

**TELEWORK ASSOCIATION**  
SUPPORTING 21ST CENTURY WORK

# **WORKING AT HOME**

## **The Productivity Tool of the Future**

**A research report  
by**

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# **Working at home: the productivity tool of the future**

***A report prepared by Peter Thomson, Research Director, Telework Association. Sponsored by Wisework Ltd.***

## **Summary**

This report shows that there is a substantial increase in output when work is carried out in the home compared with working in the office. Based on a survey of people who work for part of their time at home, the vast majority say they are more productive at home. Half of those surveyed reckoned they could measure the impact and the key finding from these respondents is that the difference is substantial. The overwhelming majority said that both the saving of wasted time and the ability to fit work around the rest of their lives improved output. But when asked to identify the main reason, the lack of interruptions came top of the list.

The report raises key questions for managers. Why is working at home still considered an employee benefit in many organisations and treated as something that will decrease the output of employees? The overwhelming evidence from this and other reports shows substantial increases in output from people adopting new working patterns. Home working has to shake off its current image and be seen as a key productivity tool as part of business strategy.

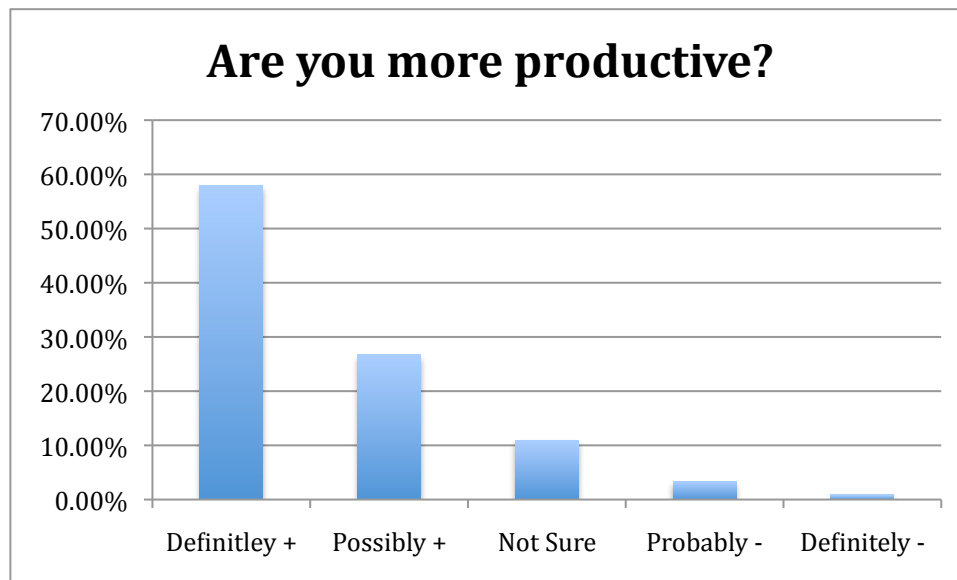
## **Introduction**

Ever since 'teleworking' started in the early days of electronic computing, there have been mixed opinions about the benefits of working at home. As we have moved to more sophisticated, networked technology and as broadband has become almost universally available the discussion has continued. Some people have argued that working from home is an employee benefit and does nothing for the organisation (other than perhaps help to attract and retain a few employees). Others have argued that flexible working brings many business benefits and contributes significantly to the bottom line.

This report aims to shed some light on this debate by looking in more detail at the productivity of people who work for at least some of their time at home. It is based on a survey of home workers carried out by the Telework Association in 2009 completed over the Internet by 350 people. Unlike other surveys that have simply asked if people are more productive whilst teleworking, this survey asked people if they could measure that productivity. This survey aimed to delve further into the reasons for the improved productivity. Is it just that people get more time because they are not wasting hours in commuting, or are they able to produce more per hour when working at home?

## How does output compare between home and office?

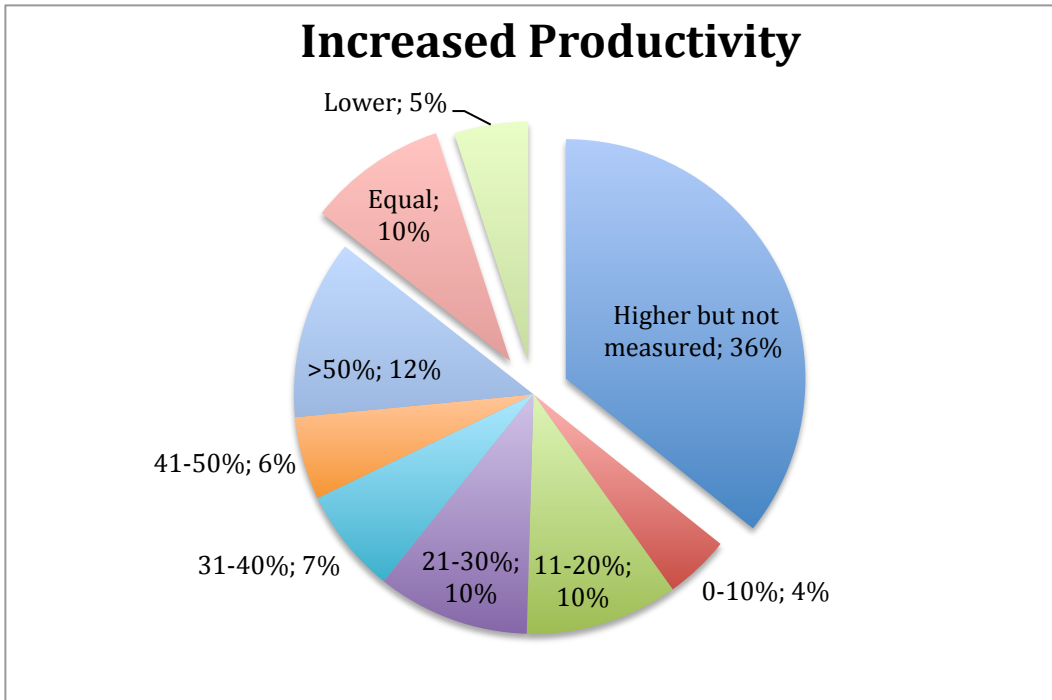
To establish how sure the respondents were about their productivity at home, they were asked if they were definitely sure about the answer or just probably right. This showed that over half were 'definitely' sure that they were more productive and adding those who are 'probably' sure brought the total to 85%. Just 1% claimed they are definitely less productive and adding the 'probables' still makes it less than 5%.



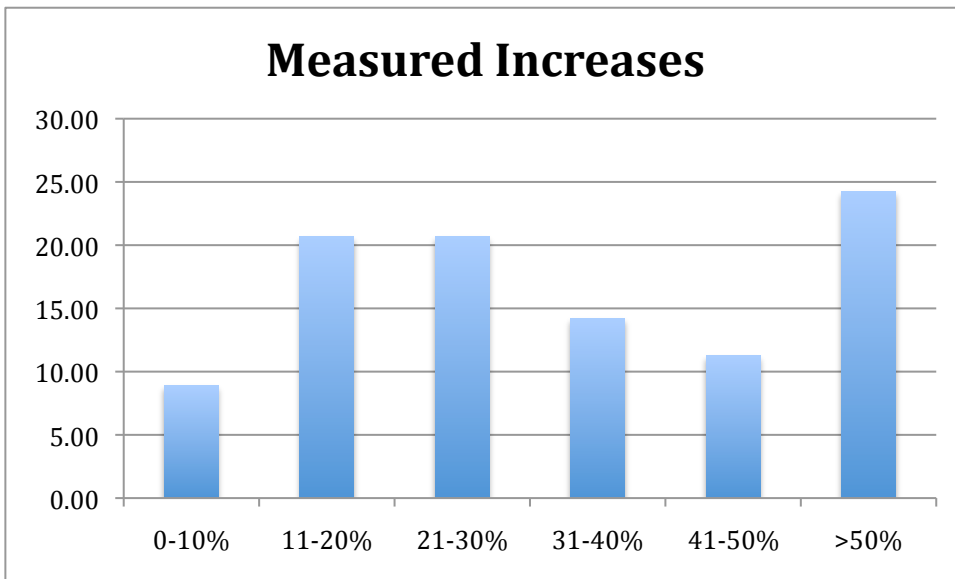
So the overwhelming majority of people surveyed think that they are more productive working at home in comparison with working in the office. They were asked to consider the 'office' as the description of their employer's premises whether it was actually a shop, bank, factory or other type of building.

When they were asked if they could measure their productivity per hour 19% said they could do it accurately 49% said it was approximate and 32% said they couldn't measure their output. So 68% of this sample say they can actually measure their hourly output. Their responses are therefore not just based on a feeling of being more productive but from more solid measures of output per hour. This is an important distinction, showing that the productivity increases in home working are not just down to saving commuting time but are real improvements in output per working hour.

When asked to put a figure on the increase in output per hour exactly half of the respondents were able to do so with a further 36% claiming higher productivity but not being able to measure it. 10% reckoned they produced the same output whether they were at the office or at home and only 5% felt they had lower output. This data shows that 85% of teleworkers are more productive when they work from home. Even if there was some bias in the self-selection process for people participating in the survey the figures still show a conclusive result.

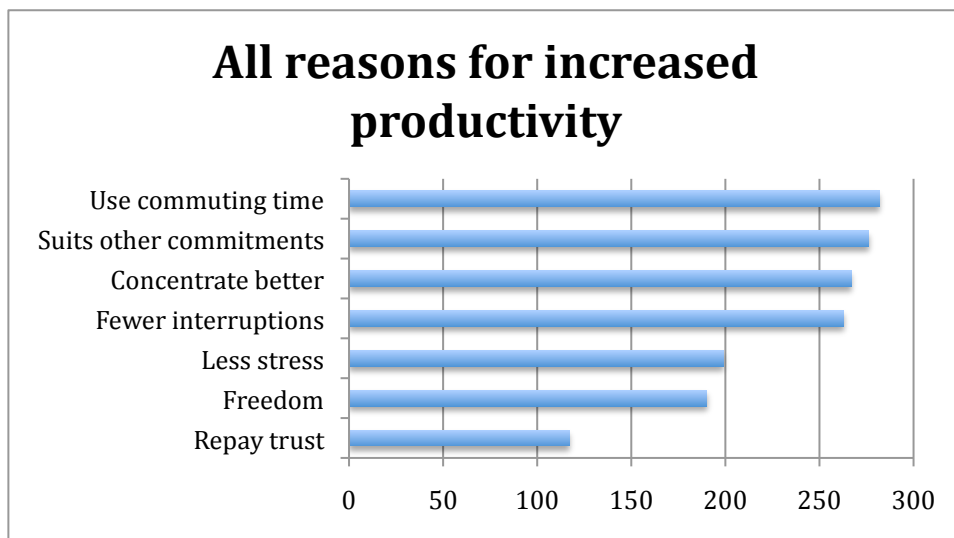


Further analysis of the percentage increases reported in this survey show an interesting conclusion. Out of the people who were able to put a figure to their increased output, a quarter claimed to have in excess of a 50% increase in productivity. Interestingly, a relatively small number claimed up to 10% increase supporting the view that teleworking is a source of substantial improvements in output.

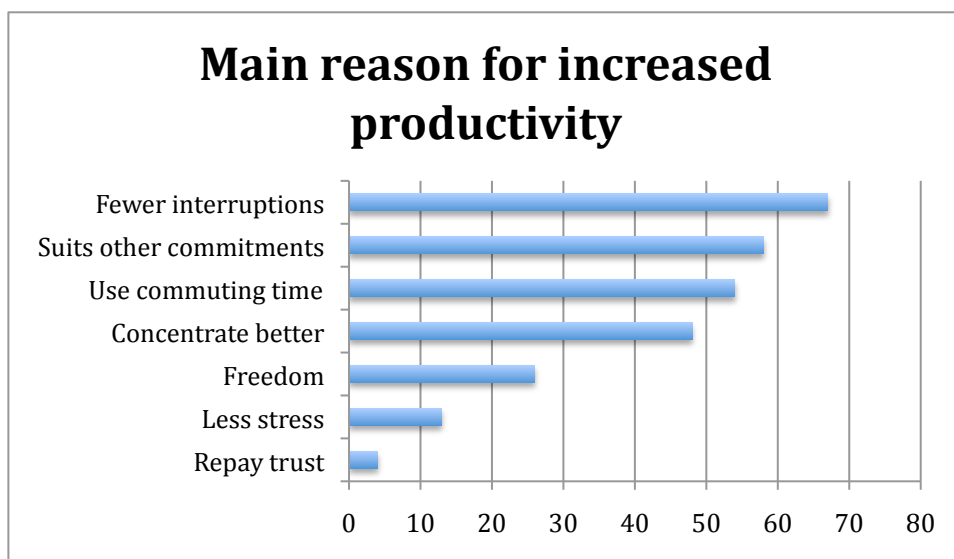


## Why are people more productive at home?

The survey asked people to identify the reasons behind the increased output. Firstly they were asked if they agreed that any items on a list were contributing to their productivity and then they were asked to pick their one main reason. The first question shows that most people were able gain a benefit from not having to travel to work and use some of this saved time to increase their output. But almost equally important was the fact that they could choose the time that they worked in order to fit in with other commitments. This then allowed them to concentrate better with fewer interruptions.

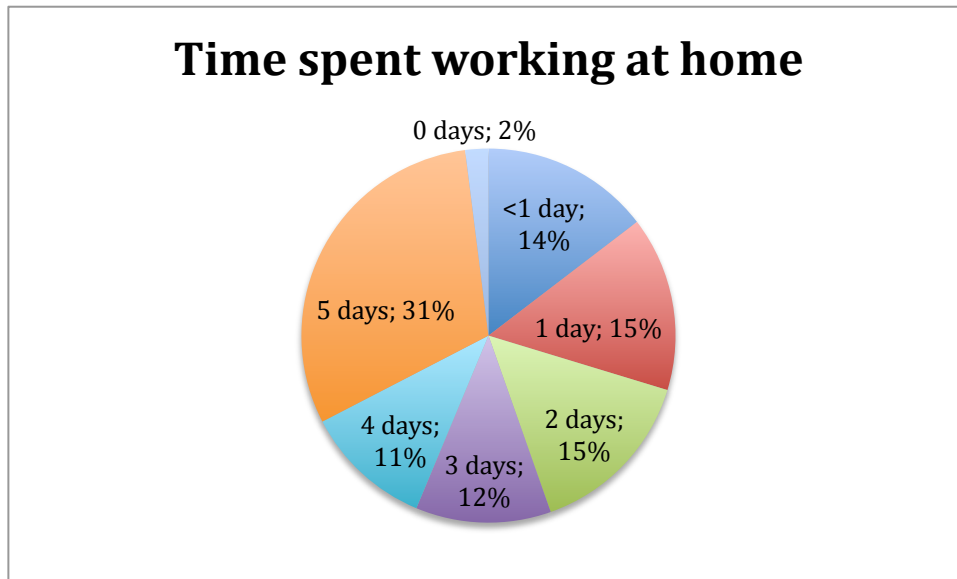


However, when asked to identify one main reason for the improved output the order changed and “fewer interruptions” scored top. So it seems that the home environment scores over the office as a place to work because people are able to get on with the job without the constant interruptions that plague many open plan offices. It also follows that arranging work around other personal commitments will result in less potential disruption from family and friends.

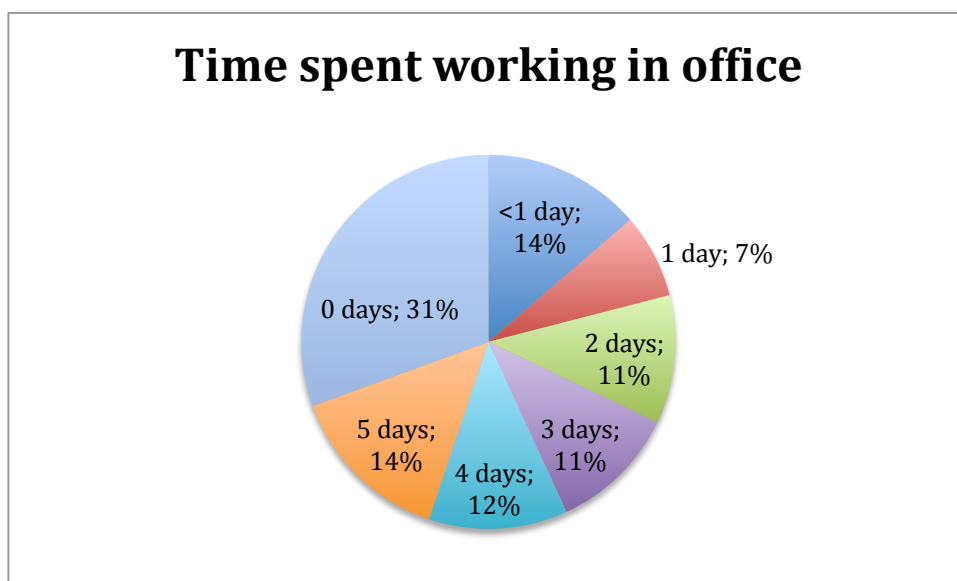


## Who answered the survey?

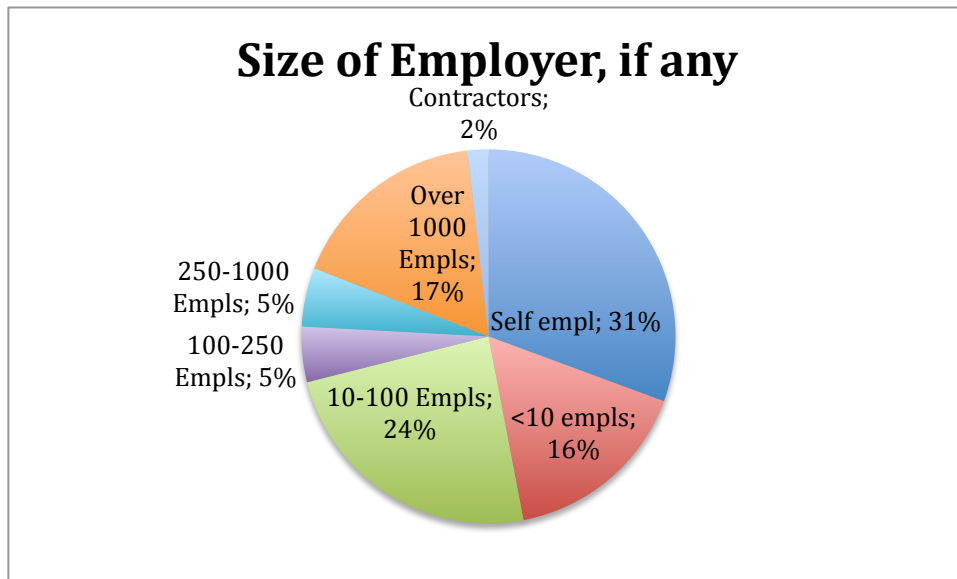
The survey was carried out between May and December 2009 using an Internet based survey. It was publicised through the Telework Association and Wisework Ltd, the sponsors of the survey. There were 350 valid responses to the questionnaire varying from full time teleworkers (30%) to those spending one day or less at home (also 30%). They were asked to estimate their time spent working at home as the equivalent to a number of days work per week and not just the number of days on which they worked.



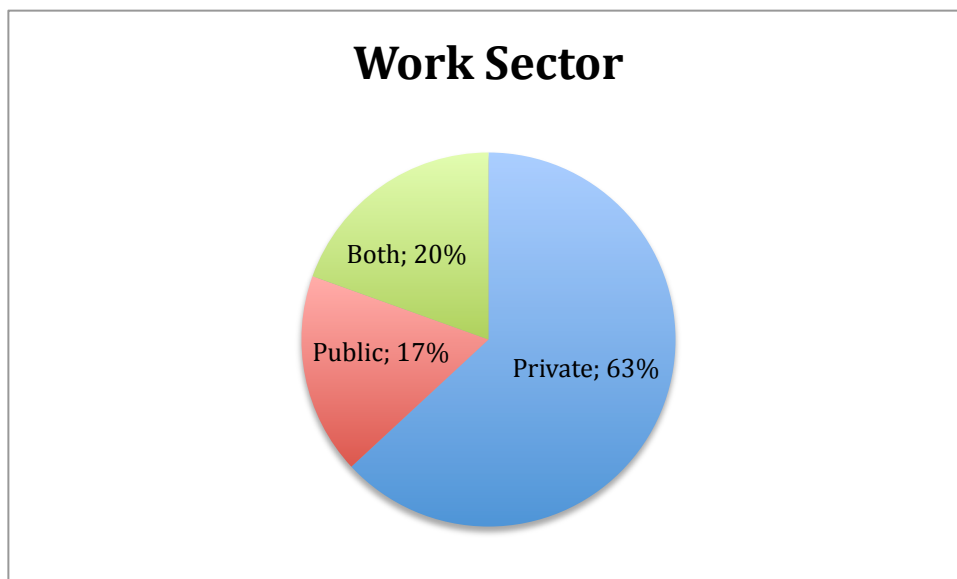
The data on time spent in the office showed an interesting pattern. It appears that 14% of the respondents spend the equivalent of 5 days working in the office so they are working at home on top of a full weeks work. Further analysis shows that the vast majority of these work the equivalent of less than one day a week at home.



The survey covered people working for employers of all sizes but the sample was predominantly individuals and small businesses. 40% worked for companies employing less than 100 people and a third were contractors or self employed.

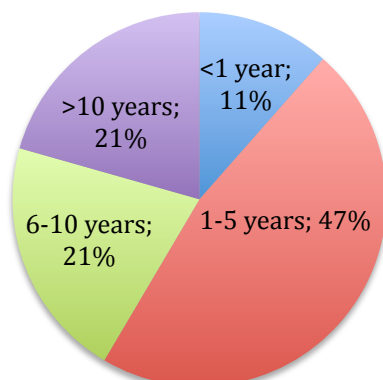


Two thirds of the respondents work in the private sector and 20% work in both public and private sectors, reflecting the fact that a significant number are self employed and have a mix of clients.



The data on the length of time that people have been working at home showed that almost half the sample were in the 1 to 5 year bracket and only 11% had less than one year's experience. So the results of the survey are not just based on recent changes to working patterns, where there could be a 'honeymoon period' of high performance, but on years of first-hand knowledge about working at home.

## Teleworking experience



### Conclusion

The results of this survey support previous pieces of research, which have shown that there is an increase in productivity when people work at home. This project has however delved further into the reasons behind this phenomenon and shown that teleworking has an amazing potential to improve business success.

Traditional assumptions amongst managers have been that allowing people to work from home will almost certainly reduce their effectiveness. They will be distracted by domestic activities and unable to motivate themselves. However there is no data to prove this prejudice and plenty to counter it. This survey shows that an overwhelming majority (85%) of people who work at home for at least some of their time increase their output as a result.

But the more astounding fact is that this is not just a 5 or 10% increase in output. When a quarter of the people who say they can measure this increase get greater than 50% improvement, the topic can no longer be ignored by managers. And when 70% of them say that they get greater than 20% improvement it has to be put at the top of the business improvement agenda.

In a time of unsteady recovery from recession employers from all sectors must be looking for continued improvements in efficiency. This report shows them that there is an opportunity waiting to be taken if they are prepared to rethink some of their traditional attitudes to work. Ultimately the organisations that do not adopt new ways of working, including home working, will not just lose good people they will be losing high performers. Those that do allow people to work at home will reap the benefits of substantial increases in output.