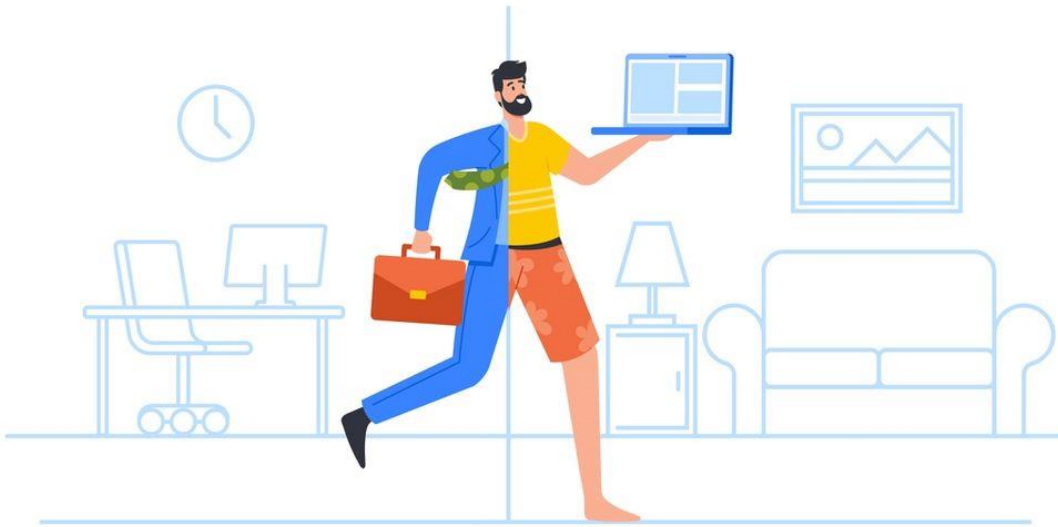


What's The Ideal Amount of In-Office Time? New Research May Point to A "Sweet Spot"

HR Brew | Kristen Parisi | April 22, 2022



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A new paper from Harvard Business School suggests being in the office one to two days a week is best.

As companies like JP Morgan Chase and Google try to entice employees back into the office (on-site yoga! A "state-of-the-art" food hall!) at least part-time, the debate continues over the effectiveness, longevity, and perfect model of hybrid work.

Recent research published by Harvard Business School points to a potential "sweet spot," based on a study of approximately 100 HR employees at BRAC, an international development NGO based in Bangladesh, over a nine-week period in 2020. Researchers compared the communications of employees who were in the office less than 23% of the time, more than 40% of the time, and an "intermediate" group that were in-person 23%–40% of the time.

To determine the success of each group, the study examined the contents and attachments of more than 30,000 emails, focusing on a number of factors including volume, the number of different people they emailed (unique recipients), and the "novelty of work output." The study also gauged whether the sentiment of the emails was positive or negative using natural language processing tech.

What'd they find? The paper asserts that "intermediate hybrid work is plausibly the sweet spot, where workers enjoy flexibility and yet are not as isolated compared to peers who are

predominantly working from home.” The intermediate group also reported greater satisfaction with working from home.

The paper suggests that intermediate levels of WFH (one to two days a week) may result in an increase in both the novelty of work products and work-related communication.

Intermediate WFH saw a 50% increase in unique email recipients.

There was “no statistically significant difference in email activity depending on whether the individual works from home earlier versus later in the week.”

FWIW. Aruna Ravichandran, SVP and CMO at Webex by Cisco, doesn’t think a blanket hybrid policy is necessarily the right way to go, nor should companies focus on email as an indicator of success.

When asked for her perspective on the paper’s results, she told HR Brew, “I do not measure the volume of emails or the messages sent, because it’s not about the quantity. It’s about quality. I also believe that when you give flexible choice to your employees, people will do the right thing, and it’s about being able to build the trust within your organization.”

Circle Back. The paper notes that more research on hybrid work is needed in order to understand just how successful the hybrid model is. The authors recommend studies that “explore the productivity effects of hybrid work in a wide variety of contexts; study whether, and under what conditions, intermediate levels of WFH correlate with effective mentoring outcomes for workers; and explore how adoption of intermediate WFH might change the geography of work.”

We’ll also need to see how much of a sweetener office yoga turns out to be.