



From dedication to medication?

A study into the length of the working day and its
impact on employee health

November 2011


Work your way

From dedication to medication?

This latest global business survey from Regus shows that for most workers the working day now extends well beyond the assumed eight hours. The report highlights the need for businesses to make sure workload does not become work-overload in the quest for improved productivity, damaging employees' physical and mental health.

Over two fifths of workers take work home on more than three separate occasions during the working week, blurring the line between work-time and personal-time. On the other hand, remote workers appear to be substituting commuting time for additional working time, increasing productivity without damaging their home life.

The survey also analysed which types of workers were most likely to suffer from over-work and which were more able to manage their time and carve out a suitable space to devote to personal life and interest. Women, more likely to be part-time or flexible workers, usually manage to work shorter hours than men, while remote workers tend to work longer than employees that have work from a fixed office location, suggesting that the benefit of a shorter commute often translates into higher productivity. In addition to this, smaller businesses tend to work longer hours, probably motivated by the high impact that just one employee may have on the success of the whole team.

Management Summary

- Globally almost half of workers (48%) work more than nine hours a day. A tenth of workers work over eleven hours but this proportion can be significantly higher depending on the country. In Brazil, for instance almost a fifth of workers spend eleven hours or more at work.
- The Chinese and Belgians are the most efficient at packing their work into a shorter day with only 5% and 6% respectively working a 60 hour week.
- In addition to length of working day, the survey also analysed how frequently respondents took work home with them, finding that 43% of workers globally take home work more than three times a week.
- In particular, in South Africa (58%), the USA (56%) and the Netherlands (51%), more than half of workers finish tasks off at home more than three times a week.
- Japan is the country where workers are least likely to take work home over three times each week (28%).
- The survey also looked at whether any major differences could be found between the working hours of men and women and found that women are less likely to regularly work 60 hours per week than men.
- Only 5% of women work 60 hour weeks compared to more than twice that (12%) for men, and while 41% of men regularly have 50 hour weeks, only 30% of women do.
- Women (32%) are also less likely to take work home to complete more than three times a week, than men (48%). However this male:female difference is much less marked than with length of working, day suggesting that more women tend to take work home to correct the work-life imbalance than men who are inclined to just stay on in the office.
- In Brazil (20%), South Africa, France and Germany (all 16%) a large proportion of men work 60 hours per week.
- Remote workers were found to work considerably longer hours than fixed office workers and to be more likely to take work home with them over three times a week: 59% compared to only 26% of fixed office workers.
- 14% of remote workers say their average working day is eleven hours or longer compared to only 6% of fixed office workers. week: 59% compared to only 26% of fixed office workers.
- In Brazil and France around a fifth of remote workers regularly work 60 hour weeks compared to China, Belgium and Canada, where non-remote workers are very unlikely to work eleven or more hours a day (3%).

Management Summary

- Respondents working in smaller companies were more likely to take work home with them (48%) more than three times a week than those working in large firms (30%).
- In particular 60% of workers in small firms in the USA and South Africa take tasks home to complete more than three times a week compared to only two fifths of respondents in larger companies.

Introduction

Dubbed 'the twenty-first century Black Death',¹ stress from overwork is fast becoming the main cause of long-term sickness across the globe. As the economic downturn has increased stress levels² workers are reportedly becoming more anxious and more prone to all the illnesses that stress can cause such as cardio-vascular disease, stomach ulcers, high blood pressure and depression.³

A recent British study found that longer working hours have a clear impact on cardiac health with 67% of people that worked eleven hours or more a day likely to suffer from a heart attack.⁴ Longer working hours are also linked to alcohol abuse.⁵

In Japan the phenomenon of death by overwork (Karoshi) became such a cultural problem that in 1987 the Japanese Ministry of Labour began publishing statistics. The main cause of Karoshi is in fact heart attack as caused by extreme stress.⁶ In China, overwork came under the spotlight in early 2011 after the death of a 25-year old white-collar worker, confirming a 2010 Chinese Medical Doctor Association and Chinese Hospital Association report revealing that over 60% of white-collar workers in large Chinese cities risk developing illnesses caused by overwork.⁷

The damaging effect of stress is not limited to the single employee but has repercussions on the whole business, triggering a series of stress-related absences as the workload of the absent person is transferred to other busy employees. Latest reports reveal that nearly two-fifths of employers have found that that stress-related absence has increased over the past year, and that workloads, management style, non-work factors such as relationships and family, relationships at work and considerable organisational change/restructuring are among the top stress-causing factors.⁸ Home and family responsibilities also make it into the top five causes of absence indicating that the need for flexible working practices is still very strong.⁹ As global economies emerge with difficulty from this last recession, businesses will be tackling growing work-loads with reduced headcount and the pressure on existing employees shows no sign of abating.

¹ Daily Mail, Stress 'is top cause of workplace sickness' and is so widespread it's dubbed the 'Black Death of the 21st century', 5th October 2011;

The Times of India, Office stress - 21st century 'Black Death', 5th October 2011

² CIPD, Absence Management 2011, October 2011

³ NHS website, The Complications of Stress (<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Stress/Pages/Complications.aspx>)

⁴ Reuters, Working Long Hours Is Bad For Your Heart, 4th May 2011

⁵ France24, Long work hours linked to alcohol abuse: study, 9th August 2011

⁶ Psychology Today, How Workaholism May Be the Price We Pay for Productivity, 17th April 2011

⁷ China Daily, Woman's death raises debate on overwork, 15th April 2011

⁸ CIPD

⁹ CIPD

Introduction

The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development also reports that over the last 12 months in the UK almost two fifths of businesses have noticed an increase in mental health problems, particularly in firms that are anticipating redundancies in the next six months.¹⁰ Interestingly, levels of absence appeared to have decreased as 'presenteeism', coming in to work even though ill, has become more common, especially in organisations expecting to reduce headcount. 'Presenteeism' is typically a symptom of increased anxiety and can lead to illnesses becoming more serious as well as increasing risk of infection for colleagues.¹¹

Employees in small businesses are reported to be less likely to take time off for illness than those working for larger organisations, significantly increasing the risk of illnesses becoming more serious and boosting stress levels.¹² In Australia the Bibby Small Business Barometer found 52% of small business owners felt they were more stressed now than twelve months ago. In particular cash-flow was highlighted as the biggest worry.¹³ In addition to this, employees in smaller firms are more likely to be prone to 'presenteeism' as smaller team size means that the success of a task is felt to rely more heavily on single workers.¹⁴

The USA Bureau of Labor statistics reports that in 2010 men worked an average 41 minutes more than women every day. Although this figure certainly masks the fact that women are more likely to be employed part-time than men, even when analyzing only those in full time employment women worked fewer hours than men.¹⁵

In the OECD the proportion of women in paid work is well over half (62%) with 25% of women working part time compared to only 6% of men. In addition to paid work, women are reported by the OECD to take on a greater share of unpaid work within the home and the community. In particular Mexican and Indian women spend 4.3-5 more hours a day on unpaid work than men, while in Nordic countries the difference is only a little over one hour per day.¹⁶ Women, however, are reported to be twice as much at risk of developing heart disease from work stress than men.¹⁷ This is a particularly worrying fact when coupled with research reporting that women generally suffer more unreasonable amounts of stress at work than men being particularly worried by work-life balance, doing exciting work, having a respectful manager, being paid fairly and having a clear career path.¹⁸

¹⁰ CIPD

¹¹ CIPD

¹² CIPD

¹³ Bibby, Stress levels rise - but Australia's small business owners remain optimistic, 25th July 2011

¹⁴ CIPD

¹⁵ American Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey Summary, 22nd June 2011

¹⁶ OECD, Cooking, Caring and Volunteering: unpaid work around the world, 25th February 2011

¹⁷ The Telegraph, Women more at risk from stress at work, 6th May 2010

¹⁸ The Times of India, Women suffer more stress at work, July 22nd 2010

Introduction

To combat stress and in particular to redress the growing work-life imbalance, more and more companies are offering flexible and remote working arrangements. In another recent survey, for example, USA employees refer they prefer remote working to reduce their commute, achieve better work-life balance, be more productive (14%) and finish work they can't complete at the office.¹⁹ The Cranfield school of Management in the UK confirms that flexible workers report increased job satisfaction and commitment while the majority of flexible worker managers identified either an improvement in productivity.²⁰ It would therefore seem that time wasted on lengthy and stressing commutes would be more productively employed by remote workers to pack more into the day without putting their health at risk.

¹⁹ Microsoft, Work without walls, 2011

²⁰ Cranfield School of Management, Flexible working and performance, 2009

The Regus Study

As world economies brace for another difficult year ahead, the pressure on businesses and employees to remain successful and grow increases once more. As businesses strive for growth their workforce, heavily depleted in the recent downturn, will experience even greater pressure.

Their productivity, dependent not only on total working hours but also on their health, will be vitally important as global economies enter the coming year.

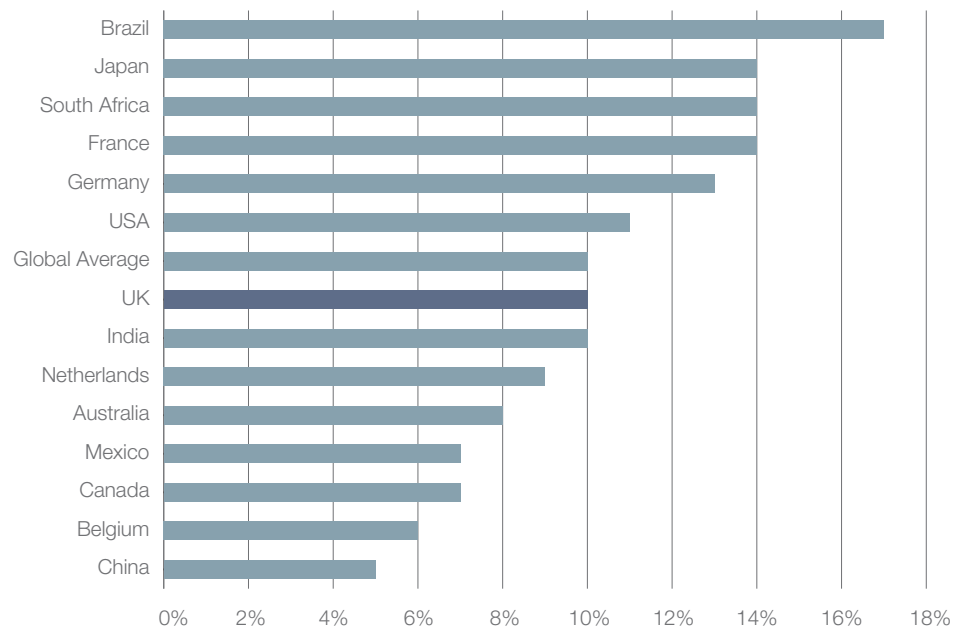
In order to provide a 'state of the nation' picture of the pressure currently borne by workers globally, Regus has surveyed its contacts database of over 1 million top level professionals and business owners, asking them about the length of their average working day and how frequently they take work home to complete.

Long hours in the office and at home

Globally, the Regus survey reports finds that two fifths of workers (38%) now work an average 50 hour week and 10% work a 60 hour week. Variations exist at the national level reflecting different working cultures; for example, although Americans are generally thought to work long hours, they are less likely to work a 60 hour week than the French, Japanese, Brazilians and Germans.

This finding, however, importantly highlights that productivity, estimated at \$63,885 of wealth per year generated by each USA worker and only \$54,609 per French worker is not directly proportional to the number of hours worked.²¹ The nations least likely to work a 60 hour week are the Chinese and Belgians.

On average my working day is eleven or more hours long

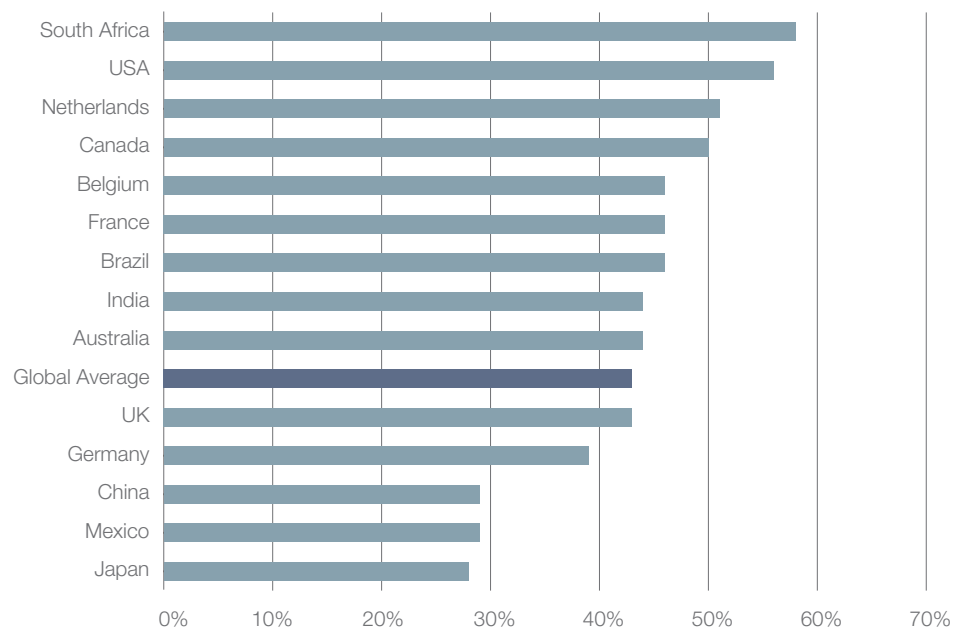


²¹ CBS News, US Workers World's most productive, 11th February 2011

Long hours in the office and at home

Taking work home to complete is a regular occurrence with 43% of workers who take tasks home more than three times a week and almost a quarter (24%) who do so at least once a week. More than half of workers in South Africa, the USA and the Netherlands declare they take work home more than three times a week compared to less than 30% of Japanese, Mexican and Chinese workers, suggesting greater productivity per hour or that desk time in the office is still a very important measure of productivity for management in these cultures.

I take work home more than three times a week

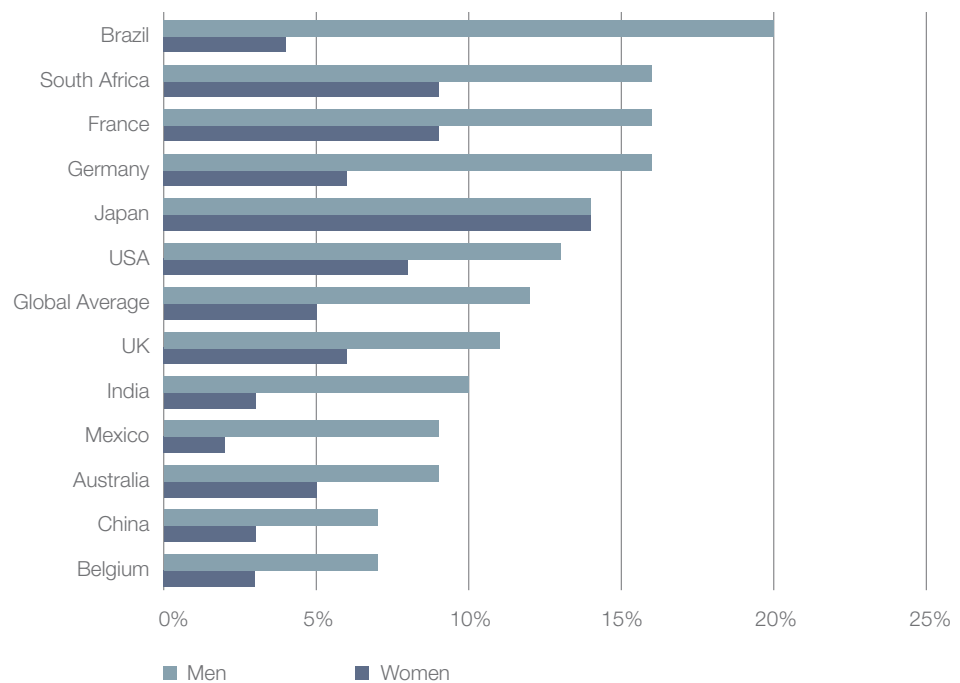


Women

The survey also looked at whether any major differences could be found between the working hours of men and women and found that women are less likely to work 60 hour weeks than men.

Only 5% of women work 60 hour weeks or more compared to more than twice that (12%) for men, and while 41% of men work 50 hour weeks, only 30% of women do. Japan proves an exception with the same proportion of female and male workers working a 60 hour week. Contrast is greatest in Brazil where 20% of male workers work eleven hours or more a day compared with only 4% of women.

On average my working day is eleven or more hours long

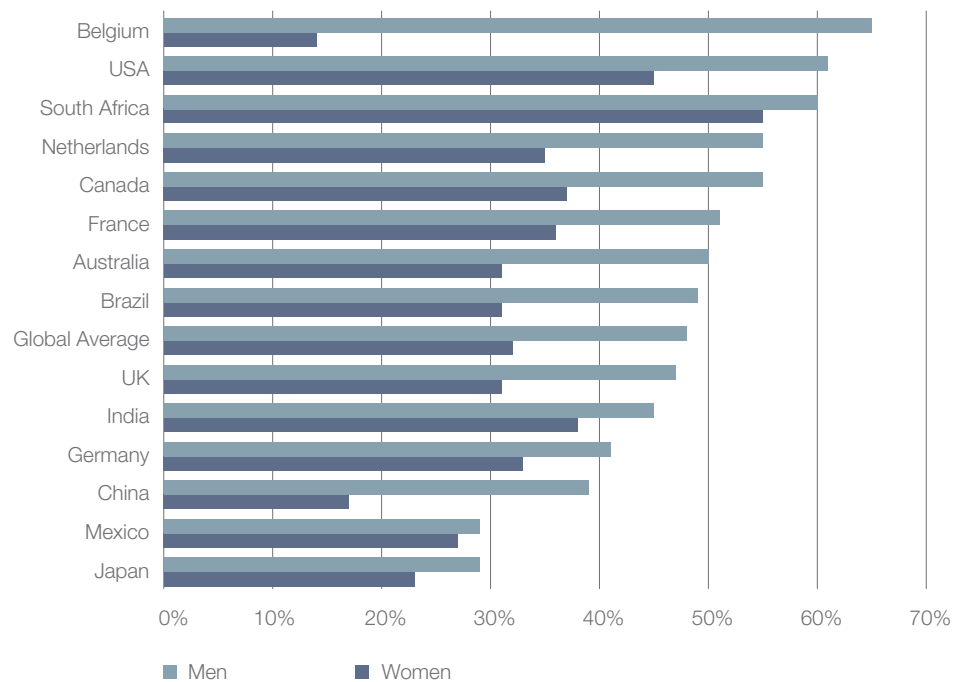


Women

Women (32%) are also less likely to take work home to complete more over three times a week compared with men (48%), although the difference between men and women is much less marked than with length of working day suggesting that more women tend to take work home in an attempt to correct the work-life imbalance, while men are just as likely to stay on in the office.

Over 60% of male workers in the USA and Belgium take work home more than three times a week, while in the USA (45%) and South Africa (55%), where commute times are usually longer due to large distances, women are also more likely to take work home to finish.

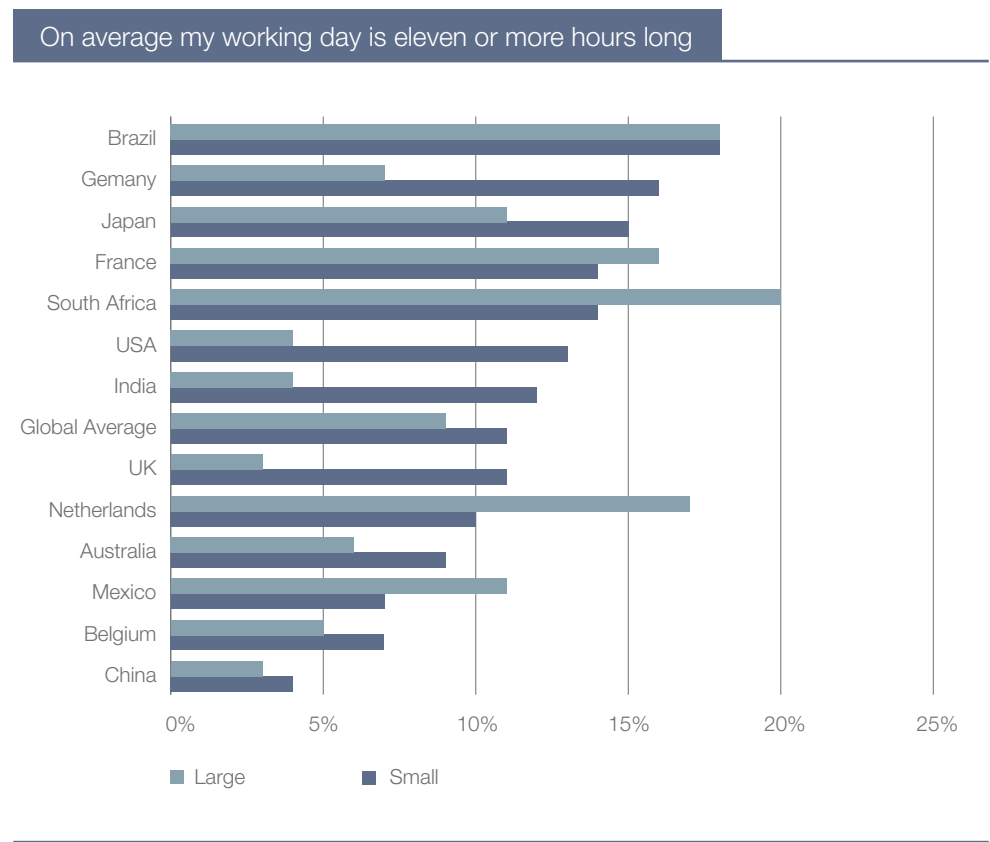
I take work home more than three times a week



Small businesses

The survey found that respondents working for smaller companies were more likely to work a 60 hour week (11%) than their counterparts in large organisations (9%), but only marginally so.

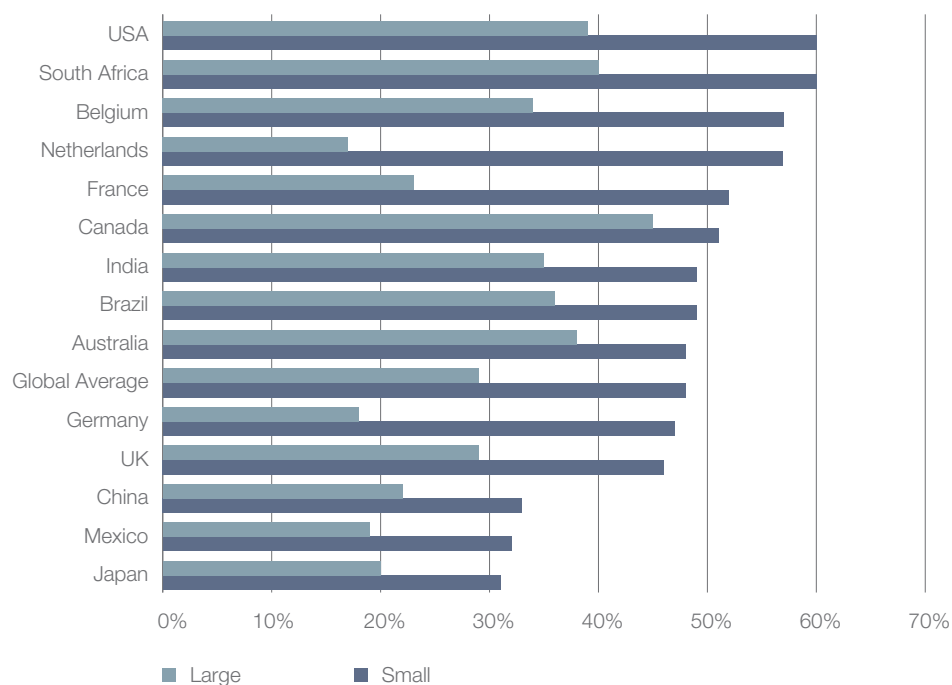
This difference is higher in Germany, the UK and the USA and is unusually reversed in the Netherlands and South Africa.



Small businesses

Workers in small companies are far more likely on the other hand to take home work to finish more than three times a week (48%) than large firm employees (29%) indicating that while there is a greater flexibility about where work is completed in smaller companies, the pressure to meet targets is higher. In particular 60% of workers in small firms in the USA and South Africa took tasks home to complete more than three times a week compared to only two fifths of respondents in larger companies.

I take work home more than three times a week

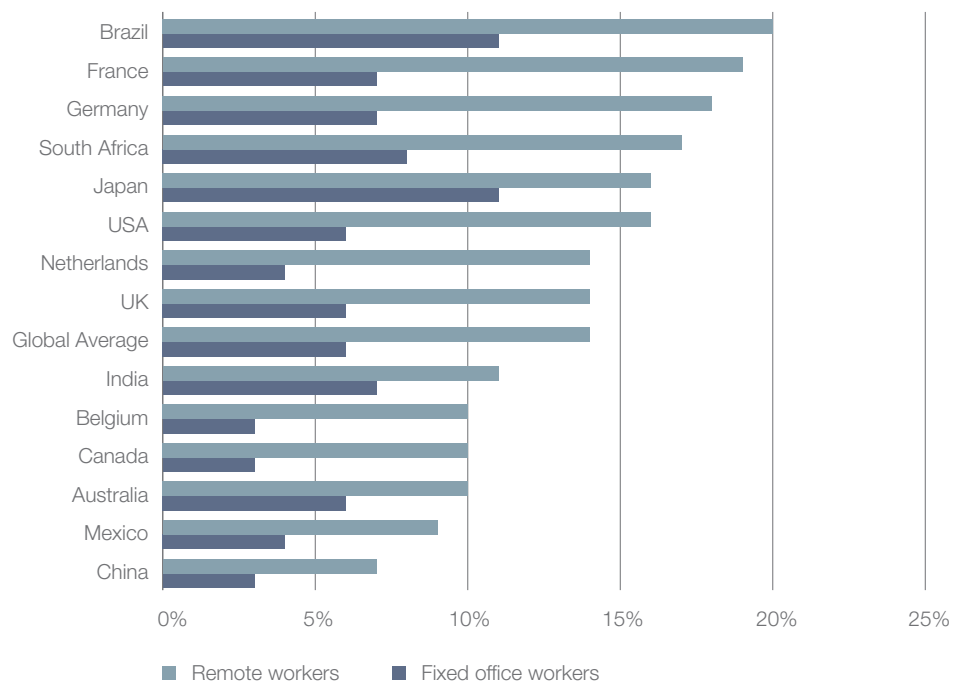


Remote workers

More than double the proportion of remote workers (14%) were found to work a 60 hour week compared to fixed office workers. This group was also more likely to work a 50 hour week (41%) than traditional workers (34%) indicating that remote workers are more likely to devote time saved commuting to finishing the day's tasks.

The ease with which they can return home from closer locations is likely to make these workers feel less pressure to finish their work within the eight hour day. In Brazil, France and Germany around a fifth of remote workers will work for eleven hours or more compared to China, Belgium and Canada, where non-remote workers are very unlikely to work eleven or more hours (3%).

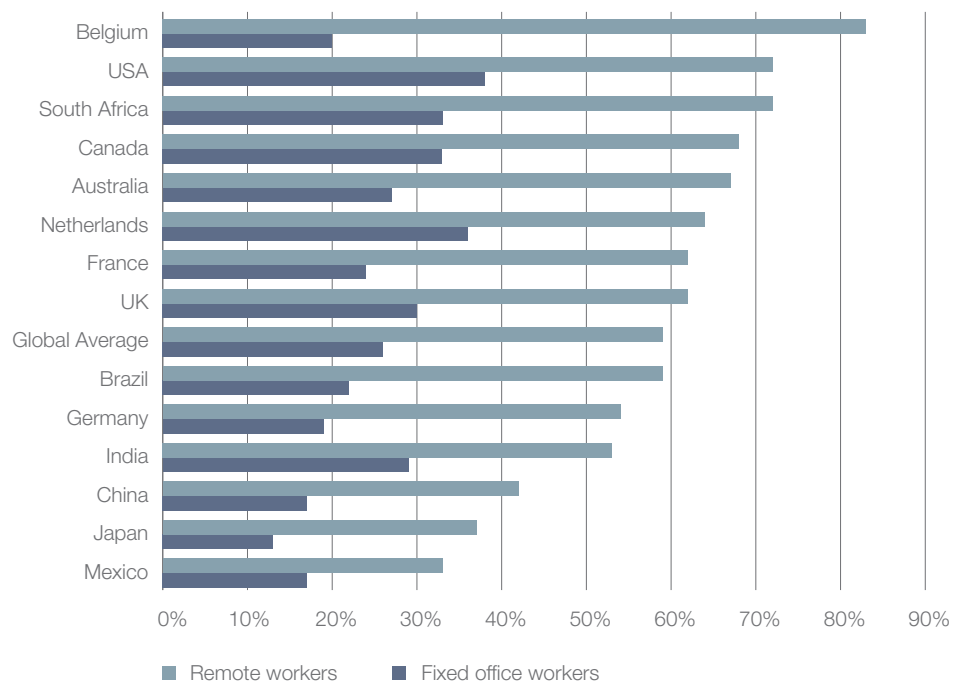
On average I work eleven hours a day or more



Remote workers

Remote workers are also far more likely to take work home with them more than three times a week; 59% compared to only 26% of fixed office workers, suggesting that although this group is very committed there is a risk for remote workers to let their work-life expand into their personal time. Over three fifths of remote workers take work home to finish in the USA, the UK, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, South Africa, Australia and Canada compared to less than two fifths of traditional workers.

I usually take home work to finish more than three times a week



Conclusion

Global workers are staying behind in the office well beyond a 40 hour week and are also taking work home to complete more than three times a week blurring the line between work and personal life.

The long-term effects of this work-overload could prove to be very damaging both in terms of worker health as well as productivity as businesses find that productive workers drive themselves too hard and develop more serious types of illness. This report provides businesses with a wake-up call to make sure their workers' dedication does not become a disaster by undermining their physical and mental well-being.

The Regus report reveals that women, often also struggling to juggle several hours of unpaid work in the home or the community, are more able to contain their working hours. The higher incidence of part-time and flexible working in this part of the population is likely to be a factor driving down total hours worked although the fact that women are also less likely to take work home to finish confirms a greater firmness in maintaining personal and work life separate.

Workers in small businesses are also more likely to work a 60 hour week and far more likely to take work home to finish. This latter result reveals the added pressure in smaller environments not to let the team down and reflects the tendency in smaller firms to share responsibility more evenly across all staff.

Although remote workers were found to generally work longer hours and be more likely to take work home with them, it is interesting to note that this is probably regarded as a 'trade-off' for improved working conditions such as a shorter commute, a more convenient location or flexible hour arrangements. Remote workers are likely to devote the time saved on a long and stressful commute to finishing their tasks – a significant productivity gain for employers.

Flexible work arrangements are becoming increasingly popular as businesses learn to trust employees and become more accustomed to measuring productivity in terms other than time spent at the desk. By allowing employees the option to work from locations that are closer to home or to manage their time more independently, businesses improve the well-being of workers relieving the stress of a poor work-life balance, but they also gain more productive, committed and healthy staff.

Global highlights

UK

- 43% of UK workers take tasks home to finish more than three times a week.
- 47% of men in the UK take work home to finish more than three times a week compared to only 31% of women.

USA

- 56% of USA employees take home work more than three times a week.
- 16% of USA remote workers work a 60 hour week compared to only 6% of fixed office workers.

India

- 10% of Indian men work a 60 hour week compared to only 3% of women.
- 53% of Indian remote workers take tasks home to finish more than three times a week.

China

- Chinese workers are among the least likely to work a 60 hour week (5%).
- 39% of Chinese men take home work to finish more than three times a week compared to only 17% of women.

Brazil

- Brazilian workers are the most likely to work a 60 hour week (17%).
- 20% of Brazilian men work a 60 hour week compared to only 4% of women.

Mexico

- 32% of workers in small businesses in Mexico take work home more than three times a week.
- Only 2% of Mexican women work eleven hour or more a day on average.

Global highlights

Canada

- 51% of workers in small businesses in Canada take work home more than three times a week.
- 68% of Canadian remote workers take tasks home to finish more than three times a week.

Australia

- 50% of men in Australia take work home more than three times a week compared to only 31% of women.
- 10% of remote workers in Australia work a 60 hour week

France

- 14% of French workers work a 60 hour week.
- 16% of workers in large businesses in France work eleven or more hours a day on average.

Germany

- 41% of German men take work home to finish more than three times a week.
- 16% of German men work a 60 hour week compared to 6% of women.

Netherlands

- 51% of workers in the Netherlands take home work to finish more than three times a week.
- 14% of remote workers in the Netherlands work a 60 hour week.

Belgium

- 57% of small business workers in Belgium take home work to finish more than three times as week.
- Only 3% of fixed office workers in Belgium work eleven or more hours a day.

Global highlights

S.Africa

- 14% of South African workers work a 60 hour week.
- 17% of South African remote workers work eleven or more hours a day.

Japan

- 14% of Japanese workers work a 60 hour week, but only 28% take work home to finish more than three times a week.
- 37% of Japanese remote workers take work home to finish more than three times a week.

About Regus

Regus is the world's largest provider of flexible workplaces, with products and services ranging from fully equipped offices to professional meeting rooms, business lounges and the world's largest network of video communication studios. Regus enables people to work their way, whether it's from home, on the road or from an office.

Customers such as Google, GlaxoSmithKline, and Nokia join hundreds of thousands of growing small and medium businesses that benefit from outsourcing their office and workplace needs to Regus, allowing them to focus on their core activities.

Over 900,000 customers a day benefit from Regus facilities spread across a global footprint of 1,200 locations in 550 cities and 91 countries, which allow individuals and companies to work wherever, however and whenever they want to. Regus was founded in Brussels, Belgium in 1989, is headquartered in Luxembourg and listed on the London Stock Exchange. For more information please visit: www.regus.com

Methodology

Over 12,000 business respondents from the Regus global contacts database spanning 85 countries were interviewed during August 2011. The Regus global contacts database of over 1 million business-people worldwide is highly representative of business owners and senior managers across the globe. Respondents were asked a wide variety of questions including ones about their economic performance and expectation, along with their usual working hours and habits. The survey was managed and administered by the independent organisation, Mindmetre – www.mindmetre.co.uk.

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