

Debunking myths about hybrid, remote, and traditional office-based workstyles

By [Ronny Levitan](#)

9 Nov 2023

As hybrid and remote work arrangements continue, the debate continues regarding the advantages and business productivity associated with these workstyles versus the traditional 9 to 5 in the office.



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On the one hand, a new corporate trend is emerging globally, with major players like Goldman Sachs and big tech giants, including Google, Meta, and Lyft, making a firm push for employees to return to the office. In South Africa, the return to office is gaining momentum as the persistent power outages and connectivity challenges have boosted the return of workers to the office.

However, the absolute reality is that the benefits of teleworking or remote work depend on and vary greatly depending on each person's capacity for self-management and their values or priorities according to the stage they are at in their life.

For this reason, at Deel we have broken down the most widespread myths about hybrid, remote work and full-time office-based workstyles, versus what the reality has shown us in the day-to-day work of the teams and companies that have already incorporated these modalities into their HR policies.

1. Working remotely makes work more distant and less personal

Post the pandemic, remote work has been at the centre of the debate on how teleworking isolates you from your teams and how dealing with colleagues can become more automatic and less personal.

The truth is that if good office habits are transferred to the virtual world, the good working environment can remain exactly the same. For this reason, it is essential for managers to set up weekly meetings to discuss current tasks, brainstorming or project discussions, or to create informal internal chat channels where conversations on non-work-related topics can be discussed and where there is a relaxed exchange of ideas, opinions and hobbies.

These dynamics are very beneficial for fostering bonds and increasing the feeling of belonging. A great example of this is a rugby interest group I started at Deel ahead of the Rugby World Cup, where 57 people from 18 different countries joined in. The debate was awesome and really fostered an atmosphere of camaraderie and friendship.



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2. Declining productivity and lower performance

The myth of lack of productivity is the one that has been the loudest in recent years, including South Africa, where the implementation of hybrid and fully remote working models before the pandemic was almost non-existent.

The analysis of employee productivity requires an infinite number of factors. Thinking that "presenteeism", ie. the practice of staying longer than necessary in the workplace, equals productivity, is a common mistake that is often made. As the report [A sustainable workplace: towards a remote and face-to-face model](#), produced by IESE and Savills Aguirre Newman, indicates, working from home two to three days a week increases performance by almost 20% on those days, the quality of work by up to 18% and pride in belonging to the company by up to 10%.

According to a recent study on productivity in the workplace by a business software research company, GetApp, 30% of South African employees said their productivity has increased as a result of working from home, whilst 25% of employees said that they perform better with a mix of in-office and remote working.

A personal perspective is that I have between 10 to 16 meetings a day, and this would be impossible to achieve in a physical office.

Remote work gives workers autonomy, flexibility and trust; in addition, the creation of a work environment based on mutual trust provides workers with the motivation and security to meet their objectives, and they become even more productive than they could be working in person.

3. Communication in teams worsens and declines

The implementation of intuitive and immediate tools and applications such as Slack, Skype or Microsoft Teams, has made it much easier to communicate in real time with customers, suppliers and co-workers. By sending a message to another person, it ensures that colleagues' tasks are not interrupted by a call or a comment, as if they were sitting next to each other in the office.

Face-to-face interaction may have decreased when working remotely, but it has not ceased to be present, it has simply moved to one-off, quicker meetings where participants seek to create value and opt to call someone on the phone when it is a sensitive or complex issue which may need a very specific explanation.

In addition, actions such as executive video call meetings with teams, data collection and feedback after internal meetings or events are helpful in improving leadership, collaboration and employee empowerment.



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4. Less creativity than in face-to-face work

All that was found in the latest [study](#) by Columbia University and Stanford on the effect of virtual meetings on the generation of creative ideas, is that virtual interaction reduces the cognitive focus of attendees and, consequently, the associative process underlying idea generation is restricted.

However, it was found that video conferencing and face-to-face interaction share many key aspects of communication and that the reduced focus on screen use does not block the collaborative part of selecting an idea from a list and developing it. If effective routines are generated where multitasking is avoided for a while to think about a topic, listen to music or have a video call meeting with a colleague, creativity can still emerge.

There is no doubt that the hybrid work model is here to stay. According to [Cisco's Global Hybrid Work Study 2022](#), the countries with employees most in favour of fully remote work were the Philippines (37.7%); Canada (34.8%), and South Africa (33.5%). Moreover, in terms of talent retention, the implementation of these modalities will become one of the main strategies of companies in the coming years, as flexibility in working hours and workplace are positioned as essential requirements when looking for new jobs.

5. Remote workers do not have the same rights as other workers and are only from the tech sector

Professionals working remotely constantly hear comments questioning whether they too have the same rights and benefits included in any normal employee salary package. And the most common myth is that to work remotely you have to be in the telecoms or technology field, when this is not true.

The latest data from Deel found that out of all the African nations, South Africa has the second highest number of people working remotely for international organisations in 2023, behind Nigeria. The most in-demand profiles are sales (traders), software engineers and data analysts.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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