



# Seeking equilibrium between telecommuting and working in the office

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Telecommuting as a practice has been increasingly gaining popularity over the last few decades as a supposedly better alternative to the more traditional way of working in the office thus attracting interest of practitioners and researchers around the world. With rapid advancements in the field of information technology, telecommuting has become available to workers around the globe.

Since telecommuting was first introduced it provoked a lot of debating between researchers. Debates were held regarding the reliability of this method of working as it is a completely contradictory to the way business has been historically conducted.

The objective of this study is to analyze existing research on telecommuting and review its benefits and disadvantages compared to more traditional way of working in the office. This study also aims to suggest ways to improve the benefits of telecommuting and minimise its flaws. In addition, the goal is to develop a working method, that will assist the management team of a case company to determine at which point of the employees' professional career, which of the working environments will be more beneficial for the employees and the company.

The research was conducted using qualitative method. Research material was collected utilizing survey. In total, seventeen employees participated in the survey. All collected data was carefully analysed to find key benefits and disadvantages of both telecommuting and working in the office. The results were also compared with the theory and similar studies to find differences and similarities. The results were well in line with written theory of telecommuting and already conducted similar studies.

The result of this study indicates that both telecommuting and working in the office have their own benefits and drawbacks. Based on these findings it was suggested to keep employees working from the office during the time while they complete all necessary training. After that it is suggested to consider allowing employees to telecommute as long as they can successfully resolve most of the work-related issues on their own.

Based on the results, few improvements were suggested for both working environments. These improvements are thoroughly reviewed in the dedicated section of the study.

Keywords: telecommuting, remote work, telework, flexible work, flexplace

## Table of Contents

1	Introduction .....	8
1.1	Objectives .....	9
1.2	Research question and bordering of the research participants.....	9
1.3	Analysis .....	10
1.4	What is known in contrast with my own experiences? .....	10
2	Webhelp .....	11
3	Terminology .....	12
4	History .....	12
5	Growth and Future of telecommuting.....	14
6	Working remotely .....	14
6.1	Policy .....	14
6.2	Requirements .....	16
6.2.1	VPN .....	16
6.2.2	High bandwidth internet connection .....	17
6.2.3	Devices .....	18
6.2.4	Communication and Collaboration platforms.....	19
6.3	Industries that can operate remotely .....	20
6.3.1	Companies that practice remote working.....	21
6.3.2	Companies that do not allow working remotely .....	21
6.4	Benefits of telecommuting.....	22
6.5	How telecommuting helps during the current pandemic .....	24
6.6	Challenges of telecommuting .....	24
7	Working in office .....	25
7.1	Why some companies prefer working from office? .....	26
8	Webhelp Finland.....	26
8.1	How Webhelp operates.....	26
8.2	Gathering data .....	27
8.3	Analyzing results .....	29
9	Suggestions and Improvements.....	38
9.1	Office improvements .....	38
9.2	Telecommuting improvements .....	40
10	Model for choosing working environment.....	41
11	Conclusions.....	42
	References.....	44
	Figures .....	46
	Appendices .....	47

## 1 Introduction

This study reviews the alternative way of working called telecommuting, that has been increasingly gaining popularity over the last two decades. This way of conducting work does not require an employee to attend the office as it usually is with a more traditional way of working. Rather with this type of working, employee is often free to utilize any environment that suits him, if data security is not a concern, and in some cases, employee is also free to make his own schedule.

This study is conducted for the company called WebHelp Finland OY, which utilizes both the more traditional way of working in the office and more modern way, telecommuting. I also work in the same company at the moment of conducting this study. This will help me as I have similar experiences of both working environments as other Webhelp employees.

Most of the employees in the department I am working in had a chance to try out both ways of working during their professional career. The data utilized in this study is based on my own experiences, experiences of other employees in my department as well as the results of the similar studies conducted over the years.

The reason I decided to research this concept is related to the current pandemic. Due to the pandemic, companies, including Webhelp, are constantly forced to move employees from office environment to the remote environment and then back to office to avoid the spread of the virus but still be able to work. Every time management needs to move employees from one environment to the other, they must decide on how many employees can be moved at a time and who out of all employees will be moved. There are many aspects that must be considered like performance, security, eligibility etc. In worst case scenarios all the employees must be moved to the remote environment and management has to come up with a working solution on how to maintain top performance in the department during that situation.

I decided to investigate and find out a working method that would help management make this decision during those difficult times. This method will try to take as many important aspects as possible into account to help management to make a correct decision. All of these aspects can be summarised into two categories, performance and well-being. Each aspect will be individual reviewed and analysed.



## 1.1 Objectives

The objective of this study is to develop a working method, based on the analysis, that will assist the management team of the case company to determine at which point of the employees' professional career, which of the working environments will be more beneficial for the employees as well as for the company.

Study will also suggest improvements for both working environments that will help management team of Webhelp to maintain peak performance of the employees regardless of the working environment.

## 1.2 Research question and bordering of the research participants

The main research question in this project can be laid out as follows: which working environment, telecommuting, or working in the office, would be more beneficial for the employees and the company?

Other questions that will be answered in this project are the following: at which points of employee's professional career each working environment would be most beneficial? How current working model for working in the office effects the performance and well-being of the employees? How current working model for telecommuting effects the performance and well-being of the employees?

Group of research participants will include employees from one department of the case company. Currently department employs around 40 employees, 12 of which are just started at the company and will not be suited for the research. The actual number of employees who fit the group of research participants would be around 20-25 people. There are several reasons for restricting the research participants to one department only:

- The research is made for the department which operates in the IT field. Not every department in Webhelp work with the Information technology that will make the data less relevant.
- Research is done for the management of this specific department. Outcomes will be difficult to implement in other departments as employees there work in a different field and are assigned to different management team, that has different focuses in mind.
- Research takes in consideration metrics like performance of the employees, those metrics differ from other departments as they are monitored in a different way. Combining results from different departments would make results less reliable.

- The research is also heavily based on my own experiences from working in the department. Analysing working environment from an unknown department would be difficult and will make the data collection more demanding and less reliable.

### 1.3 Analysis

The data collected from the employees will be reviewed from two perspectives. One focuses on the performance of the employees. How employees' working environment affects the quality of the work performed. Deciding in which environment the employee should work with this perspective in mind will ensure the best output from the employee resulting in a better performance of the whole company.

The second perspective will focus on the well-being and motivational level of the employees. Enhancing this will reduce the quitting rate of the employees as well as raising the overall moral and community spirit of the members of workforce.

Each of these two categories is divided into subtopics each addressing a specific benefit or disadvantage of the working style. This will help to focus on more specific improvements for each working environment. These subtopics will be reviewed and analysed based on the surveys from the employees of the case company as well as compared to the similar studies done over the years.

### 1.4 What is known in contrast with my own experiences?

There seems to be a never-ending debate between those who support telecommuting and those who prefer work to be done in the office. I have been working at Webhelp now for about 10 months and had a chance to experience both working environments. From my own experiences I would say that choosing working environment that is best suited for you is largely dependent on the type of the person and the type of work that needs to be done. There are countless research papers that have been written on telecommuting that state that working remotely improves productivity of work. I will agree with that claim but to a certain extent. I would say that much quieter environment of home makes it much easier to focus on work compared to crowded offices. However, it can be much more difficult to get help when it's needed while working remotely. In the Office, getting help is as simple as asking a colleague sitting next to you, however in home environment you must rely on the remote communications platforms to be able to ask for help. Some of the times it might work flawlessly, however on some occasions, that I have experienced myself also, there might be

some technical difficulties that prevent message from being sent, or for example a colleague you sent it to have not noticed it and replied way later than you expected.

Another important aspect is mental health and wellbeing of the employees. As technology progresses, it is yet easier to operate remotely but yet as lonely. I can say from my own experiences that interacting with colleagues in the office and communicating with them via chats are two completely different things and as good as remote communication can get, it may never reach the same level as face-to-face communication. This aspect of telecommuting has been raising concerns among researchers for some time now but still in the need of improvements.

## 2 Webhelp

WebHelp was founded in June 2000 in Paris, France by Fredric Jousset and Olivier Duha. The original idea of the company was to offer a real-time online support for inexperienced newcomers to a particular activity. They created a call center that provided different services and information technology support. The goal of the company was to create an optimal customer experience. (Webhelp 2021)

During first five years of the company, Webhelp was growing locally withing France in the field of customer relationship management (CRM) market. Company was hiring professionals to work in different fields that would meet the needs of Webhelp's clients. Webhelp was trying to create the ultimate customer experience with innovative technology and also claims investing heavily into creating best employee experience. (Webhelp 2021)

Through the next five years (2005 - 2010) Webhelp was not only expanding into different services but also expanding into different locations. By 2010 Webhelp was already present in five countries with a variety of services to offer to their clients. (Webhelp 2021)

By 2015 Webhelp expanded further throughout Europe into United Kingdom and Northern Europe increasing their revenue by 265% between 2011 and 2015. They continued to expand their range of offered services and by that time working with over 500 brands. (Webhelp 2021)

In 2019 Webhelp claimed to be number one player in its field in Europe. And by 2020 celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a global brand operating in over 50 countries and serving over 1300 brands. (Webhelp 2021)

Currently Webhelp offer a big variety of different services, from Sales and Technical support to Legal Services and Healthcare offering jobs for over 50 000 employees worldwide. (Webhelp 2021)

### 3 Terminology

Telecommuting is an arrangement made between the employer and the employee that makes it possible for the employee to work outside the office or companies' premises. Alternative names to describe this type of work are for example e-commuting, teleworking or simply working remotely.

In most of the cases, during this arrangement employee works from home. However, in some cases, working environment can include essentially any environment that employee prefers as long as it does not restrict the employee from performing the work and does not compromise the security of the company's internal data or companies' client's personal data. These alternative working environments can include coffee-shops, parks, libraries, and hotels but are not limited to them.

Most of the time, telecommuting requires the use of technology and tools to maintain communication between the organization and the employee, and to be able to exchange information quickly and efficiently to maintain the quality of the work. The required tools for telecommuting include first of all a fast and reliable internet connection. This is mandatory to maintain a connection with company, management, other employees, and clients. It also allows employees to quickly retrieve any data needed from companies' servers or other sources. From the hardware perspective a computer or/and a mobile device is mandatory to perform work. Very few jobs are done on the paper today especially while working remotely. And from the software perspective, the requirements are dependent on the field the employee is working in. It can include a communication software like Skype or Teams, a database software that stores all the necessary data to perform work, and other software programs or tools to be able to perform and document the work.

Some companies offer a full-time telecommuting ability while others offer a part-time option that will allow an employee to work at home part of the week but require to attend the office for the rest of it.

In some cases, telecommuting also provides the ability for the employees to create their own schedule. The employees are not required to work usual 9am to 5pm hours but can choose their own start and end times as well as amount and lengths of their breaks as long as they are able to submit work in time.

### 4 History

Working life has been constantly evolving over the centuries, improving the rights and benefits of the employees. Those improvements have been made possible by constantly

researching and analysing the data, and suggesting improvements based on the findings. The word “work” has been mostly associated with the specific working environment like “factory” in the industrial era and “office” during the more modern times. And it was only in 1970’s when the concept of telecommuting was first introduced.

In 1972 there was a man called Jack Nilles, who was working remotely from home on a complex NASA communication system. He was telling everyone that he was “Telecommuting” and so the term was born. (Avery C., Zabel D. 2001)

At first, the main goal of telecommuting was to reduce pollution and traffic congestion. In 1979, Frank Schiff wrote an article for the Washington Post that was called “Working from home can save gasoline”. Some think that this post has influenced popularizing remote work, that have led to a first conference about telecommuting in 1980. (Allied Telecom Group 2021)

During the 1980’s there were a small number of the pilot telecommuting programs. The focus of those programs was to study telecommuting and its effects on the employee’s well-being and work-life balance. As a result of conducting these studies, telecommuting practises have slowly increased and by the end of 1990’s, telecommuting was supported by many federal, state and private sector organizations. (Allied Telecom Group 2021)

In 1996, the National Telecommuting Initiative was created. Its goal was to popularize the telecommuting arrangements, mostly withing the Government. (Wendell Joice, PhD Office of Governmentwide Policy US General Services Administration 2000)

The grows in popularity of the remote work was continuous, however it was vastly restricted because of the lack of the technology that would make telecommuting useful and available for the masses.

In 2008, Microsoft developed a Smooth Streaming technology that influenced other tech companies to create and develop similar solutions. This type of technology helped in adopting telecommuting more widely as it made possible to share media and host meetings over the internet. (Christopher Mueller 2015)

By 2009 technological advancement had finally reached the stage that enabled most organizations to adopt telecommuting and from that year onward, this practise had grown exponentially. Those technological breakthroughs include growing access to high-speed broadband at homes and the growing adaptation of VPN technology that makes network secure. Telecommuting has also made possible due to evolution of the personal computer hardware and network equipment hardware that over the years got more powerful and more accessible for everyone making use of these technologies possible. According to several studies, up to around 30% of the workers today work remotely.

## 5 Growth and Future of telecommuting

According to the variety of studies conducted over the years, working remotely holds many benefits for the employees as well as for the employers. The benefits include increase in productivity due to less distractions and bigger amount of work done due to time saved on travelling to office. Employers are also saving money as they do not need to rent office spaces for the employees to work at.

Over the time, there are a lot of benefits found in working remotely that attracts people. Those benefits proved themselves to be significant enough to make teleworking popular worldwide. However, there are still aspects to develop and disadvantages to tackle.

Benefits and disadvantages of both the traditional way of working in the office and working remotely will be thoroughly discussed later in this study.

As statistic shows, telecommuting has been increasing its popularity over the past two decades, however it is still not ready to compete with working in the office. In 2019 countries like Finland and United Kingdoms had around 10 to 15 percent of people working remotely that is a relatively high number. Sweden, France, and United States had less, from 5 to 10 percent of people working remotely. Rest of the Europe seemed to have only around 5 percent or less working remotely. But it is still a tremendous grows from around 3% worldwide in early 2000's.

In my opinion, telecommuting holds a great potential to become the future way of working for most people. I prefer telecommuting over the traditional way of working. But for now, it still requires development in order to compete and surpass working in offices.

## 6 Working remotely

### 6.1 Policy

Companies and industries that are offering a remote working possibility for their employees should always begin by creating a policy that will describe how remote work should be performed. This system of principles will guide management of the company throughout the decision-making process and help achieve rational outcomes.

Through policies, industries can write down company's values and mission. Policies also help to set expectations for the employees on how company require the remote work to be performed. On other hand, policies may help the company to defend itself against possible legal claims as well as let the employees know where to turn to for help.

Key aspects of a good remote work policy should include but are not limited to the following aspects:

**Eligibility of position to telecommute.** This policy will determine which positions in the company are eligible to work remotely.

**Employee's availability.** This policy will describe a timeframe when the employee is required to be available. Some workplaces are offering predefined working hours, for example from 9:00 to 17:00. Other companies allow employees to design their own schedule.

**Responsiveness time of the employee.** This policy can specify the response time and/or the way employee is required to response. For example, it can specify that employee is required to reply to calls immediately at the time of their arrival, reply to the chat messages withing five minutes from their arrival and to email messages withing an hour from their arrival. This will help the employee to understand what is required from him and also maintain performance and good communication within the company.

**Measurements of productivity.** This policy is essential when allowing an employee to start working remotely. This will help the employer to analyze the performance of an employee and determine if he is suited for working remotely.

**Tools and Equipment.** Many companies provide employees with equipment that is required for performing the work. However, some companies do not. This aspect is important to address at the beginning of the recruitment process so the employee can determine whether he will have all the necessary tools to perform the work.

**Support.** This policy addresses the ways company will support the employee when it is needed. This usually include tech support, health support, psychologist. This policy specifies that kind of support does the company offer and provide employee with knowledge and tools of who to contact in time of need or when facing any difficulties.

**Working environment.** Some companies require employees to have rather strict working environment when working remotely. This is typically done in the companies to prevent leakage of the company's internal information or customer's private information. This policy can for example require an employee to work in a dedicated room behind the closed door.

**Security.** Same reason as for specific working environment. To prevent leakage of company's internal information or customer's personal information by for example forbidding employees from using public wireless networks.

**Client confidentiality.** Forbid employees from spreading any internal information about clients or client companies.

## 6.2 Requirements

Requirements for working remotely depends heavily on the working field in which company operates or the working field of a self-employed employee. In some cases, there are a long list of requirements that employee must meet to have a possibility to perform work remotely. In other cases, there are virtually no requirement at all. Typically working remotely relies on technology. It requires the employee to have necessary tools to be able to complete work and tools to communicate with other employees and management.

Typically working remotely will require the employee to have a personal computer or a laptop. The device needs to have stable internet connection. Some companies will provide an employee with a computer to maintain security level, other companies are allowing their employees to utilize their personal devices. Some companies may require employees to have access to a private network and insists that network meets a certain speed requirement. Other companies allow employees to utilize even public wireless network. Some companies will require an employee to work in a strict working environment to meet all the security requirements. For example, a dedicated room to work in, behind the closed door, no windows behind the back to prevent information leakage. Other companies are not strict about the environment and allow employees to work even in cafeterias. Also, tools for communication purposes are most often required especially while working in teams. And dedicated tools to perform work depending on the company and the field it operates in.

Most common tools and technologies used today while telecommuting can include but are not limited to the following:

### 6.2.1 VPN

VPN stands for a Virtual Private Network and allow users to create a private network over a public one. This is perfect way for companies to maintain security, privacy, and anonymity. For the employees working remotely, VPN is a perfect tool to access companies' private network from other location then companies' office. Without this technology it would be virtually impossible for some companies to practice telecommuting as there would be no way to securely provide remotely working employees with the necessary information. (Mujovic 2018)

First developments towards Virtual Private Network technologies have been made in 1996 by Microsoft company. Microsoft created a PPTN (Point-to-Point Tunneling Protocol) method that made possible to establish a secure network between users by forming a so-called tunnel over a LAN or WAN network connection and encrypting the data. PPTN protocol quickly became



very popular however is not the only protocol that exists. As development of the technology went on, other similar protocols were introduced. (Mujovic 2018)

At first VPN technology was mostly used by businesses and public agencies. However, as internet technology slowly gained popularity and became more accessible for masses of private users, VPN technology also started to gain popularity.

There are two types of VPN connection, a remote access, and a site-to-site connection. Remote access VPN allows user to connect to a private network to be able to utilize its services and resources remotely. This connections type can be visualized as such: Business user with VPN client is connected to the Corporate site with VPN server via the internet. Connections is established using a VPN tunnel that keeps data encrypted and thy secure. (Spadafora 2020)

Same type of VPN is also used by private users, most commonly for the following reasons: to bypass regional restriction and to access blocked websites. The connection can be visualized as such: Private user with VPN client is connected to the internet through the VPN server via encrypted VPN tunnel.

Site-to-site VPN is most commonly used by businesses or corporates. It can be divided into two subcategories: “Intranet-based site-to-site connection” and “Extranet-based site-to-site connection”. This connection type can be visualized as two business sites connected to each other via the internet using an encrypted connection via VPN tunnel. In this scenario, one site acts as a VPN client and other one as a VPN server. When this type of connection is used to connect multiple offices of the same company, it is called an Intranet based VPN and when it is used to connect the office of one company to the office of another company, it is called and Extranet based VPN. (OpenVPN INC 2021)

### 6.2.2 High bandwidth internet connection

Bandwidth is a measure that shows the amount of data that can be transferred from one point to another in the network withing a given amount of time. Usually when talking about bandwidth of the internet connection, this bandwidth specifies how much data can be downloaded to a device from a server over the internet in a specific amount of time. The higher the bandwidth the faster the download speed.

Internet bandwidth has been rapidly increasing throughout decades. Looking at the data I could find, average consumer internet bandwidth between 1990s and 2000 was about 56 Kbit/s. Compared to today averages, the increase in speed is tremendous. According to statistics, the average download speed in 2020 was around 84 Mbit/s and average upload

speed around 44 Mbit/s. (Statista 2021) That is a massive 150 000% increase in an average broadband speed.

How much internet speed is enough for telecommuting in 2021? The answer to this question is heavily depends on what type of work does a person do from home. I have found several recommendations and calculators to help me answer this question.

All of the sources that I have found showed almost identical data related to the internet speed recommendations. Most of the activities that need to be performed while working remotely like answering emails, web browsing, social media and video calls or conferences require from 3 to 5 Mbit per second. However, this appears to be the minimum requirement and the recommended speeds for those activities are from 5 to 20 Mbit per second. (Bolden, 2021)

However, if internet is used for gaming and streaming purposes, the minimal speed requirements can get up to 25 Mbit per second depending on the quality of the content that is being streamed. (Bolden 2021)

Similar results were estimated on the online calculators. Those calculators are perfect for determining what internet speed an employee should get if he considers working remotely as these calculators allow to add several variables like amount of devices, amount of members of household, type of activities that internet is required for and gives an estimate of what speed is needed. (Broadbandnow 2021)

I have also tested those minimal requirements at my home. I have an average internet speed of about 100 Mbit per second at my home, however, my router has a software platform that lets me limit the bandwidth for individual devices. I have tested browsing web and using social media with 3 Mbit per second speed and using Skype for video calls at the speed of 5 Mbit per second.

What I have noticed is that it is possible to telecommute with those minimal speeds, however I would personally recommend at least 10-15 Mbit speeds for those activities in order to maintain efficiency. Especially while telecommuting, internet speed should not affect the performance of the employee by slowing him down.

### 6.2.3 Devices

The most essential tool for telecommuting is a device the work can be performed on. All devices that are suited for performing work on can be divided into three categories: mobile devices, portable computers, and desktop computers.

Basic telecommuting like for example writing, reading, browsing web, or having a call or video conference can be performed on a mobile device. These mobile devices are usually defined by their small formfactor and the ability to operate on them while holding them in hands. These can include for example smartphones and tablets. Today mobile devices are powerful enough to provide their user with most of the everyday features however their limited formfactor does not allow them to meet power requirements to perform a more demanding workload as well as mobile operating system has its own limits regarding compatibility with for example programming or editing software.

Most employees rely heavily on portable computers to telecommute. These machines are much more powerful than mobile devices and also have the important advantage of running a desktop operating system. However, despite having these advantages, portable computers still remain light enough to be transported from home environment to the office if needed. This gives employees freedom of switching between working environments whenever necessary.

For more demanding work like for example video editing, desktop computers would be the most optimal device to go with. Despite the fact that portable computers can have same hardware components like central processing units and graphical processing units as desktop computer, they lack the ability to efficiently cool those components to maintain the peak performance. As portable computers are made with a goal of minimizing their form factor as much as possible, they lack the space inside them that would allow air to circulate freely and efficiently cool the system. Desktop computer on the other hand have a lot of room in between the components allowing the air to move freely between them. Most of desktop computer also allow for cooling customizations like the ability to add more fans, bigger radiators or consider a possibility of water-cooling the components.

Typically, workplaces that allow telecommuting also provide their employees with the necessary hardware to work remotely. This saves employees from the need of researching and deciding which device to get for the telecommuting purposes.

#### 6.2.4 Communication and Collaboration platforms

Communication is a crucial aspect in building relationships between colleagues but is also important to achieve success in business by maintaining peak performance via efficient collaboration between colleagues. While working in the office, communication and collaboration between colleagues may appear self-evident as employees are constantly working in the same space with each other. However, during telecommuting, employees

heavily rely on digital communication platforms and digital tools to be able to collaborate with other colleagues.

Some companies develop and use their own platforms for example for the security purposes and the ability to customize the platform to meet the exact qualities that company requires. Other companies and for example self-employed citizens rely on publicly accessible platforms.

Most common communication platforms that are used in Finland for example are platforms like Skype, Teams and Zoom. They offer messaging between colleagues as well as audio and video communication for example to hold meetings. These communications can be held inn between two people as well as include a group of people. At Webhelp we utilize these platforms to hold for example team meeting with other team members and management and also to establish a chat communication between colleagues to quickly seek help or answers to specific problems that can occur during the day. One benefit of having a chat communication compared to the office environment is the ability to ask all colleagues at once that maximize the chance of getting a quick response to the question.

Communication platforms on their own however are just to support work and interaction between the colleagues. Actual work is usually done by utilizing specific digital tools, collaboration platforms or a combined platform of these two. There are a lot of publicly available collaboration platforms like Dropbox, SharePoint, Google Drive or OneDrive for example. However, in most cases, companies prefer using their own software platforms and digital tools for these purposes. This not only ensures the security of the companies' internal information but also provides a digital environment with tools that are specifically designed to meet companies' needs.

Webhelp as an example utilizes a specific private platform that is designed specifically to perform the work and keep data securely withing the platform.

### 6.3 Industries that can operate remotely

IT industries have a relatively high percentage of employees that work remotely. This fields are for example Security, Web Development, Software Engineering, App Development, Database Administration. Other working fields that are capable of being performed remotely are Accounting and Finances, Customer service, Healthcare, Marketing, Education and Sales. This is possible because all tools that employees need today to perform work in those fields are digitalized and can be found on a computer.

Year 2020 has had a huge impact on the adaptation of telecommuting worldwide as government officials were continuously asking people to stay home to prevent the spread of the virus. The fact that employees got stuck at home had a colossal effect on the companies and economy of countries. As there were no predictions that the pandemic would be soon over, CEOs of the leading tech companies had to make important and difficult decisions regarding adaptation of telecommuting in their companies. Many of those companies decided to allow their employees to work from home and as a result telecommuting popularity started to grow rapidly. (Kelly 2020)

### 6.3.1 Companies that practice remote working

Many global companies decided to adopt telecommuting to continue operating during the outbreak of a pandemic. Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook have announced that his employees may work from home. CEO of Twitter and Square, Jack Dorsey has stated that his employees can continue working from home “forever”. Kate Lister, president of Global Workplace Analytics, estimated that twenty-five to thirty percent of the company’s employees will be telecommuting for multiple days a week by the end of year 2021. Tobi Lutke, CEO, and founder of global e-commerce platform for online stores called Shopify, stated that they have closed offices for the duration of the lockdown due to the pandemic and will continue to work remotely after the lockdown is over. Hayden Brown, the CEO of a global freelancing platform called Upwork said that the company will continue prioritizing telecommuting by embracing a “remote-first” model. Brian Armstrong, the CEO of Coinbase informed that his company as well is shifting towards the “remote-first” policy due to the COVID-19. Austen Allred, CEO of Lambda School, has announced that the school is permanently implementing a “work from anywhere” policy. (Kelly 2020)

Other major global companies that are partly adopting the work-from-home policy include companies like Microsoft, Google, Capital One, PayPal, Amazon, Morgan Stanley, Salesforce, Zillow, JPMorgan, Slack and many more. (Kelly 2020)

### 6.3.2 Companies that do not allow working remotely

Marissa Mayer, CEO of Yahoo, has banned employees from working remotely in 2013. Shortly after that, Hubert Joly, CEO of Best Buy, followed with forbidding his employees to work remotely from any location. Both of those events had a huge reflection in the media and received a major critic. (Goudreau 2013)

In 2020 Apple have been noticed to also refuse to accept telecommuting and has been requesting its employees to return from home environment to the office despite the risky situation with the COVID-19 pandemic. (Kelly 2020)

The Bank of New York Mellon Corporation has also announced about a possibility of limiting the ability of its employees to work remotely. Other companies like Aetna and IBM followed up by announcing that they as well will be reducing the possibility of remote working for their employees. (Wilkie 2019)

#### 6.4 Benefits of telecommuting

Telecommuting has brought a lot of benefits to the employees as well as employers. However, as everything else, this way of working has its own disadvantages and drawbacks as well. Through carefully reviewing benefits and disadvantages of telecommuting it is not easy to say if pros can outweigh the cons. For some companies and certain scenarios, telecommuting can be the most efficient and productive way to work, in some cases it can even be the only way to be able to work like for example during the current pandemic. For other companies, remote working might not even be applicable.

After carefully studying telecommuting and reviewing the researches and studies related to it, the list of pros and cons can be narrowed down to a relatively short list. This list includes most of the benefits and disadvantages that an employee can experience during working remotely. Each item on this list will be reviewed and analysed.

##### Flexibility:

Telecommuting is typically done from home environment. Working from home can save a lot of time for the employees depending on the distance to the office and how complicated the commuting is for the employee from home to his office. Typically, employees are living relatively close to the office premises. And if they are able to use personal transport like a car, a trip to work will last from 15 to 30 minutes. However if the employee has to use public transportation, trip to work can last from 30 minutes up to one hour or more in some cases. As employee must also travel back home, the time is doubled and employee has already lost from one to two hours of his time.

Usually telecommuting does not require an employee to dress up and get ready for the day as he does not need to meet any people during the day. This also can save employees from 10 to 30 more minutes during the day.

Some jobs that allow telecommuting are also allowing freedom to choose the working location. Typically those jobs do not deal with sensitive internal or clients information. This can have a great effect on the employees overall happiness and health. For example if an employee decides to work outside or in the cafeteria, this will be possible as long as he has the necessary tools to complete his work.

Some telecommuting jobs are not restricted to the specific working hours as long as the work gets done. This has also a great effect on the employees satisfaction level as employees can schedule their day according to their personal life.

Saves money:

Usually while telecommuting, both the employee and the employer save money. By allowing workers to telecommute, employer saves up to 100% on everything that is related to running the office. This can include saving up to 100% on office space and equipment as less or no employees are required to work in the office. Also saving up to 100% on electricity bills, water bills, coffee machine supplies and their maintenance.

From the employees perspective, it saves the employee up to 100% on travelling to the office or working location, this can include costs related to owning and driving personal vehicle or usage of public transportation. In some cases, employee can also save on for example electricity bills or internet bills as some companies offer to pay part of the bills for the employees if they work remotely.

Employees satisfaction:

According to statistics, remote workers are usually happier about their jobs compared to the workers that work in office premises. This can be extremely beneficial to the companies as this has a straight effect on the retention rate of the employees. By maintaining high employee satisfaction, company can save time and resources on recruiting, hiring and education new employees.

Less distractions:

Working in the office can sometimes provide more distractions to the employees than working remotely in an isolated space. Office spaces are usually crowded, especially in the offices where employees are communicating with clients via telephones, the surrounding noise can get quite high preventing employees from working efficiently and disturbing their work. Also colleagues can distract one another at a moment while employee needs to be focused on an important task. This usually happens after the arrival of fresh recruits who need help with doing their job and tend to disturb other more experienced colleagues working next to them in order to get necessary help.

Better for the environment:

From a macro-system point of view, the benefits of telecommuting could benefit larger environment. There would be less traffic and congestions on the roads, less air pollution and a decrease in accident rates.

#### 6.5 How telecommuting helps during the current pandemic

In addition to the benefits mentioned in the previous section, telecommuting has a positive effect on the current Covid-19 pandemic. As dealing with the current pandemic requires people to be isolated from one another, working remotely seems like a perfect solution to that.

Not every job has a possibility to be performed remotely. This has a huge effect on the types of job that not only can not be performed remotely but also done in crowded office spaces. As any of the colleagues tests positive for Covid-19, entire offices need to be sent home for the isolation period to stop the spread. That freezes the performance of the offices for the next 10 to 14 days

#### 6.6 Challenges of telecommuting

More possible distractions:

Working from home seems like a better alternative than working in office as the environment is more isolated and thus quieter that can improve the concentration and productivity of the employees. However this is not always the case. Majority of the employees most likely don't live alone and even if they have a dedicated room to work from, children, pets, roommates and other family member can cause serious distractions.

Can be difficult to "unplug":

Some remote workers may experience the potential problem of continuing to think about work outside the working hours, a so called difficulty to "unplug". As they work from home environment the boundaries between work and personal life can start to blur and employees may find themselves continuously thinking about work. This problem is less present with employees working from the office as it is easier to leave the work behind as they leave the premises and the surrounding environment changes.



#### Loneliness:

Employees who work remotely can start to feel isolated from other colleagues and management. This is a result of a lack of face to face interactions with other colleagues. In addition to this feeling of isolation, some workers tend to start experiencing loneliness as they spend a relatively long time by themselves, working. This is especially noticeable with the employees who live alone.

#### Lack of help:

In addition to lack of communication and interaction with colleagues, it is sometimes more difficult to ask for help if it is needed. In the office environment it is relatively easy for the employee to ask for help from the colleagues working in the same office space. But in the home environment, employees rely on other types of communication like phone or chat in order to ask for help. This sometimes can result in a delayed answers or misunderstanding between colleagues that also has a negative effect on the time required to resolve a problem.

## 7 Working in office

Working remotely is a relatively new concept of working. It was only started to gain popularity and availability in masses starting from the early 2009. Prior to the introduction of telecommuting people used to work in the offices during the modern era and in factories during the industrial era. As the practice of having a dedicated workplace to perform work have been present for a longer amount of time, more conservative companies and management try to stick to it promoting it as a “better” or “only right” way of working. If we have a look back in time, we can easily determine the reason why remote working was just not possible. During the industrial era, work was done in factories using huge factory machines and manually operating them that simply ruled out an option to perform the work from home. During the more modern era, factories started to become more and more automated and new type of work, office work, was introduced. However, technology still did not allow work to be done remotely as computers were big and expensive. Regular people did not have an option to purchase one. And even if they did, fast and reliable internet connection was so rare, it mostly existed only inside the buildings of huge tech companies. However today, almost everyone has got a computer powerful enough to perform work from anywhere and there is cheap and fast internet connection in every home making the interaction and connection with the colleagues and management possible. Even securing of companies’ internal data is made possible due to availability of virtual private network. So why so few people get to work remotely even today? This section will try to find out why so many companies are still preferring work to be done from the office rather than remotely.

## 7.1 Why some companies prefer working from office?

It seems that remote work practice had suffered the most damage in February 2013 due to the decision of Yahoo!'s CEO Marissa Mayer to ban telecommuting in the company and recall all the employees with a work-from-home arrangement back to the offices. (Dixon, 2019)

In April 2013 Marissa Mayer has finally spoken of the reason behind the remote work ban in the company at the Great Place to Work conference held in Los Angeles. Mayer explained that she felt that collaboration at the Yahoo! was not strong enough while employees were working from home and she tried to enhance it by bringing employees to work together in the same physical environment. She also stated that she never thought that remote work was worse than working from the office, she even stated that working remotely in a lonely environment usually helps to raise productivity of the employees. But as the goal was to enhance the collaboration, requesting employees to work from the office seemed like the optimal solution. (Dixon 2019)

Same model of thinking can be seen in Tim Cooks, Chief Executive Officer of Apple Inc., announcement in autumn 2020. Cook said that even while COVID-19 pandemic is still present and it is recommended by the government authorities to remain at home, 10 to 15 percent of Apple staff has already returned to the Office and Cook hopes that majority of the employees still working from home can return back to offices during the next year. (Gurman and Bloomberg 2020)

Cook stated that working from office, while employees are physically together at the same space, reflects in more creativity during brainstorming projects and attending meetings. However, at the same time, Cook stated that it has been noticed that some things work perfectly well when working virtually from home and at some point changes to the regular working from office policy might be implemented. (Gurman and Bloomberg 2020)

## 8 Webhelp Finland

### 8.1 How Webhelp operates

Prior to the pandemic Webhelp employees were mostly working from the office. New employees begin working in the company by completing the training that will qualify them for the job. This training was always held in the office environment, however, the danger of the pandemic forced Webhelp to make changes to how the company operates.

I started working at Webhelp shortly after the virus reached Finland and was a member of the first ever team of new recruits that received training in the home environment. This was the

first time company held training outside the office and no one knew how it would go. Support staff provided all the necessary tools and guidance to perform the training and later to perform actual work. By the end of the training support staff noted that it went surprisingly well proving that both training and work at Webhelp can be done purely in a remote environment.

Now that the pandemic is at its worse, Webhelp tries to keep employees mostly working remotely. As security in my department is at top priority, not every employee has the living space that qualifies for telecommuting. Webhelp requires employees to have a separate room behind the closed door to prevent internal information from leaking.

Currently besides them who do not have a qualified working space and fresh employees that just started at the company, everybody else are all working remotely.

## 8.2 Gathering data

In order to be able to analyze benefits and disadvantages of both working environments and later improve them, I have created a survey that I have sent to employees of Webhelp in my department.

Survey was divided into categories, each of which has its own focus point. Those focus points were chosen based on similar studies and known issues that employees are facing while working in office or remotely.

Focus points were the following:

Background information - this section establishes boundaries for the research group, finding out how long have the employees worked in each working environment and how long have they worked at Webhelp in total.

Flexibility - this section finds out how much time of their day do employees spend on travelling to office and back. By reducing time spent on commuting, employees can save hours of their time making telecommuting a much better alternative.

Saving money - this section research and analyses which working environment would be financially more pleasant for the employees. What effects it and why. And how could it be improved.

Distractions - as each working environment has its own distractions that negatively affect employee's performance, this section aims to find out what those distractions are and develop solutions on how to minimize or possibly even eliminate them.

Difficult to "unplug" - it is noticed that working and living in the same environment can negatively result in mixing work with personal life. Boundaries can start to blur, and employee may find himself thinking about personal life during working hours making it difficult to concentrate on work, or vice versa may continue thinking about work outside the working hours making it more challenging to mentally rest before the next day. This section aims to find out how common this problem is and whether it is possible to eliminate it.

Loneliness - another big issue with telecommuting is minimal or non-existing face to face interaction with other colleagues. This can drastically impact the well-being and performance of the employees making them feel that they are left alone. This section aims to find out how many employees are affected by this and how could the situation be improved.

Employee satisfaction - this section gives a base ground to the research showing what is the current situation is at Webhelp. It shows how happy employees are in each environment and how do they think they perform in each of them.

### 8.3 Analyzing results

#### Flexibility:

From the results, it is clearly visible that majority of employees spend over an hour on commuting daily. Only 35% of employees spend one hour or less on commuting and the rest, 65% spend from one hour ten minutes up to three hours daily. For the employees who spend one and a half hour commuting daily this results in a full 8 hours of time commuting weekly, that is an equivalent of a full working day, that could be spent on something else. Eliminating travelling could save employees a lot of free time. This theory is backed up in the survey as 88% of employees who participated in the survey also stated that they do notice an increase in their free time while working remotely.

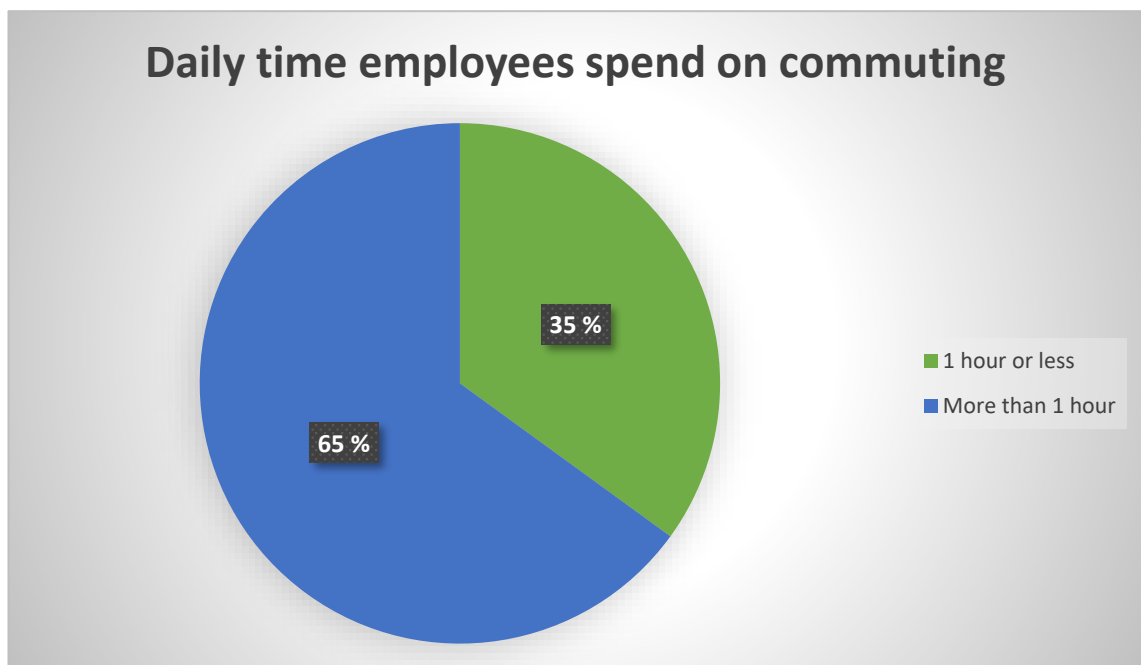


Figure 1: Daily time employees spend on commuting

It would be logical that employees who spend more time on commuting would telecommute more often than employees who spend less time on commuting. However, looking at the results it seems to be the exact opposite. Those 35% of employees who spend an hour or less daily on commuting, work remotely for 68% of the time on average. Other 65% of employees telecommute only 32% of the time on average.

As Webhelp is rather open to the telecommuting, especially during the current pandemic, it is easy to request a transfer to the home office. The important question is why employees prefer working in Office and how to make telecommuting more attractive to them.

### Saves money:

From the financial point of view, over 70% of employees have stated that they do save money on telecommuting. Biggest reasons for that were saving on gas and public transportation fees and saving on food. While employees telecommute, they tend to cook at home instead of eating out like while working at the office. That potentially saves them a lot of money as eating from home is considerably cheaper.

There also appeared two main reason why some employees answered that they do not feel like they are saving money on telecommuting. First reason was related to public transportation. Some employees are buying monthly ticket regardless of whether they work from home or not as this ticket is also used during their free time. As they would by this ticket anyway, it does not affect their savings at all. Two of the employees also stated that they have noticed a large growth in electricity consumption while telecommuting, this growth seems to be big enough to cover all other possible savings and result in no change financially for the employees.

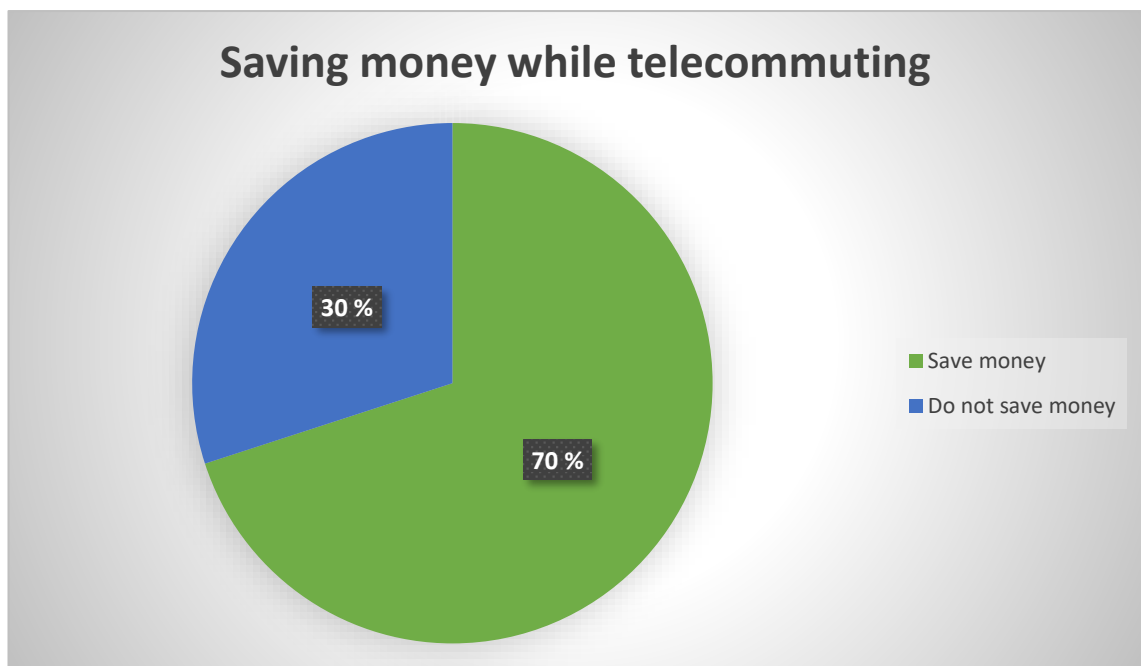


Figure 2: Saving money while telecommuting

Having a look at the distractions that employees experience while working remotely, there were many different ones that came up. However only 23,5% of employees stated that they experience and are affected by them. 17,5% were not sure and almost 59% stated that they are not experiencing or are not affected by those distractions.

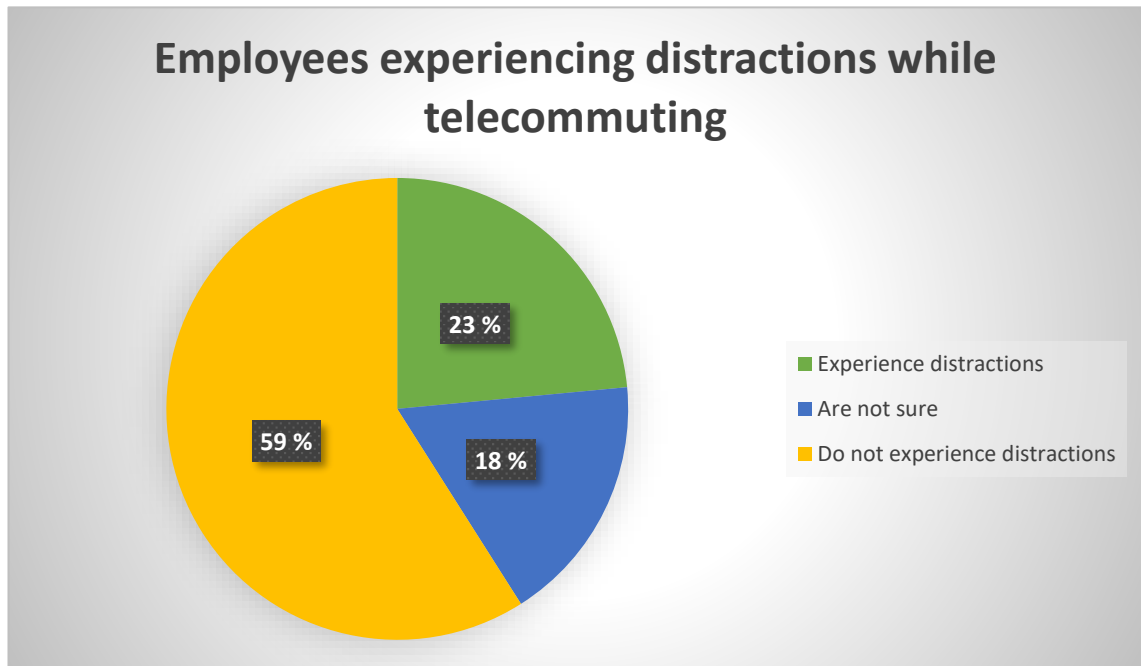


Figure 3: Employees experiencing distractions while telecommuting

#### Distractions:

From results it is clear that the biggest distractions are neighbors, other members of household, pets and phone. Neighbors and other members of household affect employees in similar way as crowded office, surrounding employees with disturbing noise. And as it is often easy to agree with other members of the household to keep quite during working hours, it is much harder to agree on that with neighbors. Usually living in a block of flats, new neighbors come and go rather often. As new neighbors move in, they usually decide to renovate something in their apartment, making noise from drilling for example. As most people does not work at home, renovating usually happens during the day to minimize the disturbance. However, as Webhelp employees who are working from home, work during the daytime, they are constantly exposed to this possible distraction. During my first half a year working in Webhelp I have experienced this distraction at least three times. I have also heard from many other colleagues that they have similar experiences every once in a while. Thus, this distraction is not so rare as it seems to be.

Pets appears to be another major distraction experienced by many employees. Pets usually does not like closed doors and crave attention rather often. This of course can be a relatively

big distraction in this type of work as the timetable is strictly scheduled and there is no time for occasional breaks, other than the ones that are scheduled, to calm pets down or give them the attention they want.

As security is at top priority in my department, we are not allowed to have our cellphones with us in the working space. While working at the office, we must leave them outside the office space and are allowed to use them only while out of the office during breaks. This is a strong security measure and at the same time it eliminates a major distraction. While working from home, we are as well forbidden from having our phones or other electronics with us in the same room. However, looking at the surveys, as it is virtually impossible to monitor whether an employee has a cellphone on him in home environment or not, employees tend to exploit this fact and sometimes are having their phones with them during working hours. This is noticed while analyzing survey data, as it appears there that rather common distractions during the workday while telecommuting are cellphone and social media.

Other distractions that have been experienced by the employees are zoning out due to the lack of things to do and a feeling of “not getting the day started”. As there are no people to talk to other than via chat, it is relatively easy to find yourself just sitting and not doing anything, especially while the day is not busy and there are not many clients on the line. As employees enter a sort of trans just thinking about something, it is tough to return to the real world quickly enough when the client actually calls and continue performing efficient work.

What is related to the “not getting the day started”, I can rely to that myself. Working in the office gives a routine to perform and get yourself into the right mood for the day. While getting to office it is rather easy to get into the mood of performing work well. On other hand, while working from home, morning routine is basically the same as during the weekend, and by the time employees have to sit behind the desk and start working, not their body, nor their mental state is usually ready to do work and has to catch up to it during the day.



### Difficult to “unplug”

Looking at the answers related to whether employees having troubles to stop thinking about work outside the working hours while working from home, it is noticed that almost 60% of employees do experience these difficulties. When compared to the Office environment, only 23,5% of employees stated that they have experienced difficulties to “unplug” while leaving the Office.

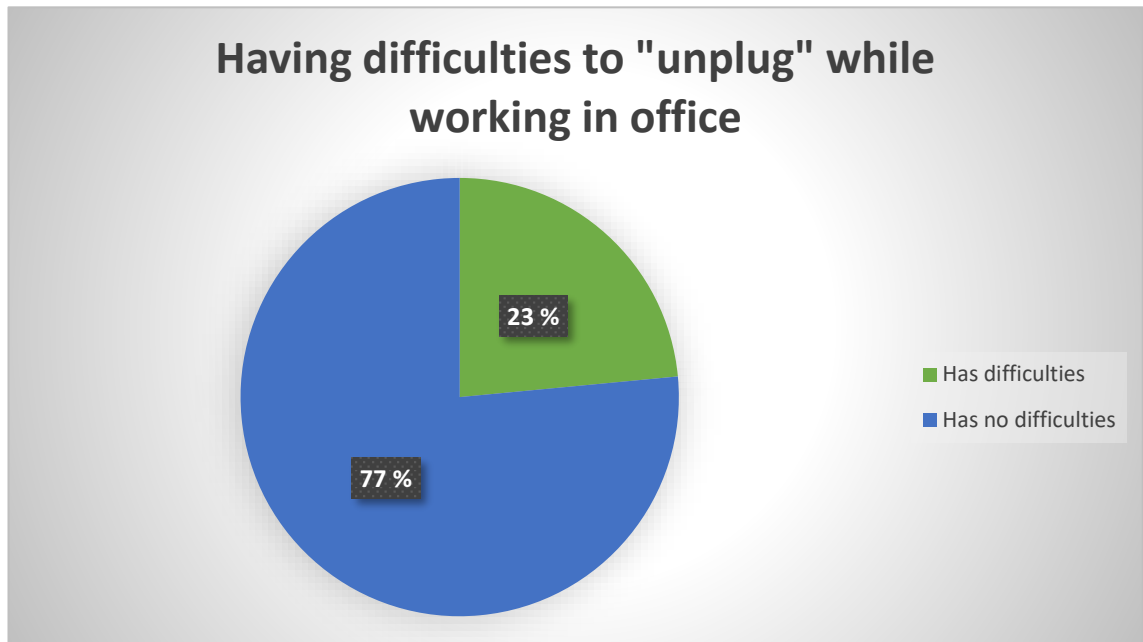


Figure 4: Having difficulties to “unplug” while working in office

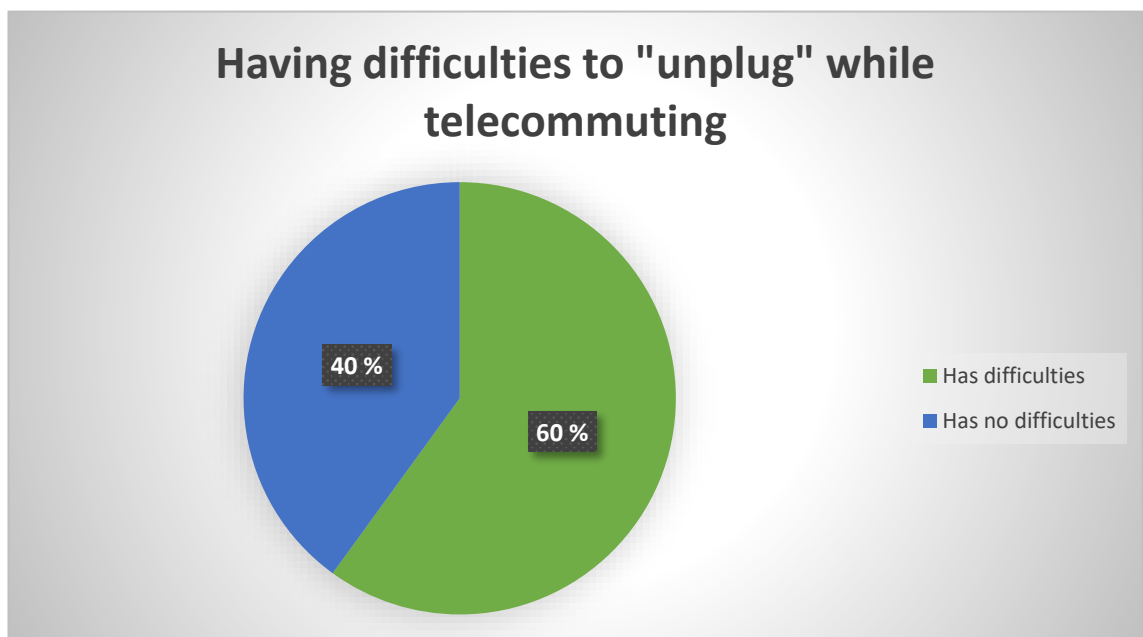


Figure 5: Having difficulties to “unplug” while telecommuting

This is a so called “the Doorway Effect”. Psychologists believe that as individual passes through the doorway to another room, brain tends to forget things that this individual thought of in the previous room to be able to create new memories or episodes in the next room. This is very effective way to reset your mental state and mentally relax after the workday while thinking about something else entirely. (Ashish, 2021)

As employees leaves the Office, they leave the space that is associated for them with work. While working from home, environment usually does not change, and these difficulties may occur. As it is noticed from the survey, over 88% of employees does not have a dedicated room for working purposes only. This means that they are also spending their free time in the same room that can on some occasions keeps them thinking about work even after working hours.

### Loneliness

Loneliness is a single biggest threat while working remotely. It can occur extremely easily as employees are most often working by themselves in a room behind the closed door, and it may have a huge impact on the employees’ mental state, especially if the employee is a very social person.

Analyzing the results, over 82% of employees stated that they are experiencing loneliness while working remotely. Almost 12% were not sure and only under 6% partly disagreed. Based on the results it is safe to assume that almost all employees in my department experience some level of loneliness at some point while working remotely. Over 94% of employees stated that they miss face to face interaction with colleagues while telecommuting from home.

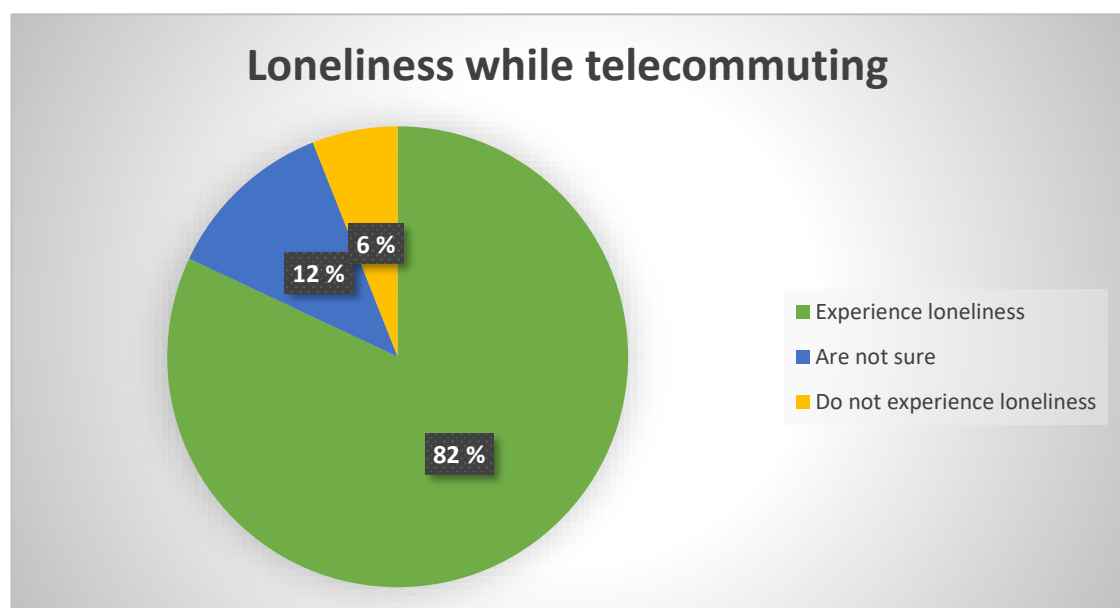


Figure 6: Loneliness while telecommuting

As employees are left with only chat to interact with colleagues while working remotely it is not a surprise that there will be a lack of face-to-face interaction that employees will miss. Also looking at the results of the preferred way to communicate with colleagues, over 88% preferred face to face interaction and only around 12% preferred chat. Chat environment can also be potentially harmful to the communication between employees if it does not work properly. For example, not getting answers or help in time due to malfunction in a communication platform and message not getting delivered in time or at all.

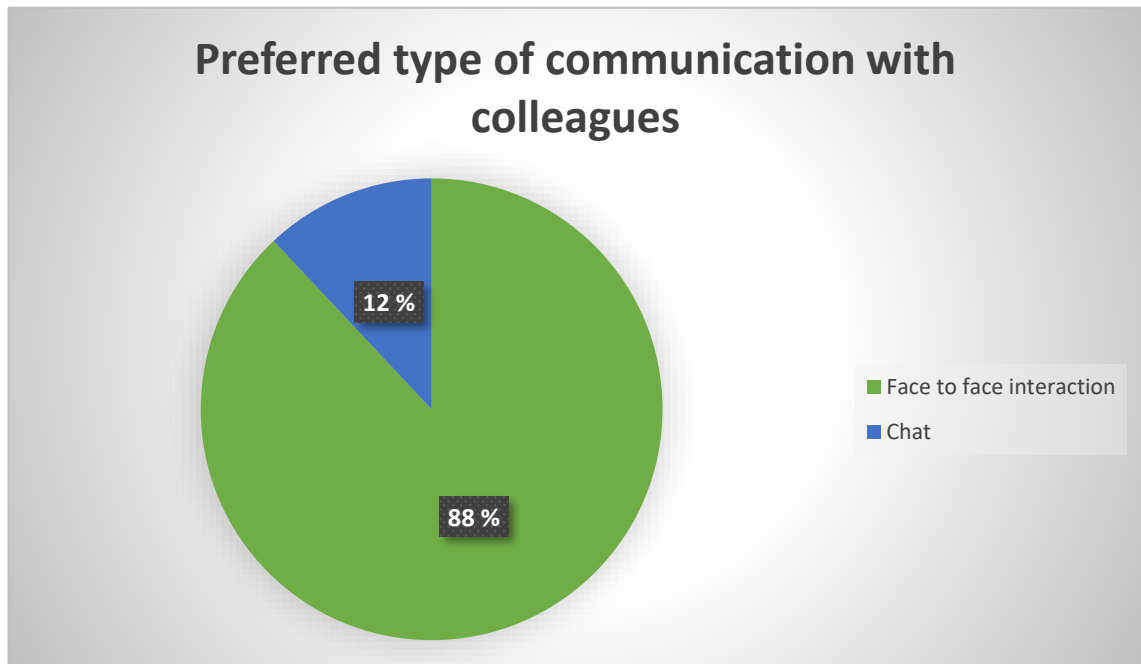


Figure 7: Preferred type of communication with colleagues

## Getting help

An important aspect in every job is the ability to get help quickly and efficiently if its required. The importance of this is especially easily noticeable in a type of work that employees are dealing with at Webhelp, as employees here are faced with new problems to solve every day. As new employees are constantly hired there is always someone in a need for some assistance.

As noticed from surveys where employees are asked in which environment it is easier for them to get help at, it is clearly visible that Office environment is more suited for that. Over 82% stated that it easier for them to get help in office and only 6% leaned towards statement that help is easier accessible remotely.

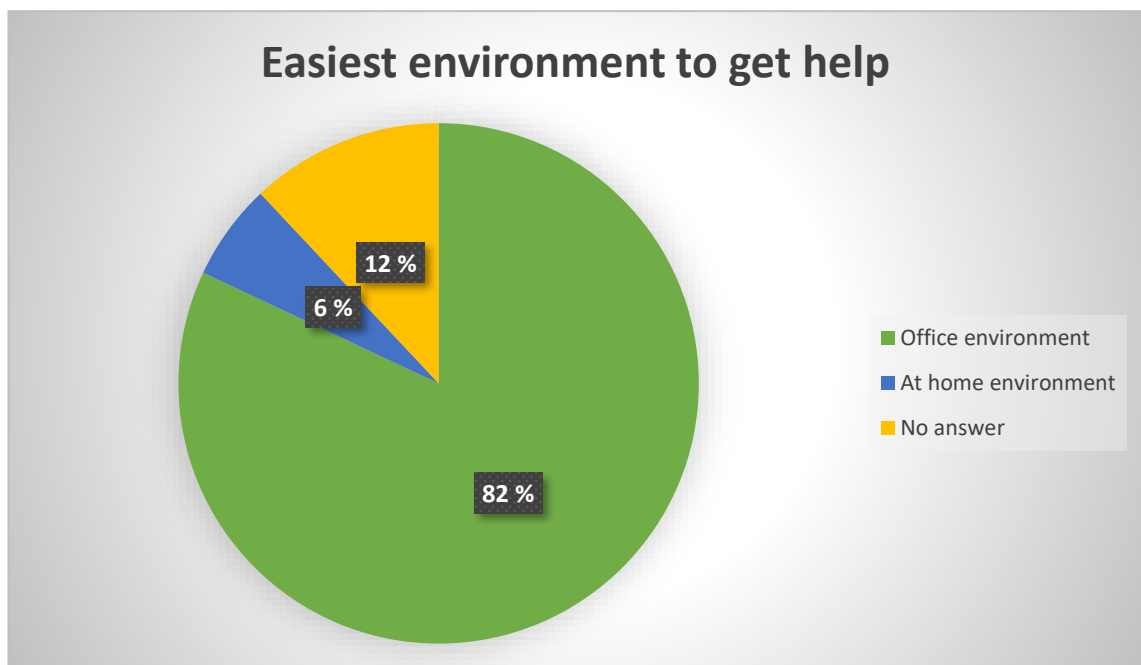


Figure 8: Easiest environment to get help

## Performance

Employees were asked to rate their performance level while working in office and while working remotely. Looking at the results, 47% stated that they perform better at office and only 23,5% stated that they perform better while working remotely.

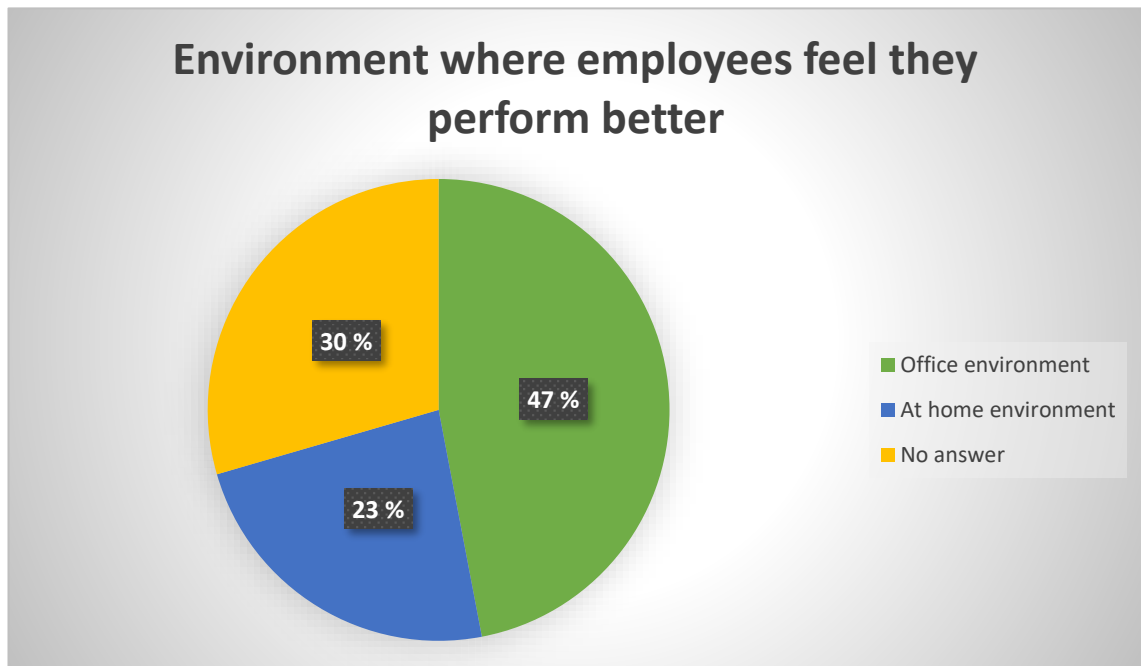


Figure 9: Environment where employees feel they perform better

However, the difference is minimal and most likely related to some employees being yet inexperienced and needing extra help while performing work that is easier accessible in the office environment.

## Remote communication

Remote communication platform that Webhelp is using seems to need some improvements. Multiple employees have stated that remote communication does not always work as they are expecting making it difficult sometimes to communicate with colleagues.

Management of my department has been notified about this issue and are currently working on improving the situation. As I know, Webhelp is currently testing a new communication platform that has had a major success and received a lot of approvals and praise from employees that have been testing it. Currently this platform is not yet in use as Webhelp's security department is still working on adjusting the platform to meet strict security requirements.

## Management

Besides some inconveniences while working remotely, management of Webhelp department seems to be doing a very good job supporting employees. 82% of employees stated that they are getting enough feedback from the management, none disagreed. And 88% of employees stated that management does track their performance and workload well, none disagreed.

## 9 Suggestions and Improvements

### 9.1 Office improvements

#### Eliminating surrounding noise

The biggest drawback of the office environment for the employees according to the survey was the experience of a surrounding noise during the busy hours. There are constantly other employees working nearby and taking the calls that can distract the other employees who try to concentrate.

Moving employees further away from each other could be one solution, however it is not cost efficient as it would require a much bigger office space and difficulties to expand in the future. Moving employees further from each other would also make it more difficult for the employees to communicate and interact with each other raising loneliness of employees and making it more difficult to quickly ask for help when needed.

An alternative solution could be in separating personal working spaces of the employees with low walls, to create so called "office cubicles". The walls will provide employees with more restricted personal space also isolating an employee from majority of a surrounding noise. The cubicles do not need to entirely surround the employee, completely isolating him from other colleagues. Putting three walls made from sound dampening material in front and on both sides of the desk will most likely be enough to mask majority of the surrounding noise as well as keep majority of the noise generated by an employee working in this cubical. By leaving the space behind the employee completely exposed, this setup will not restrict employees from communicating with each other if needed.

Another alternative solution to remove surrounding noise could be achieved by providing employees with different style of headset. Currently employees of Webhelp use on-ear headset while working. This type of headset is perfect for delivering high quality sound however does not mask any surrounding sounds. In this case, Webhelp could provide its employees with over-ear style headphones. Those would be much better at masking the surrounding noise to keep the employees better focused on working. One major drawback to

this solution is that in order to communicate with other colleagues, employees would need to constantly take headset on and of as over-ear design would make it hard to hear colleagues while headset is on.

#### Other improvements

While working at the office, there can be moments of unplanned free time occasionally, during the day. For example, judging from my own experiences and from what I have heard from other Webhelp employees, there are moments in between taking calls from clients that can be from several second to up to ten minutes that employees can utilize as they want. There is always something useful to do during those moments, employees can for example go through emails, answer questions from other colleagues in chat, ask questions from other colleagues or research a resolution to a certain issue in a knowledge base. However, there can be moments when employees are mentally tired and are in the need of a small break. To avoid zoning out while doing nothing, Webhelp has already came up with a brilliant solution. Webhelp has implemented a website that allow employees to complete small exercises and games to earn points and compete with other colleagues. This is a great activity to perform in between taking calls to think about something else for a while or mentally relax. At the same time, by completing those exercises employees are also learning something new or rehearsing important thing that they already know.

I would however suggest implementing one addition to already existing solution. As current platform still focuses on providing employees with exercises that are work related, it would be beneficial for employees to have total breaks from work related tasks. Currently there is nothing else employees could do at the office beside visiting the platform provided by Webhelp. So, to avoid zoning out while having a break in between the calls some employees including myself have already came up with a solution. They bring a fidget toy or a puzzle from home to keep brain occupied during those short breaks. This helps to relax mentally as employees does not have to think about work related things for a while simultaneously occupying the brain with something preventing zoning out effect to be able to immediately jump into work as next client calls.

As it appears to be useful, I would suggest Webhelp to adopt this trend even more and supply their Office with a small amount of fidget toys and puzzles that employees could use during the working day. This might not be a good idea during the current pandemic; however, this could be useful after the pandemic is finally over.

## 9.2 Telecommuting improvements

### Loneliness

One of the biggest drawbacks of telecommuting is the experience of loneliness that employees have because of continuously working in an isolated environment by themselves. Utilizing chat alone does not solve the problem as chat does not provide employees with face-to-face interaction. It is most likely impossible to completely illuminate feeling of loneliness while working from home, but there are methods to minimize this experience.

Several studies have shown that video calls are much more efficient in creating a friendly community atmosphere than regular audio calls. And as it has been noticed from the surveys, over 94% of employees stated that they miss face-to-face interaction while telecommuting. Webhelp already holds weekly team meetings in a group call however camera is rarely used. I would suggest making it mandatory to keep the camera on during these team meetings. This small change can bring the interaction between colleagues to a new level creating an experience of being in the same space by providing a face-to-face interaction.

In addition to that, there are regular one to one meetings with management and meetings with quality coaches at Webhelp that could also utilize cameras while held remotely.

### Communication platform

By analyzing surveys, I have noticed that many employees have stated that current communication platform that Webhelp utilize does not always perform flawlessly as it should. I have also experienced similar behavior of the current platform.

Those issues can sometimes appear in messages not being delivered in time or in rare cases at all. Or there are a continuous threat that if group chat stays inactive for some time it can close up preventing employees from using it and creating a need of constantly creating new group chats. This creates an unnecessary things to worry about during the working day. As Webhelp is using a third-party communication platform it is not possible for Webhelp to modify or improve it in any way.

Webhelp is fortunately aware of this issue and is currently working on adopting a new communication platform for their employees. It has already been tested that resulted in a huge success. Currently there are still some test and improvements that Webhelp must make to ensure that this platform is secure and there will not be any risks of internal data leakage.



### Partial coverage of electricity bills

Webhelp is doing a great job in making office spaces more pleasant and supports employees by covering part of the public transportation fees and part of the lunch expenses for them.

Similar support could be also implemented for the employees that constantly telecommute. This support can be provided by for example partial coverage of the employee's electricity bill. As currently employees must cover all the extra electricity used on powering the commuter and lights during the working time on their own. It has been noticed from the surveys that some employees have experienced a noticeable increase in their electricity bills while telecommuting. Partially covering these bills could promote telecommuting and ensure employee satisfaction.

### 10 Model for choosing working environment

To assist management of Webhelp while choosing the correct working environment for their employees I have developed a list of questions to go through. This will help management to decide whether employee is ready to telecommute, or would it be more beneficial for the employee and management if employee would work in the office.

Has employee completed all necessary training?

Webhelp does not require its employees to be able to perform everything from the beginning. Webhelp utilizes a ladder-style progression by offering a next training program only after employee had some time to learn, practice and get familiar with previous skills. As it has been noticed from the surveys, getting help in a remote environment is much more difficult compared to the office environment. Based on these finding I would suggest keeping the employee in the office for the time he gets familiar with all the necessary skills. After employee has completed all the trainings and acquired all the skills, telecommuting could be considered.

How good employee is with solving problems on his own?

Even after completing all the trainings, employees will still face unfamiliar problems every day. There are usually two ways to find resolution to new and unfamiliar problems. The preferred by Webhelp option is to search for the resolution in the knowledge base. However, for new and inexperienced employees this task can take a long time that might not be available during the call. Another option would be to ask other colleagues working in the office for help or utilize communication platforms like chats to quickly ask for a solution from quality coaches or other more experienced colleagues. This would be a much quicker solution

but will not help employees long term as they will not develop a skill of finding the answer on their own. As it has been noticed from the surveys, employees find it more difficult to get help in a remote environment. Not being able to find answer on their own and difficulties getting help remotely can result in low performance and decreased well-being of the employees.

The skill of finding solutions on their own should be monitored by management and discussed with employees regarding ways to improve it. Only after employee is confident that he could find a solution on his own most of the times, telecommuting should be considered.

How much employee is dependent on social interaction?

Not all employees are looking forward for telecommuting as it lacks face-to-face interaction. As it has been noticed from surveys, majority of employees miss face-to-face interaction while telecommuting and can start to experience loneliness, decreasing their well-being and possible even resulting in a decreased performance.

This topic should be regularly monitored and discussed between employees and management to determine what would be more beneficial for each employee, a quiet working environment that improves concentration or a more social environment to improve overall well-being.

Performance

As management allow employees to telecommute, they should carefully monitor performance level of the employees after change of the environment. It is possible that changing to telecommuting could impact the performance of the employee drastically lowering it. In this case, management should focus on finding out what is the cause of this drop in performance level. Some issues could be easily resolved but, in some cases,, switching back to the office environment might be considered.

## 11 Conclusions

Objective of this study was to analyze existing research on telecommuting and review its benefits and disadvantages compared to more traditional way of working in the office. Study also aimed on suggesting ways to improve the benefits and eliminate flaws of telecommuting based on the findings and analysis. In addition, after reviewing all the findings, the goal was to develop a working method, that will assist the management team of the case company to determine at which point of the employees' professional career, which of the working environments will be more beneficial for the employees as well as for the company as a whole.

Research was done as a qualitative research, which empirical part was conducted utilizing surveys. In total, seventeen Webhelp employees participated in the survey. Questions of the survey were based on existing research.

Deep and comprehensive data was collected utilizing this survey. Data consisted of employees' experiences and opinions about both telecommuting and working in the office, benefits and disadvantages of both methods of working as well as their impact on the employee's well-being.

Main research question was to find out at which point of employees' professional career which of the working environments would be more beneficial for the employee and a company. By analysing answers to the survey, we can determine that it is more beneficial for the employee to work in the office for the period while employee completes all necessary trainings. After employee has successfully completed all training and is able to successfully solve work related issues on his own, it is most likely more beneficial to telecommute.

Secondary questions of the research aimed to improve both working environments in the company. Based on the analysis it was suggested to make mandatory to use cameras during team meetings for telecommuting employees to reduce the feeling of loneliness. Also, it was suggested to improve or change the online communication platform for easier and faster communication. At the same time making new platform more reliable so there would be no need to worry whether the message or request for help arrived safely to the destination.

For the office environment improvements, it was suggested to focus on elimination the surrounding noise from other colleagues as it was the main distraction based on the survey. Cubical-type office improvements were suggested. Partly walling out the working area of the employee from three sides would drastically reduce the surrounding sound, also trapping sound coming from that employee thus reducing noise for others. Another suggestion was to provide the office with fidget toys or puzzles to keep employees occupied during time between calls keeping their brain busy but at the same time provide them with something else to think about beside work to help employees to mentally relax.

Based on the survey employees were satisfied with their management and work that management is doing. Employees felt that management monitors their performance and workload well giving them at the same time plenty of feedback on their work.

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## Figures

Figure 1: Daily time employees spend on commuting .....	29
Figure 2: Saving money while telecommuting .....	30
Figure 3: Employees experiencing distractions while telecommuting .....	31
Figure 4: Having difficulties to “unplug” while working in office .....	33
Figure 5: Having difficulties to “unplug” while telecommuting .....	33
Figure 6: Loneliness while telecommuting .....	34
Figure 7: Preferred type of communication with colleagues .....	35
Figure 8: Easiest environment to get help .....	36
Figure 9: Environment where employees feel they perform better .....	37

Appendices

Appendix 1: Webhelp Survey question..... 48

## Appendix 1: Webhelp Survey question

### Background information

1. How long have you been working at Webhelp?
2. How much have you been working in each environment? (i.e. Remotely 50%, in Office - 50%)
3. Do you have a dedicated room for working purpose only?

### Flexibility

1. How much time does it take you to get to Office?
2. Do you feel and increase in your free time while working from home by not spending time on travelling to office?
3. Explain (Optional)

### Saves money

1. Do you feel that you save money by working from home? (Consider saving on transportation but increase in water and electricity consumption)
2. Explain (Optional)

### Distractions

1. I experience distractions while working in the office. (On the scale from 1 to 5, 1 - Completely disagree, 2 - Completely agree)
2. I experience distractions while working from home. (On the scale from 1 to 5, 1 - Completely disagree, 2 - Completely agree)
3. What distractions do you have while working from home? (Consider for example phone and other electronics, people you leave with, pets, neighbours.)
4. What distraction do you have while working from office? (Consider for example surrounding noise, colleagues asking question.)
5. Additional comments on this section (Optional)

### Difficult to “unplug”

1. I find myself thinking about work outside the working hours while working from home. (On the scale from 1 to 5, 1 - Completely disagree, 2 - Completely agree)
2. I find myself thinking about work outside the working hours after I leave the office. (On the scale from 1 to 5, 1 - Completely disagree, 2 - Completely agree)
3. Additional comments on this section (Optional)



### Loneliness

1. I experience loneliness while working remotely. (On the scale from 1 to 5, 1 - Completely disagree, 2 - Completely agree)
2. I miss face to face interaction with colleagues while working remotely. (On the scale from 1 to 5, 1 - Completely disagree, 2 - Completely agree)
3. I experience loneliness while working in office. (On the scale from 1 to 5, 1 - Completely disagree, 2 - Completely agree)
4. I miss face to face interaction with colleagues while working in office. (On the scale from 1 to 5, 1 - Completely disagree, 2 - Completely agree)
5. I prefer face to face interaction with colleagues. (On the scale from 1 to 5, 1 - Completely disagree, 2 - Completely agree)
6. I prefer using chat to interact with colleagues. (On the scale from 1 to 5, 1 - Completely disagree, 2 - Completely agree)
7. Additional comments on this section (Optional)

### Employee satisfaction

1. I feel happy while working from office. (On the scale from 1 to 5, 1 - Completely disagree, 2 - Completely agree)
2. I feel happy while working from home. (On the scale from 1 to 5, 1 - Completely disagree, 2 - Completely agree)
3. Explain (Optional)
4. Additional comments on this section (Optional)

### Performance

1. In which working environment is it easier for you to get help?
2. Explain (optional)
3. I perform better while working in the office than while working remotely.
4. Explain (optional)
5. I perform better while working at home than while working in office.
6. Explain (optional)
7. Remote communication with colleagues is working well.
8. Explain (optional)
9. I get enough feedback from my management.
10. Explain (optional)
11. Management tracks my performance and workload well.
12. Explain (optional)
13. Additional comments on this section (Optional)

### Additional feedback

Please feel free to give any additional feedback regarding each working environment or this survey. What do you feel works well in each environment? What would you change/improve?