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LIFESTYLE | CAREERS

The Disconnect Between Remote Workers and Their Companies Is Getting Bigger

More people who work from home say they don't feel a connection to the mission of their employers

By [Lindsay Ellis](#) [Follow](#)

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Nearly 30% of U.S. workers in remote-capable jobs work exclusively at home, according to Gallup, a share that hasn't wavered much in the past year. PHOTO: ISTOCK

People who work from home are feeling more disconnected from the larger mission of their employers.

In a new Gallup survey, the share of remote workers who said they felt a connection to the purpose of their organizations fell to 28% from 32% in 2022—the lowest level since before the pandemic. The findings are from a survey this spring and summer of nearly 9,000 U.S. workers whose jobs can be done remotely.

By contrast, a third of full-time office workers reported a similar sense of connection, nearly the same as last year. Hybrid workers clocked in highest, with 35% saying their companies' mission made them feel their jobs were important.

The findings have broader implications for businesses worried about remote work's effects on employee loyalty and team productivity. For now, many workers say remote work affords them the ability to focus on their essential duties and avoid some of the extracurriculars of office life. This leaves it to companies to try to foster that sense of connection.

In short, more remote workers appear to be approaching their jobs with “a gig-worker mentality,” fulfilling the basic responsibilities of the role rather than anticipating the broader needs of their team or company, said Jim Harter, chief workplace scientist at Gallup, which has tracked worker engagement since 2000. Most professional roles, he points out, tacitly include expectations that go beyond the actual work, such as mentoring others or spurring innovation.

“That’s much more likely to happen if they feel they’re part of something significant,” he said.

Despite the lack of connection, the Gallup survey showed 38% of people who work remotely full- or part-time are engaged, or enthused about their work, compared with 34% of in-office workers.

The conflicting metrics show bosses don't have any easy answers as they try to provide flexible working arrangements yet fret about worker productivity. Nearly 30% of U.S. workers in remote-capable jobs work exclusively at home, according to Gallup, a share that hasn't wavered much in the past year. One reason they score higher in Gallup's engagement metrics than their office peers is that they say they have a clear idea of what's expected of them.

Many managers are unsatisfied with the current setup. In a Federal Reserve Bank of New York survey of business leaders released this month, the majority said remote work helped in recruiting employees yet worsened workplace culture, team cohesion and mentorship.



“People are a little bit more prone to drift to other employment, feeling less attached to the workplace,” said Howard Liu, chair of the psychiatry department at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, where clinicians can work several days each week from home and see patients virtually.

There's also a risk that senior faculty may not think to include junior

Howard Liu, chair of the psychiatry department at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

PHOTO: SCOTT DOBRY

plans large outdoor events each quarter and recently rolled out smaller-group meals, where about 10 colleagues—from clinicians to receptionists—sign up to eat together. The department foots the bill.

Companies are fine-tuning how they manage their remote workforces, adding more virtual check-ins and team-building activities. Some are also bringing them together physically at more critical moments in their work with their teams.



Kelly Ann Doherty, chief administrative officer of Mr. Cooper. PHOTO: MR. COOPER GROUP

colleagues on presentations or projects if they don't run into them in person, Liu said. His department now

Mr. Cooper, a Dallas-based mortgage lender and servicer, introduced a “home-centric” work model last year, letting staff still mostly work at home while having them come into the office occasionally. But as mortgage rates climbed and business got tougher, the lender’s sales managers asked their teams to come in one to three days a week, said Kelly Ann Doherty, its chief administrative officer.

The managers felt on-site work would help team members learn more from each other, improve individual performance and feel more invested in

the organization, she said. It's paid off: Productivity has improved, and the teams have closed more deals since, she said.

At Microsoft, just over a quarter of teams work together in the same location, compared with 61% of them pre-pandemic. The company is now using data from internal research on in-person work and employee surveys to guide managers on when it's most effective to work face-to-face.

One early finding is that new hires who meet their manager in person in the first 90 days are more likely to ask colleagues for feedback and say they are comfortable discussing problems with managers. These workers are also more likely to say that their teammates ask them for input to inform decisions or solve problems, Microsoft said.

“Think about social connection as a battery—you need to charge that battery every once in a while,” said Dawn Klinghoffer, vice president for human-resources business insights.

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