A Return to Productivity:
A Work From Home Study and Tips to Help Your Teams

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Operating a business today looks nothing like it did just weeks ago.

In this unprecedented era of change amid COVID-19, many employees are now working from home.

This scenario presents a unique set of challenges for many businesses as they venture into unknown territory.

As teams adjust to this new work style, business leaders are wondering about the effect on their morale and productivity.

How long will workers be at home during this crisis, and will they be as productive as they were in the office? After all, businesses need to keep operating no matter the circumstances — especially in today's uncertain climate.

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that equals >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

8 Million People

That share is up from 5% in 2016, and 3.3% in 2000."

2000   2016   2017

Thankfully, we have been able to learn a lot about work from home. The number of employees working remotely is on the rise every year. According to data from the US Census[1], "5.2% of workers in the US worked at home in 2017—or 8 million people. That share is up from 5% in 2016, and 3.3% in 2000." So we know it can be done effectively. And even though the current shift was fast and unexpected, for some, this isn't unknown territory either. Periodically, businesses face a disaster that puts them in a similar situation, such as a tornado or a flood.

In this eBook, we'll explore research around these scenarios, how long it takes before normal productivity levels are likely reached, and what you can do to support your at-home workforce in order to keep productivity levels and morale as strong as possible.

Hurricane Harvey: A Real-World Work-From-Home Study

In August of 2017, Hurricane Harvey hit Houston, Texas. Many businesses found themselves with flooded offices, including a large energy company. As a result, executives made the decision to have employees work from home in order to keep the company running. This was the first time in company history this directive had been made.

The sudden shift in workspace gave Texas A&M Researcher Dr. Mark Benden a chance to study these workers over time, learning how working from home unexpectedly impacted productivity levels.

Mark E. Benden PhD CPE received his BS in BIEN, MS in IE and PhD from Texas A&M, and is a Certified Professional Ergonomist.

By tracking more than 100 data points on nearly 1,000 employees before, during, and after the shift, Benden was able to get insight into the productivity of workers who were home for three to six months.[2]

"Our team at the Ergonomics Center was already studying the effects of sedentary behavior at the workplace when Hurricane Harvey hit," said Benden. "At the time, it was more about the general trend to remote work and also the resiliency of big corporations suddenly being forced to all work from home due to a hurricane. We had no concept of a national quarantine at the time, so none of us foresaw more than a year ago how relevant this research would be to our new reality today."

With the help of tracking software, at-home workers were monitored on data points, such as:

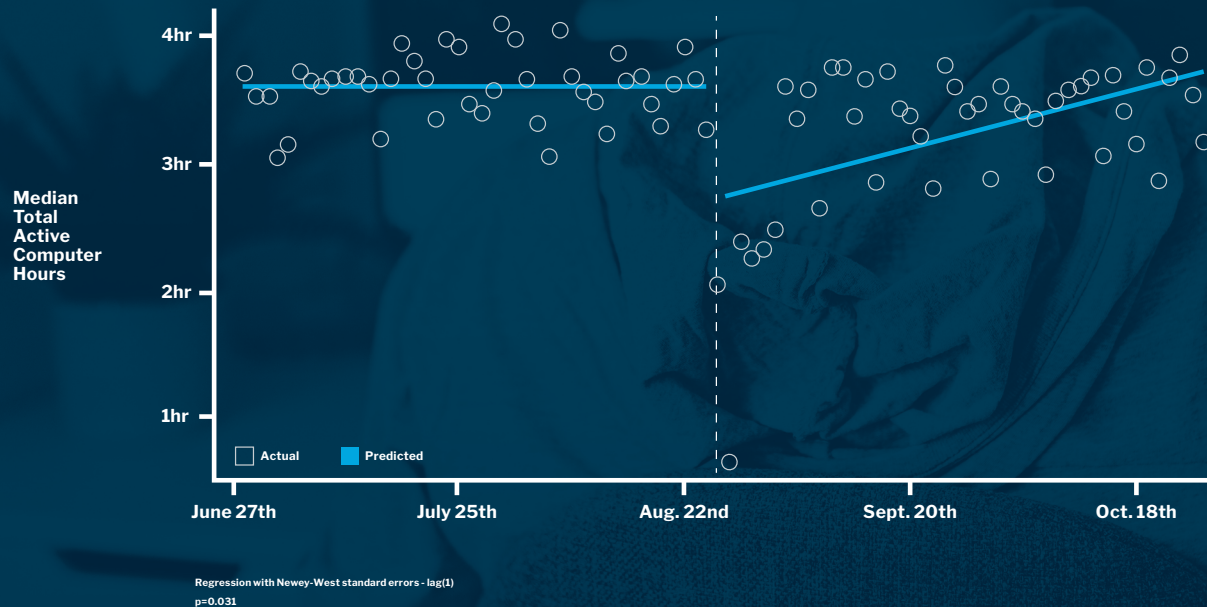**The number of keyboard hours**

The number of words typed per hour

How much time a user spends using the mouse

The number of keystrokes per hour

Total Active Hours

Median Total Active Computer Hours

4hr
3hr
2hr
1hr

☐ Actual ■ Predicted

June 27th · July 25th · Aug. 22nd · Sept. 20th · Oct. 18th

Regression with Newey-West standard errors - lag(1)
p=0.031

"I want to re-assure business leaders working through these unprecedented circumstances right now that their teams can adjust to this pretty quickly."

Benden's team discovered that all the metrics they were tracking, including average mouse scroll clicks, clicks per hour of mouse users, and total active hours on the computer, dropped drastically when employees were suddenly asked to work from home. However, after only 30 days, teams had readjusted significantly. After 60 days, it appeared their computer activity was just as high as when they were in the office.

"I want to reassure business leaders working through these unprecedented circumstances right now that their teams can adjust to this pretty quickly. Per our study, after only 30 days, most employees were back up to normal productivity levels. By then, they're doing the part of their job tied to computer work as before the hurricane. This will surely vary a bit from our current reality considering schools and other business were starting to open back up after 30 days in the areas hardest hit by Hurricane Harvey, but it is a reference point that should be encouraging." Benden said.
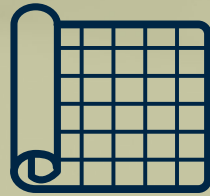
So, while it may take approximately

30 Days

to have your team up and running as normal, the company Dr. Benden's team analyzed also did a lot right during a time of uncertainty. "They definitely had a strong culture and cared about the wellbeing of their team more than about their productivity," Benden added.

Let's dive into how you can set your team up for success today.

How to Help Employees Hit Their Stride

Start with Surveys

In the event employees are suddenly working from home, one of the best places to start to ensure your workforce is productive is with a survey. If you're unsure how employees are feeling or what they're lacking, you can't improve their work environment. Google Forms[3] is a great, free tool for conducting surveys. Ask employees how they are feeling and if any equipment, like a second monitor, a desk, or lighting, is needed to perform their job at home.

Be sure to ask these questions and survey employees regularly to determine if morale and productivity is improved. If the results show that employees are still feeling unsure, then you know you need to make further adjustments to correct the problem. By asking how employees are doing and by correcting what you can, you'll improve productivity at a faster rate than if you simply hope everyone is happy and productive at home.

Now that you know how your employees are feeling and performing, what can you do in the short term to boost at-home productivity?

Survey Your Employees: A Sample Questionnaire

Use Google Surveys to Create and Send Your Survey.
Ask respondents to rate their answers on a scale of 1 to 5 (least agree to completely agree).

1. I am feeling satisfied with working from home.

2. I am comfortable with my work from home setup (furniture).

3. I am missing technology (applications) needed to perform my job.

4. I feel that I'm supported in performing my job at home.

5. I have everything I need to successfully perform my job.

Also, ask your employees open ended questions, like:

1. What do you need to better perform your job at home?

2. Do you need furniture? If so, what do you need?

3. Do you need technology (applications) to perform your job? If so, what are they?

5 Ways to Improve Employee Productivity

1
Communicate Openly and Frequently

If your employees aren't used to working from home, the most important thing to do is educate employees on what's expected, what technology they should be using, and who to reach out to for help.

For example, you could publish an internal work-from-home guide to educate employees on how it all works. Employees can't be expected to perform at a high level if you haven't communicated your expectations.

Also, be authentic with your team. A weekly update from top leadership—even if it mainly includes personal experiences—can be powerful if crafted with compassion, authenticity, and optimism.

2
Use Technology to Enable Your Workforce

Whether your team needs to videoconference or communicate with one another, there are a number of cloud-based applications[4] that improve the work-from-home experience and productivity. For example, some of the most commonly used are Zoom or Microsoft Teams for videoconferencing, and Skype for instant messaging. Be sure to provide guidance on which application is used for each type of communication so that employees are consistently using the right ones.

No matter which software you choose, be sure to provide your teams with the technology needed for them to work and perform as if they were in the office.

3
Provide Everything Needed to Make the Home Office Functional

Encourage your employees to find and create a dedicated workspace in their home, even if it is at the kitchen table. If your employees need desks or any other office furniture, you might consider purchasing them or giving employees a stipend to purchase what is needed to make their office active, comfortable, and productive. In fact, studies show that the more active your employees are when working, the more engaged and productive they are.

"Users of stand-capable desks were 45% more productive on a daily basis compared to their seated counterparts,"

according to a 2015 study[5] on the subject. A workspace can be made more active by using a sit-stand desk and accessories that encourage much needed movement throughout the day.

4

Communicate and Create Work/Life Balance

Working from home can be tricky. If employees are expected to answer emails day or night, you'll likely burn them out. While it's tempting to expect employees to always be available, that can add to their stress and actually hinder productivity. Instead, communicate when they're expected to be active at their desks, and that it's perfectly fine to call it quits when the end of the day arrives. You can support your team by suggesting that they:

Get dressed each morning as if heading into the office

**Take a lunch and other breaks throughout the day**

Turn their computer off to signal their workday is done

This gives employees the flexibility needed to have a healthy balance between work and home. Be sure to communicate that it's perfectly healthy to establish certain hours that employees will be at their desks and responding.

5

Establish Company Culture

If you haven't already, establish <u>foundational values</u>[6] for your company. Company leaders should communicate these out to the entire team. But your work doesn't stop there. Put your company values into action. For example, if one of your values is to embrace change, encourage your employees to adapt to any situation. Working from home is the perfect time to embrace change as you're working in an entirely new environment. Overall, the four to five values you choose should represent your entire organization and influence future decisions made about your company.

The right culture can make a significant change in how happy your employees are and how well they're performing.
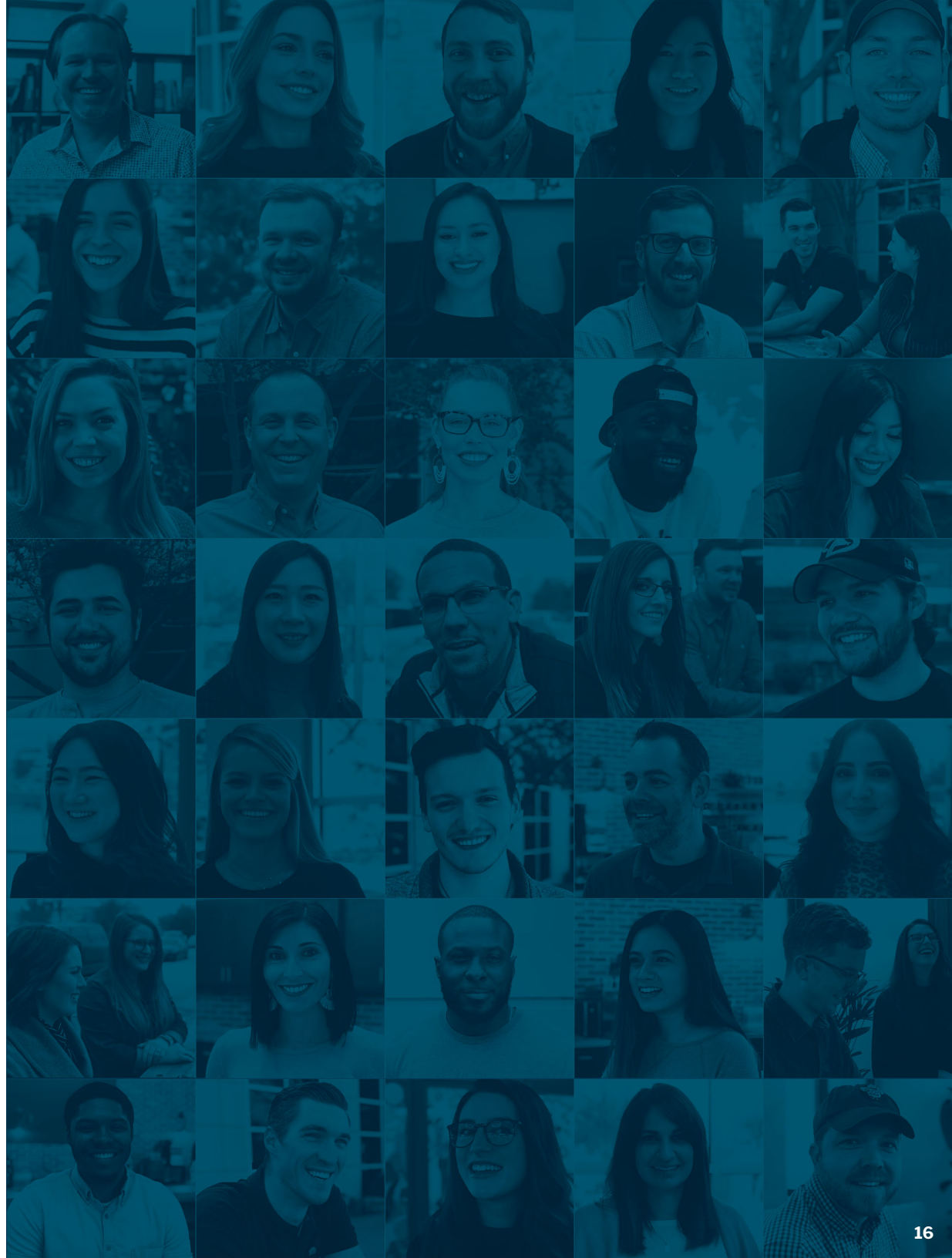
If you're able to communicate your expectations to your employees, you'll be far better off than those who choose to hope for the best.

Being open, communicative, and proactive in your approach will only speed up how productive your employees are at home.

Put this advice into action and you'll be on your way to a happy, healthy at-home workforce.

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1. https://ceoworld.biz/2019/01/29/top-5-benefits-of-remote-working/

2. Sarnosky, K., Benden M., Applied Ergonomics Conference Louisville, KY March 19, 2020, The Use of Ergonomic Software as an Estimate of Productivity following Displacement from Natural Disasters

3. https://docs.google.com/forms/u/0/

4. https://learn.g2.com/work-from-home-apps

5. https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/km4nB428SqEGEqw7Bwjz/full

6. https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2018/01/03/how-to-build-a-great-company-culture-from-the-ground-up/#17798f2b84f8