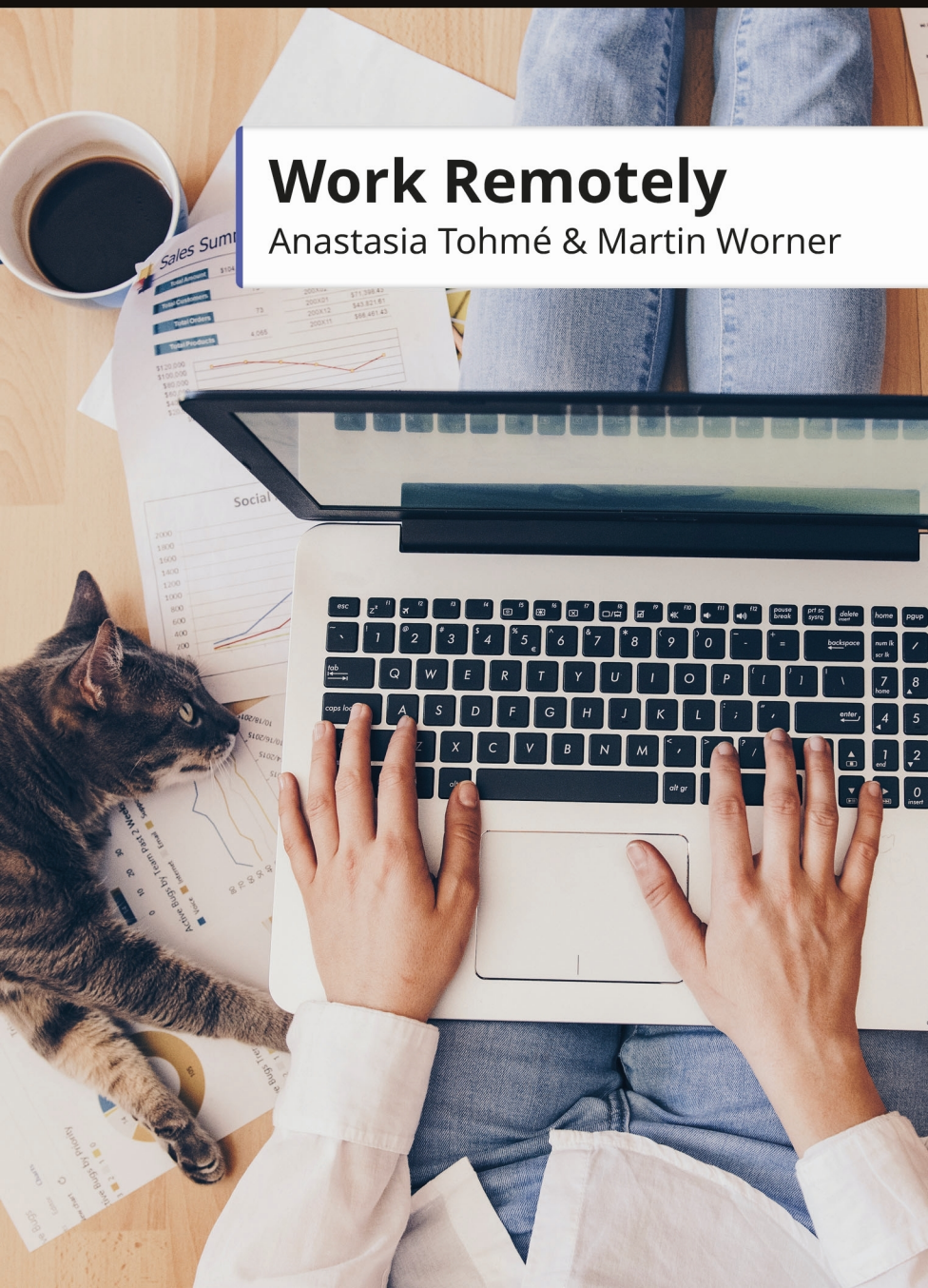


Work Remotely

Anastasia Tohmé & Martin Worner



Many of the quotes in this book have been simplified
for learners of English as a foreign language.

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Note about the book

Martin Worner used to work for **finance*** and technology businesses, before starting his own company, **specializing** in technology for banks and other **financial organizations**. He has worked with **teams** around the world and was quick to move to **remote** working. Today, he is head of **product** at Confio.

Anastasia Tohmé is a **human resources** (HR) **specialist**, she is **responsible** for **hiring** the best people for Safeguard Global, an important world **services** company. She also teaches at Geneva Business School. She lives in Spain and has been fully remote since 2018.

This book looks at the positive and negative sides of working **remotely** for **employees**, managers and companies. It explores **productivity** and people's work-life balance.

Before-reading questions

- 1 What do you think “working remotely” is?
- 2 When and why did more people start working remotely, do you think?
- 3 What is good about working remotely? What is bad about it?

*Definitions of words in **bold** can be found in the glossary on pages 97–104.

INTRODUCTION Why work remotely?

Since the birth of the modern office, few people have worked **remotely**. A 2018 **survey** found that only 3% of **employees** in the United States of America worked from home more than half of the time. But, since the start of the **coronavirus pandemic** in 2020, thousands of companies have had to close offices and many millions of people have **had to** work from home. In April 2020, almost 50% of UK employees began to work away from the office. Companies all over the world are now welcoming **remote** working. While he was at Twitter, Jack Dorsey made all jobs remote, except for those that need you to be in an office. Many more companies have followed.

To get the most out of remote work, we need to look at what the **workplace** means and understand what **flexible** work can bring. We need to become more **innovative**, and carefully and actively experiment with different ways of working. Remote work has become the new normal. And it is here to stay.

But why should we do it?

Without the **limits** of an office, many employers can employ people who do not live in the area. In one survey, 64% of employers said that they would probably **hire** remote employees, while most found that **virtual**

hiring was a cheaper way to get good new employees. Companies can use the money that they do not spend on renting offices to pay employees more. Employees are not **limited** to one place, so they can develop a **career** while still staying close to family and friends. According to one survey, people want \$24,000 more if you ask them to move away from family.

Remote working also gives the same chances to people whose age, **race**, class, sex or **disability** can make career **development** more difficult. Taking away the cost and need to travel to work every day can really help people who find it difficult or impossible to get to an office. Once in the virtual **workspace**, employees from different groups are treated more fairly, one survey found, because the employer sees the results, not the people.

Several surveys have shown what most of us already knew: working at home increases our **productivity**. In a survey of over 13,000 businesses around the world, 85% found that **teams** were more **productive** when working remotely.¹

For many employees, working from home means that they have greater **flexibility** and **independence** to plan their day. They have more time for interests, for spending time with family and friends, and for looking after pets. With hours saved by not travelling, workers can spend more time exercising and preparing healthier meals. One survey found that 77% of employees thought that they were healthier and had better **wellbeing** by working from home. In a KBC Bank survey, 87% of people said they had better work-life

balance; 83% said that they could **concentrate** more at work; 72% felt less **stressed** at work; 68% were more **motivated**; and 62% could manage their work better.² The survey also showed that it was good for employers, too, as there was a 76% increase in employees staying in their jobs when they could work **flexibly**.

Virtual **communication** has also changed the way people see each other in companies. It can be positive to see company managers in their homes on a Zoom call. We see that they, too, have families, homes to manage and their own problems. Many companies welcome this move towards a more human way of managing a company.

Big offices in tall glass buildings in city centres cost companies millions every year. In New York, offices cost about \$14,800 per employee every year, with cleaning, food and drinks, and **taxes**.³ Saving money in this way means that companies can find better employees and pay them more, or buy new technology.

Working from home can also be good for the environment. In 2015, the company Xerox found that its remote workers drove 92,000,000 fewer miles.⁴

Of course, there are still people who are unsure about changing to remote working. Some employees work better when they are with people in an office. Others like the **structure** a working day gives them. Many do not live in a home where it is easy to work, and some worry that **colleagues** might think less of them when they see where they live.

The history of office work

Offices – places where employees **processed** the documents you need when managing a country – have been around for a long time. The Medici family's Palazzo Uffizi in Florence, or the Bank of England, are early examples. The idea of working together in one place started with factories in 18th-century Europe. Before that, city people worked in the city, country people worked in or near their homes. When factories opened, many people moved to cities to work. People are still doing this today.

In 2018, 13% of people living in cities were in thirty-three huge megacities – cities with more than 10,000,000 people. By 2030, there will probably be 14% of people living in forty-one megacities.⁵

Technology like the telephone made it possible to open offices away from the home or factory, because managers could still control things. Other new technologies like lights, and machines to do difficult maths, allowed lots of information to be saved and processed faster and in a more **organized** way than before. More employees were needed with the ability to work in these new offices. In the end, whole cities were built around business areas.

However, this brought new problems and one of the biggest was traffic. According to the RingCentral blog, any worker around the world loses about a month of each year travelling to and from work. This makes us stressed, and owning and managing a car costs money and is bad for the environment. It did not take long for people to start

questioning how we work and trying to find better ways of doing it.

In the last thirty years, as offices have become bigger and more open, productivity⁶ has fallen, mostly because they are so noisy, making it difficult to concentrate. People have started using **instant** messaging communication **tools**, like Slack, Teams or Skype, instead of having conversations. We probably send messages just as often as we walk over to a colleague's desk now.

The office is still a place where we can meet, discuss and share things. But we are all so busy with our own work that finding time and a place to meet is difficult. Company offices are often on different floors, buildings or even in different countries. Being close does not necessarily mean always working well together as a team.

So do we really need to be in an office? If offices are not working, is this our chance to rethink how we work? Remote working, either fully remote or mixing office and remote working, has become possible because of technology like video calls, **cloud applications** and fast internet. This means that employers can hire people from anywhere they choose, and employees can have more control over where and how they want to work. There are problems with remote working, as it is different from office work. However, once you understand what you need to do, you can work towards it.