



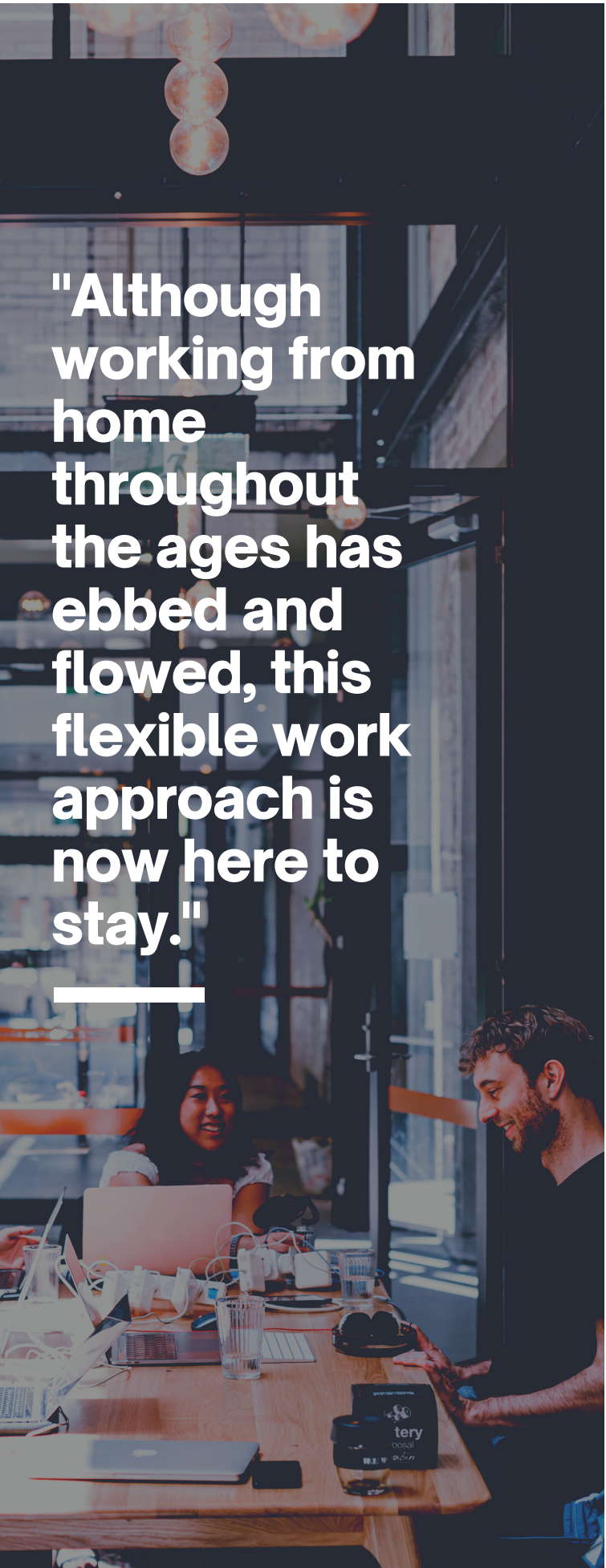
# The Evolution of Remote Work: A Whitepaper

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**"Although working from home throughout the ages has ebbed and flowed, this flexible work approach is now here to stay."**

## ABSTRACT

Working from home is nothing new, due to the constant changes in technology throughout the centuries. As early as the 1600s in Britain, it was considered normal for people working in manufacturing to work from their kitchens or bedrooms and by the early 1800's in the United States, more than 40% of the workforce was WFH ("Home-working had its advantages even in the 18th Century," 2020). Regardless of the causes throughout history, as technology continues to evolve, the belief that employees should work where they are most effective is becoming more commonsensical due to the trends in social behavior in both professional and personal settings.

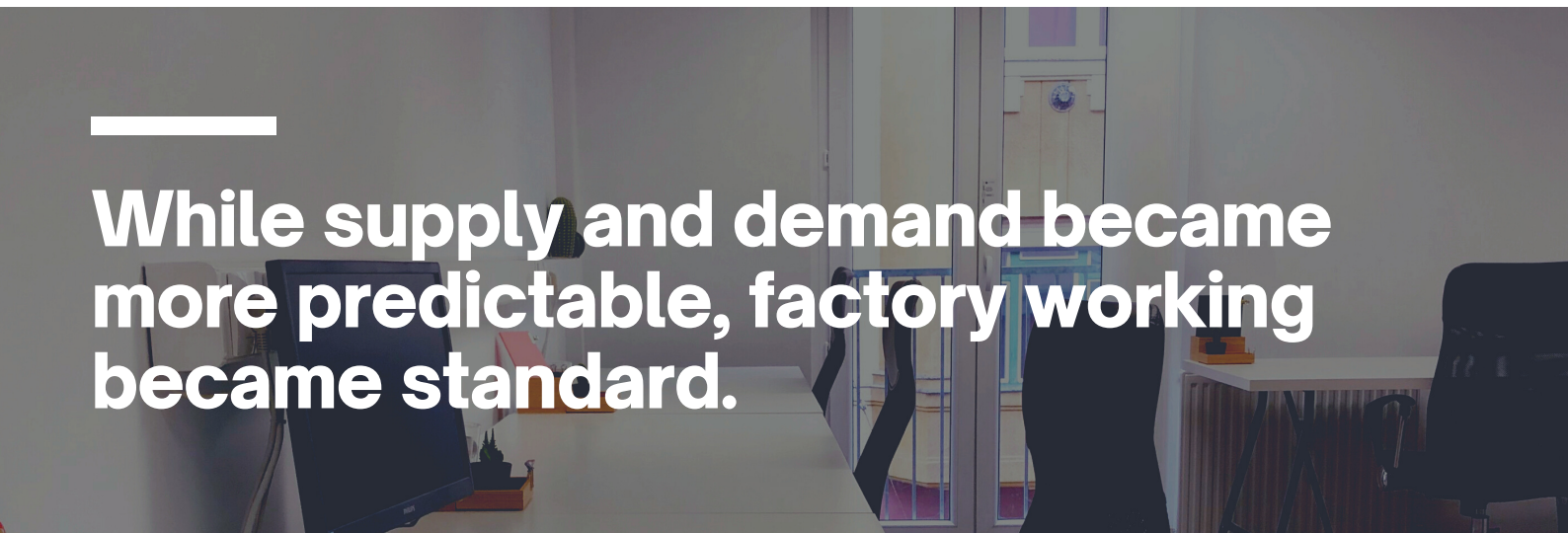
Many organizational employees believed that working from home as a flexible work choice was not a viable option before COVID-19. However, remote work practices have existed globally for centuries and began to diminish with the rise of the Industrial Revolution, coupled with the popularity of Henry Ford's assembly line. With the rapid growth of technology making it possible to stay connected from anywhere, our social norms are adapting worldwide. That means our relationship with the way we perform our daily tasks is also changing. This includes an increased need for flexibility in the way employees work. Although working from home throughout the ages has ebbed and flowed, this white paper discusses why this widespread flexible work approach is now here to stay and how the trend started well before the presence of COVID-19.

## A HUMBLE BEGINNING

The earliest instances of working from home are from 1600's Britain, in accordance with the emergence of capitalism ("Home-working had its advantages even in the 18th Century," 2020). An 'at-home' industrial workforce made sense with the increased prevalence of global trade, demand for goods, and the machinery available at the time. The payment for work was per item made, not hourly, and demand for goods was often sporadic. This caused significant inequality amongst those that were able to afford the machines to produce goods and those that toiled to produce them ("Home-working had its advantages even in the 18th Century," 2020). When the factory system was developed in the late 18th century, the efficiency and productivity was higher there because of the amount of goods that could be manufactured in one place, and the worker's ability to receive higher wages ("Home-working had its advantages even in the 18th Century," 2020). However, there were some workers that chose to continue working from home because of their ability to obtain income through other means while maintaining higher autonomy over the structure of their days, an approach that was particularly attractive to working mothers.

The idea continued to make its way around the world to different countries like France, Denmark, and eventually the United States. In the 1900's, over a third of France's manufacturing workforce was working from home, as was a tenth of the Danish population ("Home-working had its advantages even in the 18th Century," 2020). Meanwhile, another phenomenon was emerging which would diminish workers' desire to continue manufacturing goods at home and make it more difficult for people to compete with mass production plants. This was the implementation of the assembly line.

While the assembly line was considered the pinnacle of modern efficiency practices, the length of the workday was not regulated within the U.S. until the Adamson Act of 1917, a federal law establishing an 8 hour workday for railroad workers, according to Ward and Lebowitz (2020). Shortly thereafter, Ford Motor Company adapted this model into a 5-day, 40-hour work week in 1926 (Ward and Lebowitz, 2020), and many organizations followed suit. By the time the Fair Labor Standards Act went into effect in 1940, working 40 hours a week was the standard for most corporations.



**While supply and demand became more predictable, factory working became standard.**



## FROM JOBS TO CAREERS

Although managerial positions have existed since the 1830's, business administration as a profession wasn't popularized as a career path until the turn of the century ("Carbons to Computers," 1998). Frederick Taylor, the founder of scientific management, created an operating structure that had employees in managerial positions thinking out how tasks could be performed most efficiently, while the subordinates were in charge of executing tasks ("Carbons to Computers," 1998). This science provided a general strategy as to how Americans created labor processes, though it had the potential to be significantly flawed. This practice became popularized in organizations simultaneously with the Great Depression, making workers more inclined to endure these conditions in order to remain employed.

After WW2, the demand for consumer goods was increasing and factory jobs were paying more than office positions. With a bit of clever branding, office jobs were promoted as being more respectable and less routine than factory jobs, and health and retirement plans were provided as additional forms of payment ("Carbons to Computers," 1998). It wasn't long before technological advancements to office equipment became the norm, and by the 1960's, the products of the 'Baby Boom' were entering colleges at a higher rate, according to Thelin and Olivas (2021). Working in an office setting quickly became the aspiration for those entering the workforce.

**"Technology usage is embedded within voluntary human behavior. It is a social norm that will not be disappearing anytime soon."**

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Not long after personal computers hit the market in 1975, IBM piloted a 'telework' program in 1979 that allowed five employees to work remotely ("The History of Remote Work," 2020). By 1983, those five employees had turned into 2,000 employees working remotely, and in 1987 there were 1.5 million employees working remotely across America ("The History of Remote Work," 2020). Yet, the number of organizations that offered this as an option for employees remained minimal. With varied data on small population sizes, implementing wide-scale telework programs was seen as risky, which led many organizations to continue utilizing a fully in-office approach for efficiently completing daily duties in professional industries.

The way that people were communicating forever changed in 1990 when Tim Berners-Lee created the 'World Wide Web' from the modern internet that was first developed in 1983 (Bote, 2019). During this time, some of the first social networking sites started hitting the web. These were spaces where people were able to interact with others by writing blogs, reviewing products, and exchanging messages with people in different parts of the world through the internet platform, according to Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, and Seymour (2011). These early prototypes paved the way for social media websites like MySpace, Friendster, LinkedIn and Facebook to launch in the early 2000's (Edosomwan et al., 2011). Communicating through channels like instant messaging, phone and video calling allowed users to reach a broad audience rapidly. Organizations all over the world quickly saw value in using these tools for employees to collaborate from anywhere and the ability to grow their customer base by building their brand through expanding markets.

## COVID-19'S IMPACT

Fast-forwarding to December 2019 when the first signs of COVID-19 were being discovered in Wuhan, China, the global population's reliance on communicating via social media platforms had over two decades to solidify itself in modern mainstream behaviors. In the U.S., stay-at-home orders began towards the end of March 2020, causing shutdowns of businesses deemed to be non-essential shortly after. In an attempt to contain the spread of the virus, employees that had been working office jobs migrated en masse to places where it would be safer to work, which primarily meant working from home.

Over the next year, organizational operations continued with a sole reliance on communication channels like instant messaging, video and phone calling. Decades of research has validated the individual adoption and voluntary use of technology that is known as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which was originally proposed in 1986 according to Rauniar, Rawski, Yang and Johnson (2014). The integration of web-based communication channels within organizations that are similar to ones used within social media outlets and the constant reinforcement of this behavior prior to and during COVID-19 shows that individuals engaging in this behavior of their own accord will continue to do so. Simply, the behavior of sending and receiving information so quickly provides the reinforcement of instant gratification in the form of a response. The popularity of using these channels is twofold: first, usage is embedded within voluntary behavior that, second, has been accepted as a social norm within many societies that have widespread internet accessibility.



Numerous psychological studies throughout history have shown that individual behavior is influenced by the behaviors of others (Rauniar et al., 2014) so unless modern society does away with social media channels all together in personal and professional settings, the desire to use them will remain. In addition to the voluntary usage and acceptance of these communication tools, employees have embraced the working from home life. For employers that continue to use these channels, they have the benefit of communicating instantaneously through Slack, Microsoft Teams and other platforms to get information sent and tasks performed quicker. This is a significant advantage over organizations that do not use these channels as much, noting that the ability to communicate and collaborate promptly wanes. Post-COVID, having the option to work from home would make employees happier due to higher rates of productivity, lower operating and commuting costs, and having a greater sense of autonomy in their personal lives (“State of Remote Work”, 2021).

## THE FUTURE IS FLEXIBLE

This has been the largest work from home experiment that has ever been conducted globally, and employees are expecting their employers to accommodate alternative ways of working in a post-COVID world. The ability to work from anywhere is the next evolution in the way organizations are able to appeal to their employees and continue to stay connected with their customer base. Through the disruption of the status quo, employees and employers have rediscovered the autonomy and flexibility that made remote work so appealing in the past. In addition, employees will remain reluctant to cede the convenience, efficiency and productivity that they’ve found in working from home for the past year. This mode of work will almost certainly become the norm due to the rapid rate at which technology continues to influence our personal and professional lives. With these changes impacting humanity's social behaviors, the way we interact and conduct business will need to evolve as well.



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