

A woman with curly hair, wearing a yellow hoodie, is sitting on a blue couch. She is looking at a laptop screen. A grey and white tabby cat is lying on the couch next to her. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

# Less time at work – more time to work

## This why productivity increases when working remotely

Why did some productivity increase for some employees during the pandemic, and how do we apply these lessons in the new working life? This is the second report in a quarterly survey of Swedish professionals' attitude to working life, remote work and what creates irritation and wellbeing at work, carried out by Novus on behalf of Sodexo.

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December 6, 2021

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## Executive summary

The research company Novus has asked 1,006 public and private professionals about their attitudes toward remote work and work in a shared workplace, how much time they saved by working remotely, and how they have used that time

- Nearly half of remote workers report saving more than an hour a day when working from home.
- One in three state that they work more as a result of the time they save. The time is also spent on household activities, sleeping longer, and exercising more.
- Every other remote worker says they work more when they are at home than when they are in the office, four out of ten work the same amount and only 11% work less when working from home.
- Compared to the previous survey in August, there is a significant increase in those who plan to work 100% in the workplace. They now amount to 44%, but a majority of professionals still work remotely entirely or in part.
- There is also a clear decline in the proportion of people working remotely 100% of the time, from 13% in August to 5% in November.
- Fewer people can work as flexibly as they want. Almost every fifth person is not allowed to work flexibly to the extent they wish.
- There is a marginal increase in those who are considering changing jobs, especially among those who have enjoyed working life during the pandemic, where three out of ten are now thinking about changing their job.
- Better leadership now tops the list of what would make the work situation better, but the opportunity to work more flexibly is number two, followed by a more pleasant working environment in the office.

# The new working life is a fact

When we carried out the survey last time, the Public Health Agency of Sweden's recommendation to work from home was still valid. When we asked questions about the new working life in October, it was entirely possible for employers to open up their offices and work in more or less the same way as before the pandemic.

But while restaurants, cultural and sporting events have seen audiences return, a 100% return to the shared workplace is not as obvious. Of course, there is a significant increase from 38% to 44% who now plan to work 100% in the office – but a majority is still working remotely, in whole or in part. Most common is two days of remote work (18%) followed by one day (14%). The major difference is that the proportion of people working 100% remotely has fallen from 13% to 5%.

**Just over four out of ten plan to work full time at their workplace, a significant increase compared to the previous survey**

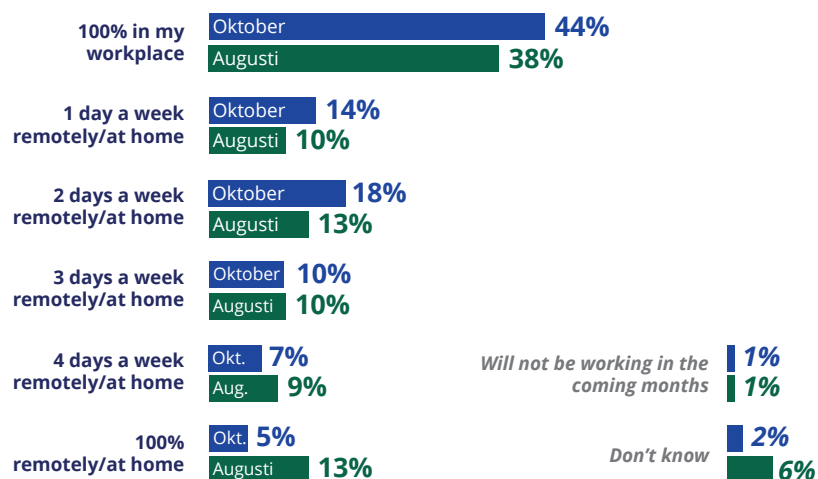


Figure 1: Answer to the question "How do you plan to work in the coming months?"  
Base: Total October (n = 1,006), August (n = 1,043)

With the new survey, we now have data that supports what we at Sodexo predicted just over a year ago. The way we work has undergone a paradigm shift, from a focus on the workplace to the working life.

The survey looks closely at the implications of remote work on time and productivity.

# The largest decrease in working hours since 1978

And it is a lot of time. Of those who are now working remotely, almost every other person state that they save more than an hour a day. So, what do you do with that time? More than a third work more. Half do household chores, which may explain why many people feel that the number of pieces in the puzzle of work-life balance has decreased. But there is also more time for recovery through sleep and rest, while at the same time getting

more exercise into everyday life. All in all, these are obvious benefits for both employees and employers. Companies receive more hours of work, and employees take more time for recovery and exercise – which is positive both for their own health and in generating more energy for work.

When asked whether they generally work more remotely than at the shared workplace, almost half say that they work more, while only 11% state that they work less.

## Keys to increasing productivity when working remotely

Drawing a straight line between increased remote work and increased productivity is too simplified. We are all individuals. Some people thrive in the comfort of their home, while others thrive in a shared workplace. Some tasks are better suited for remote work than others. Many researchers were used to remote work and to managing their own work to a great extent. Productivity measured as the number of published research reports increased by 35%, according to a study referenced in 12 points on remote work after Covid-19 from the research institute Ratio. At the same time, responses to open-ended questions from teachers in our survey show that remote learning has not been positive for teachers or students.



*“I’m a teacher, and a large part of my work is exhausting but also very rewarding, teaching and interaction just became cumbersome working remotely, while inspiration and other values are constantly being created in the classroom!”*

The fact that we are now moving from being commanded to working from home to a situation of voluntary remote work is likely to be even more positive for productivity. Research into productivity and remote work before the pandemic showed that the gains in productivity when working remotely were clear, but it was important that they were based on a voluntary approach.

In addition to a voluntary approach, a large dose of self-determination and autonomy is an important part of productive remote work. [According to an article in HBR](#), a higher degree of self-determination gives employees both a more satisfied and committed work experience. This is because the results of the work are more clearly linked to the intrinsic ability of the individual. It also creates motivation to perform even better. The autonomy includes both the question of how I carry out the work and whether I can influence where I do it myself.

The easiest way to measure productivity is to compare revenue with cost. If we sell as much working remotely as when being in the workplace full time but save money on reduced office space and business trips, productivity has truly increased.

In summary, there is much to indicate that remote work is positive for productivity, while employees feel that they have more time in their everyday lives. But not everyone enjoys being remote, and just because it is possible to perform one task remotely, it is not a given that it is good for all work tasks. Make sure to give your employees considerable opportunity to manage their work – then productivity will increase.



“The new working life is much better! Remote work means that the work-life balance puzzle fits. Everything is better – family time, physical health, reduced stress, and I am more efficient at work. I never want to go back to what it was before.”

## An increase in those not able to work as flexibly as they want

As we have seen, a return to the shared workplace has occurred compared to the previous survey. At the same time, we know that flexibility is one of the highest-ranking factors for job satisfaction. When participants were asked if employers provide opportunities to work flexibly, there was a significant decrease in the proportion of people who are allowed to work as flexibly as they wish compared to the previous survey. One out of five now answers no to whether the flexibility that is decided by the employer is sufficient. Those who get to work as flexibly as they want are those who have an income of more than SEK 60,000 per month, those who have worked at home to a great extent during the pandemic, and those who are now planning one or two days of remote work per week. Those who do not have the flexibility they want are to a higher extent women between the ages of 30-49, who worked 25% from home during the pandemic and are now planning to work 100% at the workplace.

### One in five has little or no flexibility in choosing where to work

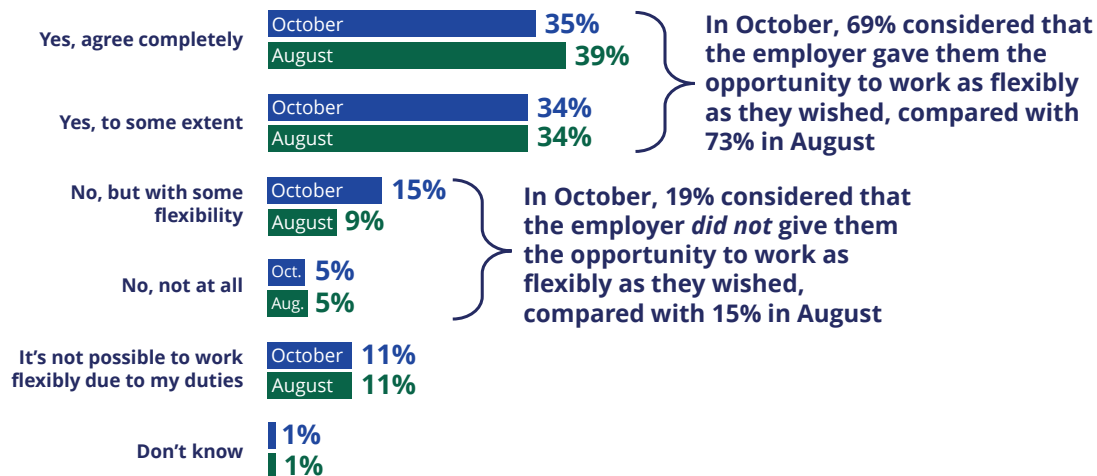


Figure 2: Answer to the question “Do you believe your employer gives you the opportunity to work as flexibly as you would wish?”  
Base: Total October (n = 1,006), August (n = 1,043)

However, the decrease in flexibility has only marginally increased the share of people planning to change jobs. All the same, it is worth noting that almost three out of ten of those who felt that working life was better during the pandemic are now considering a new job.

After the recommendation to work from home was removed, 45% worked full time in the office, while the number of remote days is relatively evenly distributed between 1 and 5 days per week. Those who are remote full-time are to a greater extent men between the ages of 50–64, those with an income of more than SEK 60,000 per month. Those who are more than 100% in the shared workplace, on the other hand, have an education level

corresponding to primary or secondary education, an income of less than SEK 30,000 per month, and live in smaller rural municipalities.

## The immediate manager determines flexibility

In a previous report, we have highlighted the importance of a working life strategy and how this needs to be a management issue. The way a company organises itself in the new working life will have a major impact on competitiveness. In this report, we show possible productivity increases with remote work, but the working life strategy is also crucial for the future ability to retain and attract new talent.

### Nearly one in four has a workplace where employees are required to work in the office full time

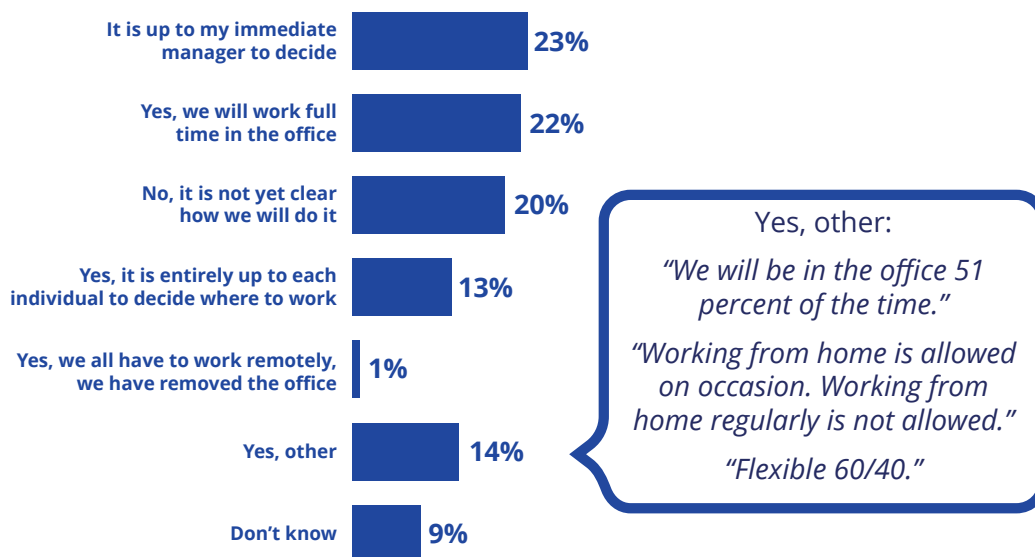


Figure 3: Answer to the question "Has your employer decided how work is to be distributed between the office and remote/from home?" Base: Total (n = 1,006)

It is therefore worrying that one in five states that it is not yet clear how work will be organized in the future. The most common answer is that it is the immediate manager who determines the degree of flexibility, followed by a decision on full-time work from the shared office. Our interpretation is that the issue has not been given the strategic importance it deserves.



"It is fully possible to work from home despite what management said before. And yet, management is completely uninterested in letting us continue to do so even to a lesser extent."

## Conclusions and the way forward

It is clear that many Swedish companies and organizations are still unsure about what the new working life will entail. Since the recommendation of working from home was removed, we have had a return to the shared workplaces, but a large amount of the work is still done remotely.

We see a few companies that have completely switched to remote work, some who have started experimenting with remote work in co-working offices, and others where the entire workforce has returned to the office. The most common, however, is the hybrid office with a mix of remote and on-site. There are excellent arguments for continuing to give employees a high degree of making the decision themselves concerning when, where, and how they work.

At the same time, in our previous report “Five problems with the hybrid model” we have warned of the challenges that exist. These include exclusion, leadership and culture. One constant concern is how attractive the hybrid office will be to come into, and what the loss of unplanned meetings leads to. When you are in the office, you do not interact with just colleagues and those with whom you have meetings; you also meet others who are at the workplace for other reasons. And when you go out for lunch, there are additional unexpected meetings. This is a dimension of the new working life that we want to return to in future studies.



*“How well it works to meet only via Teams for example and workshops via Miro. That management and managers realized so quickly that everyone is better off with more time for other things and less stress from traffic, for example. That the company is running smoothly and almost better! But it is important to still see each other to maintain togetherness and company culture. I miss the chats by the coffee machine.”*

Finally, we can confirm that the new working life is already here. More than half of professionals in Sweden work remotely between one and five days a week. This is in fact a paradigm shift. It is now a matter of daring to continue to evolve working life, making it better for both employers and employees. ■