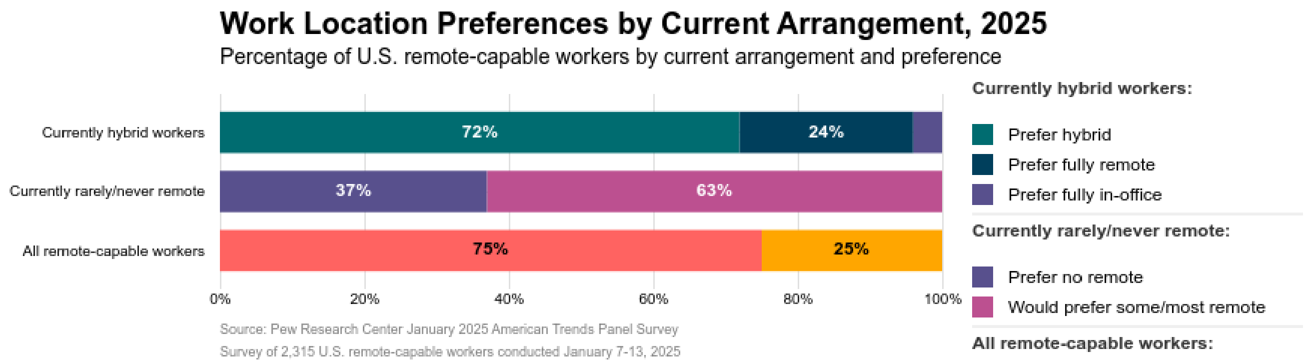
Many Remote Workers Say They'd Be Likely to Leave Their Job If They Could No Longer Work from Home

Remote-Work Landscape and Employee Preferences

The past several years have dramatically changed how and where work happens. As many organizations shift away from pandemic-era flexibility, employees are demonstrating a strong preference for maintaining remote and hybrid work arrangements. Recent data from Pew Research Center's January 2025 survey reveals a fundamental mismatch between evolving employer mandates and worker preferences, highlighting a significant retention risk for companies reconsidering their flexible work policies.

The Rise of Remote-Capable Work and Current Preferences

Pew's January 2025 survey of 2,315 U.S. remote-capable workers found that 75% currently work remotely at least some of the time. When asked about preferences, the data shows a clear desire for flexibility - among hybrid workers, 72% prefer continuing their current arrangement, while only 24% express a desire to work fully remote. Even more telling, among workers who rarely or never work remotely, 63% indicated they would choose some form of remote work if given the option.



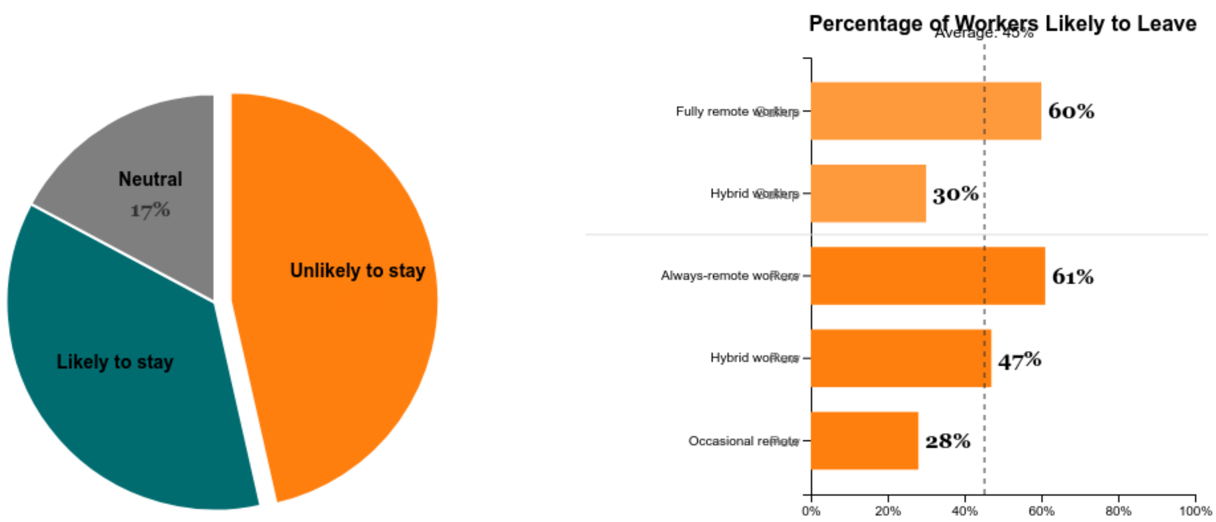
Turnover Intentions When Remote Work Is Removed

Perhaps the most concerning finding for employers is how strongly employees feel about maintaining access to remote work. Among non-self-employed remote workers surveyed by [Pew Research Center [1]](), 46% indicated they would be unlikely to stay at their current job if their employer ended work-from-home opportunities, with 26% describing themselves as "very unlikely" to stay. Only 36% said they would be likely to remain with their employer (20% "very likely"), while 17% expressed neutral feelings.

These findings align with other industry research showing strong quit intentions when flexibility is removed. In Gallup's Q2 2023 survey of approximately 18,871 U.S. remote-capable employees, 30% of hybrid workers and a staggering 60% of fully remote workers reported they would be "extremely likely" to leave if forced back on-site full-time.

Worker Intentions if Remote Work Options Ended

Percentage of non-self-employed remote workers who would stay or leave if work-from-home ended



Source: Pew Research Center January 2025 ATP Survey; Gallup Q2 2023 Survey

Gallup data shows workers "extremely likely" to leave; Pew data shows workers "unlikely to stay"

The Rise of In-Office Mandates

Despite clear employee preferences and quit intentions, employer in-office mandates are increasing. Pew's research shows that 75% of non-full-time-remote workers now face a set number of mandatory in-office days per week or month – up significantly from 63% in early 2023.

This mismatch between employee preferences and employer policies creates a challenging dynamic across industries. The trend toward stricter in-office requirements despite employee resistance suggests many organizations may be underestimating the retention risk associated with ending remote work options.

Turnover Intent and Subgroup Insights

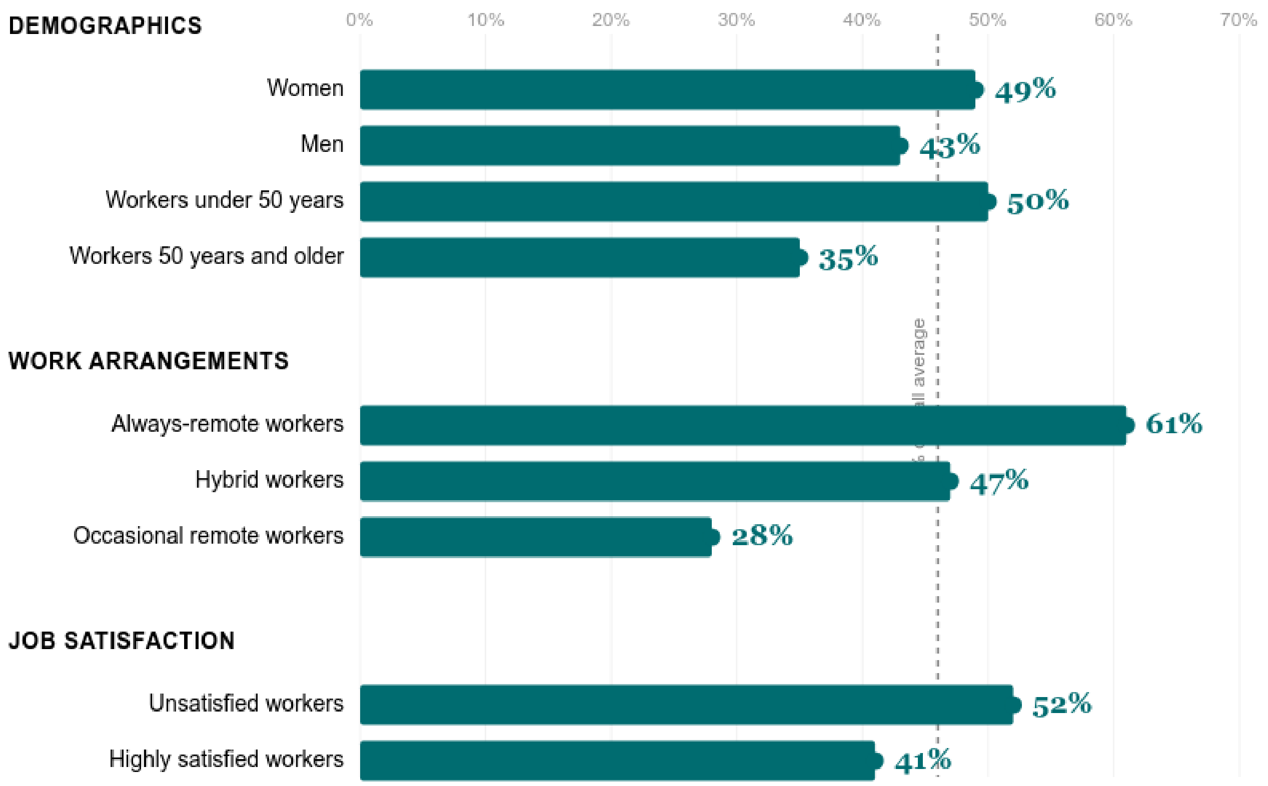
Not all employees respond the same way to the prospect of losing remote work privileges. Understanding these differences can help organizations identify which segments of their workforce may be at highest risk of departure if flexible work options are rescinded.

Demographic and Work Arrangement Differences

Pew Research Center [1] data reveals significant variations in quit intentions across different employee segments:

Who's Most Likely to Leave if Remote Work Ends?

Percentage of workers unlikely to stay if employer ended work-from-home, by group



Source: Pew Research Center January 2025 ATP Survey

Survey of non-self-employed remote-capable workers who would be "unlikely" to stay if work-from-home ended

These differences in quit intentions highlight several important patterns:

1. **Gender gap**: Women (49%) show a higher likelihood to leave than men (43%) if remote work ends, potentially reflecting different family care responsibilities.

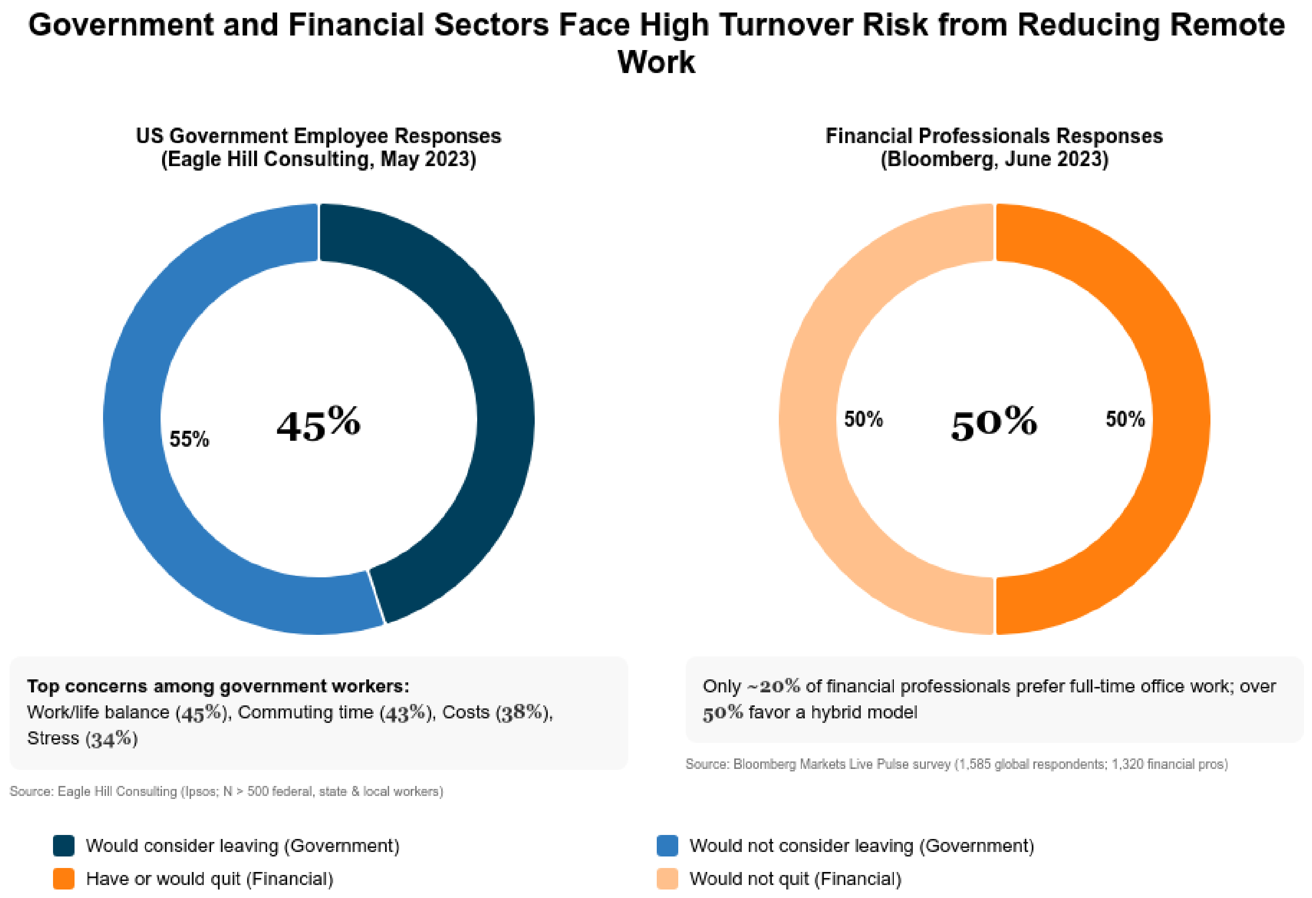
2. **Age differences**: Younger workers (under 50) are significantly more likely to quit (50%) compared to those 50 and older (35%), suggesting different generational attitudes toward workplace flexibility.

3. **Work arrangement impact**: Current work arrangements strongly influence quit intentions, with always-remote workers most likely to leave (61%), followed by hybrid workers (47%), and occasional remote workers (28%). This graduated response suggests that those with more extensive remote work experience have developed stronger preferences for flexibility.

4. **Satisfaction correlation**: Unsatisfied workers (52%) are more likely to leave than highly satisfied workers (41%) if remote privileges end, though it's notable that even among satisfied employees, over 4 in 10 would consider departing.

Government and Financial Sectors at High Risk

The public sector faces particularly high turnover risk from rescinding remote work. A May 2023 Eagle Hill Consulting survey found that 45% of US government employees "would consider looking for a new job" if remote or hybrid working options were reduced. Similarly, [Bloomberg's Markets Live Pulse survey [2]] in June 2023 reported that approximately 1 in 2 financial professionals "have or would quit" if required to spend more time in the office.



Government workers cited several key concerns around losing remote work, including work/life balance (45%), commuting time (43%), costs (38%), and stress (34%). They also recognized the benefits of different work settings, noting that remote work is superior for deep thinking (64%) and research (61%), while acknowledging that team building is better in-person (85%).

These sector-specific insights mirror broader patterns across industries and highlight the multifaceted reasons employees value remote work - from personal wellbeing to productivity concerns. The consistently high percentage of workers willing to leave across different sectors suggests the preference for flexible work has become deeply embedded in professional expectations.

Productivity, Compensation, and Replacement Costs

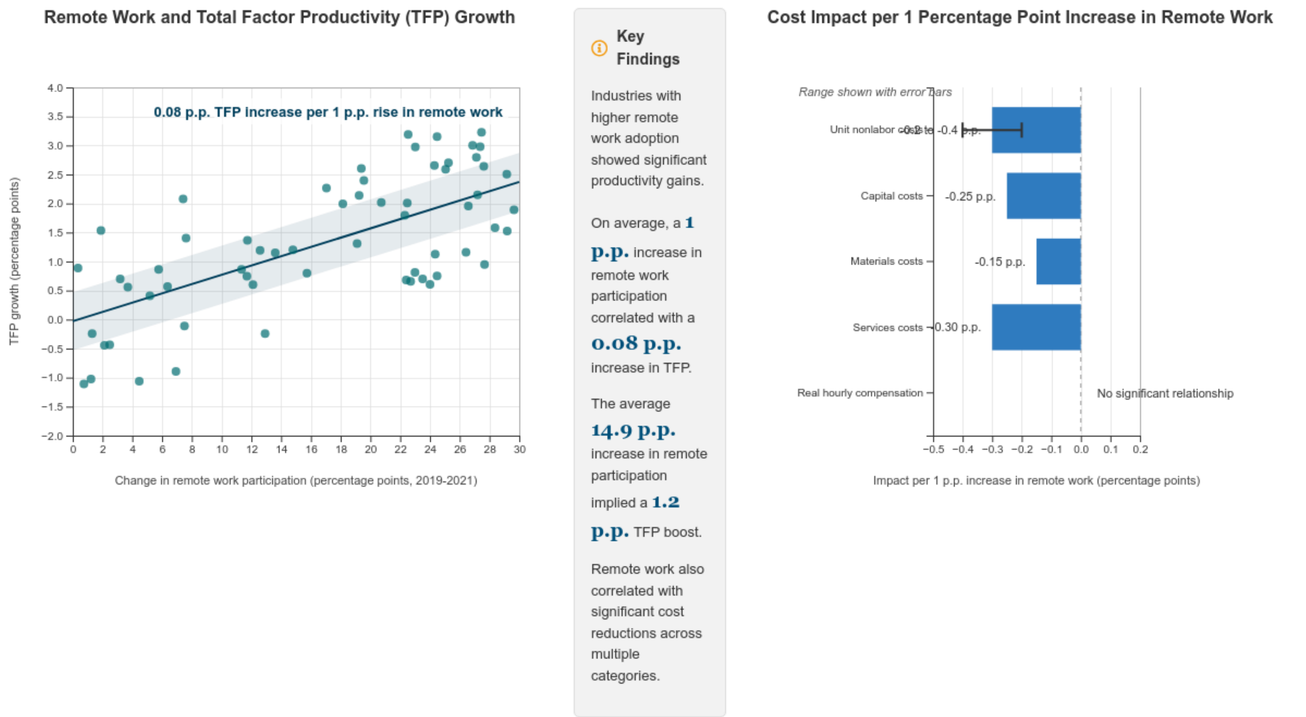
The economic implications of restrictive return-to-office policies extend well beyond individual employee preferences. Research indicates that remote and hybrid work arrangements correlate with productivity gains, while the costs of replacing departing employees can be substantial - especially in high-wage remote roles.

Remote Work's Productivity Impact

Contrary to concerns about remote work hampering productivity, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) shows a positive correlation between remote work participation and productivity growth. Across 61 private-sector industries, a 1 percentage-point increase in remote workers was associated with a 0.08 percentage-point rise in total factor productivity (TFP) growth during 2019–21, rising slightly to 0.09 in 2019–22.

Remote Work Correlates with Productivity Gains and Cost Reductions

Analysis of 61 private-sector industries, 2019-2022



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), October 2024

Further analysis indicates that the output-weighted average 14.9 percentage-point increase in remote participation implied a meaningful 1.2 percentage-point boost in total factor productivity. This productivity gain appears to be driven largely by 0.2–0.4 percentage-point declines in unit nonlabor costs (capital, materials, services) per percentage-point rise in telework.

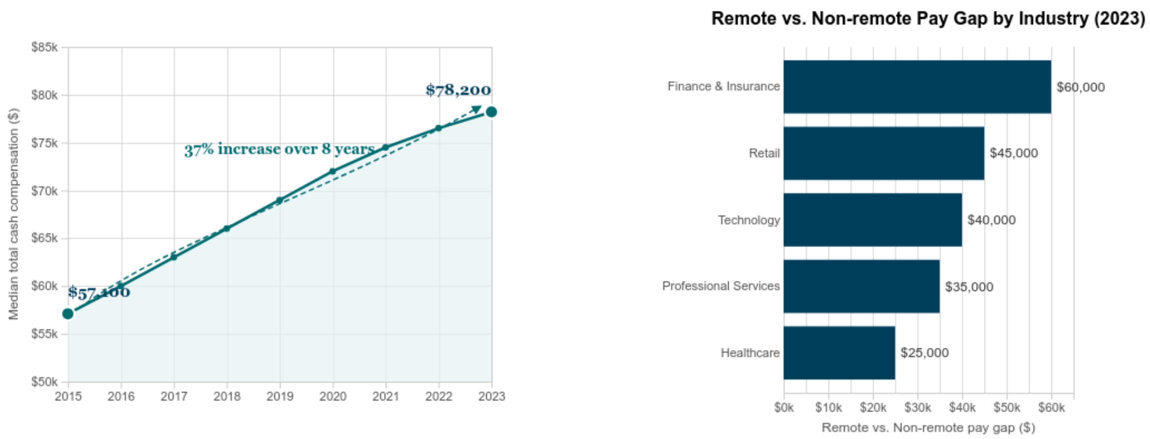
Importantly, the BLS data showed no significant negative relationship between remote work and real hourly compensation growth, countering arguments that remote work undermines worker earnings.

Rising Compensation for Remote Roles

The compensation landscape for remote workers has evolved significantly over time, with remote roles now commanding substantial premiums in many industries. Payscale's survey data shows that median total cash compensation for workers remote "all or most of the time" rose from $57,100 in 2015 to $78,200 in 2023 – an increase of approximately 37% over eight years.

Remote Worker Compensation Has Risen Significantly

Median total cash compensation for workers remote "all or most of the time" (2015-2023)



Source: Payscale Compensation Survey Data, 2015-2023

The compensation premium for remote work varies significantly by industry. Finance & Insurance and Retail show particularly large pay gaps of up to $60,000 between remote and non-remote roles, with Technology, Professional Services, and Healthcare also showing substantial differentials.

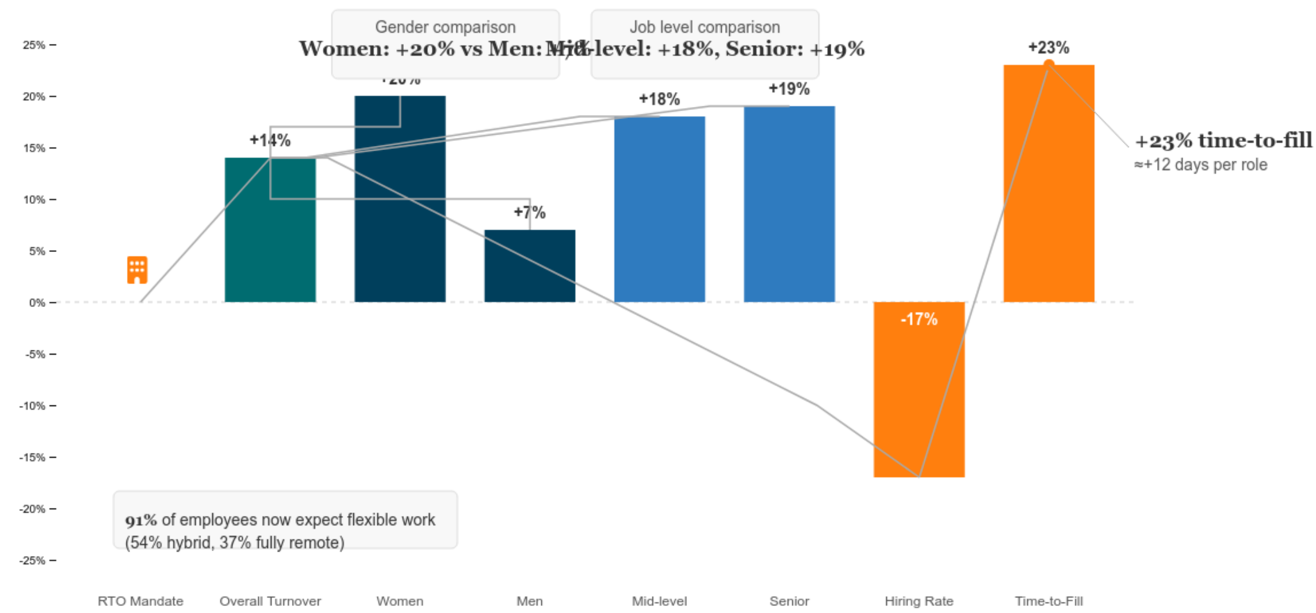
These findings highlight the financial stakes of remote work policies: organizations that force high-earning remote employees back to rigid office schedules risk losing talent that commands significant premiums in the labor market and would be costly to replace.

Replacement Costs and Time-to-Fill Impact

The financial implications of turnover driven by strict return-to-office mandates can be substantial. Research by Dr. Mark Ma and colleagues, analyzing over 3 million LinkedIn profiles, reveals that S&P 500 tech and financial firms enforcing RTO mandates experienced a 14% jump in turnover. This was especially pronounced among women (+20% vs. +7% for men), mid-level skilled workers (+18%), and senior managers (+19%).

The Hidden Costs of Return-to-Office Mandates

Impact on S&P 500 tech and financial firms based on analysis of >3 million LinkedIn profiles



Source: "Return to Office Mandates and Brain Drain," Dr. Mark Ma et al., SSRN, December 2024

Beyond the immediate turnover impact, these mandates also negatively affected hiring capabilities. The same research found that time-to-fill for open positions increased by 23% (approximately 12 additional days per role) following RTO mandates, while overall hiring rates fell by 17%. These metrics reflect the difficulty of replacing workers who leave due to inflexible work policies, especially in a labor market where 91% of employees now expect some form of flexible work.

The financial implications of these trends are significant. With longer vacancy periods, reduced hiring success, and disproportionate losses of experienced talent, the true cost of strict return-to-office policies may far exceed the immediate operational adjustments.

Retention Strategies and Autonomy Models

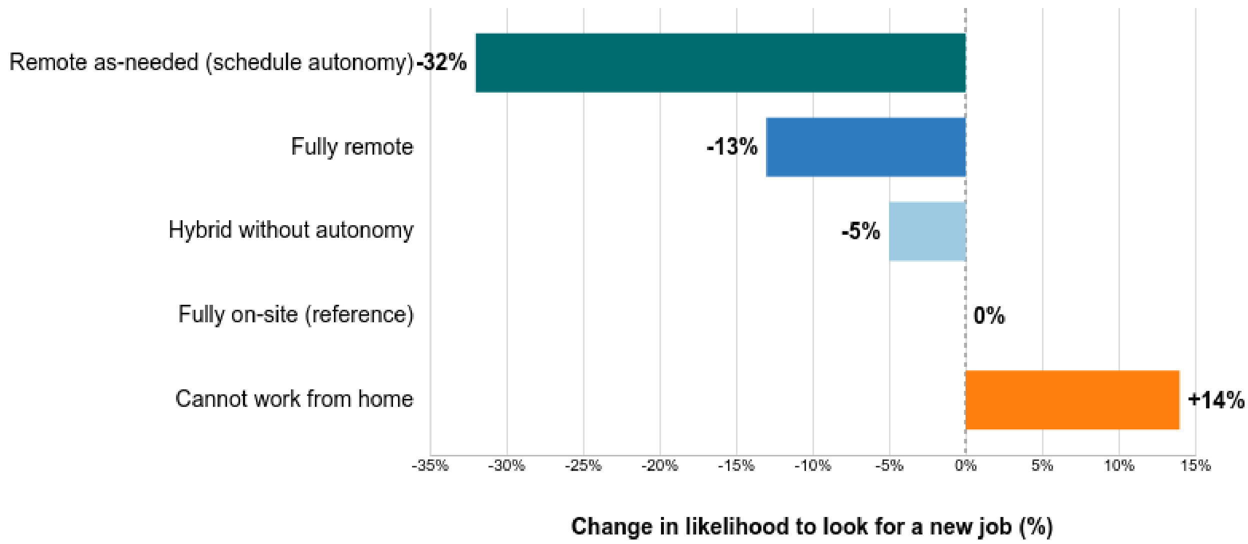
Organizations seeking to minimize the retention risks associated with workplace flexibility can implement evidence-based strategies that balance business needs with employee preferences. Research consistently shows that schedule autonomy and co-designed hybrid frameworks are particularly effective at reducing turnover intentions.

The Power of Schedule Autonomy

Perhaps the most compelling finding from recent research is that granting employees control over when they work remotely is more powerful for retention than any specific remote work arrangement. Payscale's logistic-regression analysis of nearly 310,000 employees found that those with "remote as-needed" privileges are 32% less likely to look for a new job than non-remote peers – significantly outperforming both fully remote arrangements (which showed a 13% reduction in job-seeking) and hybrid schedules without autonomy.

Schedule Autonomy Is the Most Powerful Retention Driver

Change in likelihood to look for a new job by work arrangement (Payscale, n = 309,971, 2021-2023)



Source: Payscale logistic-regression analysis, August 2021–

Key Insights:

Employees with schedule autonomy are **32%** less likely to seek a new job than those working fully on-site.

Gallup found 31% of hybrid employees have full autonomy over their office schedule, correlating with higher engagement.

Conversely, employees who cannot work from home are 14% more likely to seek new employment compared to those who work fully on-site but could potentially work remotely. This finding suggests that the mere absence of remote work options – regardless of whether they would be utilized – increases turnover risk.

Gallup's research provides additional context, finding that only 31% of hybrid employees currently have full autonomy over their office schedule. When employees do have this autonomy, it correlates with higher engagement levels and lower turnover intentions – especially when teams collaboratively design their hybrid working rhythms.

Evidence-Based Retention Strategies

Building on these insights, several evidence-based approaches can help organizations reduce remote-driven turnover:

Four Evidence-Based Strategies to Reduce Remote-Driven Turnover

Based on Gallup and Payscale research on hybrid work retention

Co-Created Hybrid Guidelines

Involve teams in designing their own hybrid rhythms within a broader framework. Gallup finds collaboration on scheduling produces both **higher engagement and retention** than top-down mandates.

Robust Performance Management

Implement regular check-ins, clear visibility into goals, and outcome-based evaluation. **80%** of hybrid workers report receiving no formal training on hybrid collaboration.

Manager Training & Development

73% of hybrid managers have received no formal training on hybrid leadership. Focus training on outcome-based management rather than monitoring presence or activity.

Compelling Workplace Value Proposition

Make in-office time meaningful through collaboration, team building, and experiences that can't be replicated remotely. Great Place To Work finds choice **multiplies retention by 3x**.

Sources: Gallup Q2 2023 survey (~18,871 U.S. remote-capable employees); Payscale 2021-2023 data; Great Place To Work

1. **Co-created hybrid guidelines**: Rather than imposing rigid schedules, organizations can implement what Gallup calls "flexibility within a framework." When teams collaboratively design their hybrid working patterns, engagement and retention both improve compared to top-down mandates.
2. **Robust performance management**: Regular check-ins, clear visibility into goals, and outcome-based evaluation help maintain accountability without requiring constant in-person supervision. This is particularly important given that 80% of hybrid workers report receiving no formal training on how to collaborate effectively in a hybrid environment.
3. **Manager training and development**: According to Gallup, 73% of hybrid managers and senior leaders have received no formal training on best practices for hybrid leadership. Organizations should invest in training that emphasizes managing for outcomes rather than presence or activity.
4. **Compelling workplace value proposition**: For hybrid models to succeed, in-office time must offer clear value

through meaningful collaboration, team building, and experiences that can't be replicated remotely. Great Place To Work [3] research finds that giving employees choice in work location multiplies retention – those who can choose between remote, hybrid, or on-site are 3× more likely to stay.

Organizations that implement these evidence-based strategies create environments where flexibility becomes a retention asset rather than a point of contention. By focusing on autonomy, training, and meaningful in-office experiences, companies can reduce turnover risk while maintaining productive collaboration.

Mandate Backfire and Case Studies

Recent history is filled with examples where strict return-to-office mandates have backfired, leading to increased turnover, operational disruption, and reputational damage. Conversely, organizations that have embraced flexibility often report improved retention and engagement. These contrasting outcomes provide valuable lessons for workplace policy development.

When Mandates Trigger Chaos: Federal Telework Rollback

A stark example of mandate disruption occurred with President Trump's January 2025 executive order ending remote work for federal employees. This order forced the return of 2.28 million civilians across 24 federal agencies – though it's worth noting that only 10% had been fully remote prior to the order, and 46% had some telework eligibility, according to a 2024 Office of Management and Budget report.

The abrupt return created what NPR described as widespread "chaos" with shortages of basic resources like desks, Wi-Fi, parking, and even toilet paper. Many government employees viewed the return-to-office push as an indirect attrition strategy, despite telework having saved agencies $230 million in fiscal year 2023 through reduced real estate needs and other efficiencies.

Tale of Two Approaches: When Mandates Backfire vs. When Flexibility Works

Contrasting outcomes from different return-to-office strategies

Failed Approach: Strict Mandates

Federal Telework Rollback (Jan 2025)

- **2.28M** civilians across 24 federal agencies forced back to offices
- Only **10%** had been fully remote, **46%** had telework eligibility
- NPR interviews revealed "chaos" with shortages of desks, Wi-Fi, parking
- Many viewed as indirect attrition strategy
- Sacrificed **$230M** in annual savings from telework

S&P 500 Tech & Financial Firms

- **14%** jump in turnover following RTO mandates
- Women saw **20%** turnover increase vs **7%** for men
- Time-to-fill rose **23%** (≈+12 days per role)
- Hire rates fell by **17%**
- JPMorgan Chase disabled internal comments on its RTO announcement to quell dissent

Successful Approach: Intentional Flexibility

Dropbox "Virtual First" Policy

- Launched in **2020**, maintained instead of rolling back
- Designated remote work as primary mode
- Repurposed offices as "Dropbox Studios" for collaboration
- Reported improved employee engagement scores
- Enhanced global team efficiency through asynchronous work

Atlassian's Work-From-Anywhere Model

- Employees can choose location based on personal needs
- Only requires overlap with team for **4 hours** in 24-hour period
- Shifted focus to outcome-based KPIs instead of seat-time
- Reports higher innovation output
- No productivity decrease after implementation

Sources: NPR, March 2025; Dr. Mark Ma et al., SSRN, December 2024; company reports

Corporate Mandate Consequences

The corporate sector has seen similar patterns. A University of Pittsburgh-led study by Dr. Mark Ma and colleagues analyzed over 3 million LinkedIn profiles and found that S&P 500 tech and financial firms implementing RTO mandates experienced:

- 14% jump in overall turnover
- Disproportionate impact on women (20% increase in turnover vs. 7% for men)
- 18% higher turnover among mid-level skilled workers
- 19% increase in turnover among senior managers
- 23% longer time-to-fill for open positions (approximately 12 additional days per role)
- 17% drop in overall hiring rates

Some organizations have attempted to minimize visible dissent when implementing mandates. For example, JPMorgan Chase disabled internal comments on its RTO announcement to prevent public criticism. Such approaches highlight the tension these policies create and may ultimately undermine trust and engagement.

Successful Flexibility Models

In contrast to the turbulence caused by strict mandates, some organizations have demonstrated that intentional flexibility can enhance both retention and performance. Two notable examples:

1. **Dropbox's "Virtual First" Policy**: Launched in 2020, this approach designates remote work as the primary mode, with offices repurposed as "Dropbox Studios" for intentional collaboration. Rather than rolling back flexibility post-pandemic, Dropbox maintained its approach and reports improved employee engagement scores and enhanced global team efficiency through asynchronous work.

2. **Atlassian's Work-From-Anywhere Model**: This policy allows employees to choose their location based on personal needs, requiring only a 4-hour overlap with their team within a 24-hour period. By shifting focus to outcome-based KPIs instead of seat time, Atlassian reports higher innovation output and no decrease in productivity after implementation.

These success stories demonstrate that flexibility, when implemented thoughtfully, can become a competitive advantage rather than a liability. The key differentiator appears to be whether organizations view flexible work as a strategic imperative or a temporary accommodation.

RTO as Covert Downsizing

Some organizations have used strict return-to-office mandates as a deliberate attrition strategy. A Bamboo HR [4] report from August 2024 revealed that approximately 25% of VPs/C-suite executives and 20% of HR professionals openly admitted to designing RTO mandates to prompt voluntary resignations.

However, this approach often backfires. Unispace [5] data shows 42% of companies enforcing strict RTO saw higher-than-expected attrition, with 63% of C-suite leaders acknowledging disproportionate losses of female talent. Research by Greenhouse [6] indicates underrepresented employees are 22% more likely to quit when flexibility is withdrawn, further undermining diversity goals.

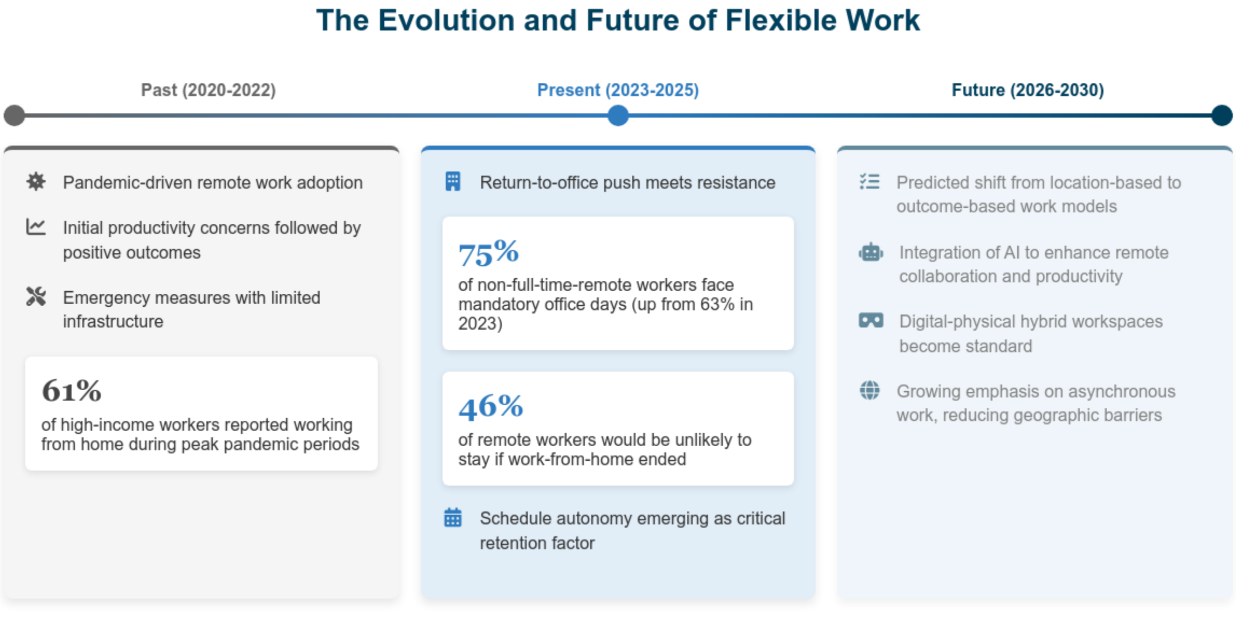
Using RTO mandates as a covert downsizing tool not only damages organizational culture and trust but also tends to result in unplanned, uneven talent losses rather than strategic workforce reshaping. The approach risks losing high performers alongside lower performers, with particular impact on diversity and inclusion efforts.

Future Outlook and Research Gaps

As organizations continue to navigate the evolving landscape of remote and hybrid work, several emerging trends and research gaps warrant attention. Understanding these developments can help leaders make more informed decisions about workplace flexibility and its impact on talent retention.

Emerging Trends in Flexible Work Models

Several key trends are shaping the future of flexible work arrangements:



Sources: Pew Research Center; Gallup; Great Place To Work; industry projections

1. **Shift from location-based to outcome-based models**: Organizations are increasingly focusing on what work is accomplished rather than where or when it happens. This trend aligns with research showing that autonomy significantly enhances retention.
2. **Technology integration**: New collaboration tools and AI-powered productivity platforms are making remote and hybrid work more effective, addressing previous challenges around communication and coordination.
3. **Asynchronous work adoption**: Companies are increasingly embracing asynchronous collaboration models that reduce the need for real-time interaction, expanding talent pools across time zones and accommodating diverse work styles.
4. **Digital-physical hybrid spaces**: Innovative workspace designs that bridge digital and physical environments are emerging, allowing for more meaningful collaboration when teams do come together in person.

Under-Researched Sectors and Populations

While considerable research exists on remote work in knowledge-worker-heavy industries like technology and finance, several important sectors and demographic groups remain under-studied:

Critical Research Gaps in Remote Work Studies

Areas where limited data exists on remote work impacts and preferences

Under-Researched Sectors

Manufacturing — High Gap

No equivalent turnover metrics exist for manufacturing firms compared to S&P 500 tech & financial companies

Higher Education — High Gap

66% of staff believe most duties could be performed remotely, but limited research on institutional outcomes

Healthcare Administration — Medium Gap

Remote potential exists for non-clinical roles, but retention impacts understudied

Public Administration — Medium Gap

Despite **45%** quit intentions if telework reduced, limited data on actual departure rates

Under-Researched Demographics

People with Disabilities — High Gap

Remote work potentially reduces barriers, but limited research on specific retention patterns

Caregivers — Medium Gap

Disproportionate impact on those with family responsibilities, but inadequate segmentation in most studies

Rural Workers — High Gap

Potential geographic diversity benefits, but minimal data on retention differences by location type

Early-Career Workers — Medium Gap

Mixed findings on mentorship and development needs vs. flexibility preferences

Sources: CUPA-HR 2023 Higher Education Employee Retention Survey; Eagle Hill Consulting survey; industry research gaps

1. **Manufacturing**: While much attention has focused on knowledge work, there is a critical lack of research on remote-capable roles in manufacturing. The University of Pittsburgh study tracking turnover in S&P 500 firms did not report equivalent metrics for manufacturing companies, revealing a significant data gap.
2. **Higher Education**: According to the CUPA-HR 2023 Higher Education Employee Retention Survey, two-thirds (approximately 66%) of higher education staff believe most of their duties could be performed remotely and would prefer hybrid or remote schedules. However, comprehensive research on institutional outcomes remains limited.
3. **Caregivers and People with Disabilities**: While some research indicates that flexible policies disproportionately impact those with caregiving responsibilities and can reduce barriers for people with disabilities, most studies inadequately segment these populations.
4. **Rural Workers**: The potential for remote work to expand geographic diversity by allowing employment in rural areas remains under-explored, with minimal data on retention differences by location type.

Future Research Needs

To better inform workplace policy, several key research areas warrant further investigation:

1. **Longitudinal studies**: Most existing research captures point-in-time snapshots rather than tracking the long-term evolution of remote work preferences, productivity, and retention outcomes.

2. **Skill-building frameworks**: With Buffer's State of Remote Work 2021 identifying challenges like inability to unplug (27%), collaboration difficulties (16%), and loneliness (16%) as top remote work challenges, more research is needed on effective skill development for remote and hybrid environments.

3. **Digital enablement**: Research from Gallup shows that 80% of hybrid workers and 73% of hybrid managers have received no formal training on best practices, indicating a need for better understanding of digital tools and processes that support flexible work.

4. **Inclusion impacts**: Further exploration is needed on how remote policies affect diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, with particular attention to historically underrepresented groups.

By addressing these research gaps and monitoring emerging trends, organizations can develop more informed, evidence-based approaches to workplace flexibility that balance employee preferences with business needs.

In conclusion, the data consistently shows that many remote workers would indeed be likely to leave their jobs if they could no longer work from home. Organizations that recognize this reality and develop thoughtful approaches to workplace flexibility – particularly those emphasizing schedule autonomy and co-created hybrid guidelines – will likely gain a significant advantage in attracting and retaining talent. As the workplace continues to evolve, policies that balance employee preferences with business needs while providing meaningful choice will be critical to organizational success.

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