

Working From Home Is Harming Young Employees. They're Starting to See That.

Remote work means less training and opportunity for advancement, especially for younger workers, research suggests. Some are getting the message.

By Noam Scheiber

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When large employers like Amazon, JPMorgan Chase and the federal government tightened their office attendance policies this year, many younger workers appeared to balk. Opinion surveys from Gallup showed that they were generally more resistant than older workers to returning to the office full time.

But the picture was more complicated. According to Gallup, the youngest people were also the least interested in work that was *entirely* remote.

New research sheds some light on why that might be. In a recent paper, a team of economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, the University of Virginia and Harvard University found that younger workers suffered career-wise by working from home, receiving less training and fewer opportunities for advancement. The economists found that remote work even contributed to higher unemployment among younger workers.

They calculated that younger workers appeared to be responding accordingly, spending more time in the office than older workers over the past few years.

In 100 responses to a New York Times questionnaire, many readers 30 or younger who were able to spend time working from home in the last five years said they still preferred that arrangement. But many others said they had sought to spend more time in the office in recent years. They often cited feelings of isolation as a reason, as well as a desire for more mentoring and feedback, and to improve the odds of a promotion.

“One of the things I was looking for was more in-office opportunity to learn and ask questions,” said Kenneth Sullivan, 30, a civil engineer based in the Seattle area who specializes in designing and inspecting bridges.

The economists acknowledge that working from home can increase productivity, as other studies have concluded, but argue that the benefits are concentrated among experienced workers. They also found that the quality of work can suffer in remote arrangements, especially for younger workers. When it came to the quality of their code, for example, it typically took years for younger engineers on physically scattered teams to catch up to engineers of the same age who sat next to their teams.

Dr. Emma Harrington, one of the paper’s authors, said that scarcer mentoring and training also appeared to make young workers on scattered teams less likely to leave for better jobs at other companies. She said it could even make it harder for them to take on new roles within their companies, though the study didn’t assess that issue directly.

In their more recent analysis, Dr. Harrington and her co-authors found that remote work led to at least one other large cost: higher unemployment. It can be explained by employers being less interested in hiring younger workers into remote or hybrid roles, or onto teams where a lot of workers are remote. Firms might figure those young people will not get the proper training and “decide to hire older people,” Dr. Harrington said.