

REMOTE WORK AND ADOPTION: THE NIGERIA PERSPECTIVE (WHITE PAPER)



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The image features a large, solid dark red rectangular area in the upper half, which serves as a background for the white text. Below this, the design transitions into a series of overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes in various shades of red and pink. These shapes include triangles, rectangles, and trapezoids, some of which are outlined with thin dark red lines. The overall composition is modern and minimalist, with a strong emphasis on color and geometric form.



The facts about remote work support improved business outcomes and better performance. (Forbes:2022). After WWII, the global economy started to gather momentum, and large organizations with cubicles started to appear. With phones, cars, and planes now becoming mainstream, cross-border expansion started once again, companies started having a presence across multiple countries. By this time, company offices were already working remotely with one another. But it wasn't until the advent of computers, which accelerated the expansion of the knowledge economy, and then later the internet, that "remote work" as we see it today started to appear. These technologies allowed individuals to collaborate and contribute without the need to be in the same location.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the

implementation of remote work in Nigeria increased to 72% percent and 62% respectively. But going forward, remote work is collectively expected to remain at a level of 29 percent. This is according to the Global Telecom Market Report (GTM), also known as "The Future of Urban Reality Report". The report was recently launched by the Ericsson Consumer Lab. It was, however, explained deeply at a virtual meeting on Tuesday(Gurdian:2020).

/// One of the most influential reasons for preferring working from home is the flexible scheduling options ///

Executive summary

There has been a lot of debate for or against remote working or what some researchers call Working from Home(WFH) and its implication for employee productivity. For example, Lupu (Lupu:2017) stated strongly that One of the most influential reasons for preferring working from home is the flexible scheduling options. He stated that flexible scheduling gives employees a certain autonomy in planning their daily lives, including employee and family activities according to their needs. Other advantages like scheduling of work, commuting to work, etc have all been used as a strong point. But others have also argued against it. Again, Lupu stated some of these drawbacks Lupu (2017:696), he postulated that: "the technical problems that cannot be solved remotely, the unequal salaries between employees working in the office and teleworkers; employee isolation, limitation of normal interaction with the colleagues and difficulties in organizing union activities"

Finally, this white paper seeks to look at the positive impact of remote working or WFH on employee productivity especially if the tools are deployed using a world-class tech company.



WHAT IS REMOTE WORK (RW)

The background features a large, solid dark red vertical rectangle on the left side. To its right, there are several overlapping, semi-transparent light red and white geometric shapes, including triangles and rectangles, creating a layered, abstract effect. The overall design is clean and modern.



To a layman, remote work means working from anywhere around the world while collaborating on different issues with members of the same organization. In other words, you work like you are on the office premises ie you attend meetings, you send emails, you collaborate on designs, etc. to contribute to the overall goals of the organization. But let us look at some scholarly definitions for perspectives: Some keywords have been used to define Remote Working These keywords are: "working from home", "telecommuting", "teleworking" and "remote work". Baker et al. (2007:38), who prefer the phrase "remote working", explained why there is no universally acceptable definition: "Reasons include that remote working has been studied under various names (e.g., teleworking,

telecommuting, working from home), with no generally accepted definitions.

But a more globally acceptable definition of "telework" or should we say "Remote Work" was proposed by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1990 as "A form of work in which (a) work is performed in a location remote from a central office or production facilities, thus separating the worker from personal contact with co-workers there; and (b) new technology enables this separation by facilitating communication" (Ruiz and Walling 2005, as cited in Beño 2018:27). For our studies, we will adopt the term Remote Work as we will be looking beyond just working from home but rather working from anywhere around the world including the bus, the train, external workstations, etc.



REMOTE WORK (RW) TOOLS

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In Late 2019 the Covid 19 pandemic spread across different parts of the world at an unprecedented speed. Nations of the world had to come together to fight this deadly virus, one of the ways was to promulgate legislation on how people gather and interact hence the introduction of "distancing" to avoid contact with people. This impacted the way people interacted across the world. For businesses, it was important for them to find a way to continue providing services to their customers while at the same time promoting the concept of safe distancing. Businesses were in a quagmire on achieving business objectives and ensuring employees are safe. There was a scramble for a better solution across sectors. From banking to oil and gas to even the public sector. In

come Microsoft collaboration solution, a tool that enables employers and employees to collaborate across the different regions without any physical interaction. This is not to say there has not been a collaboration tool before covid but the pandemic now made it a necessity for most organizations.

SA consulting a subsidiary of SignalAlliance Technology Holding(SATH) a Microsoft Gold Partner has carved a niche for itself in deploying collaborative solutions across different sectors in Nigeria and other African countries. To connect with network systems, you can use work-from-home software like video chat or messaging applications, cloud services, program management systems, online team management programs, and so on. It is vital that remote working technology has a wide



Remote Work (RW) Tools

variety of connections with other apps, and it is easy for other team members to foster remote cooperation. Remote work comes with its own set of challenges, which needs a unique set of tools to overcome them. Here we listed a few of the best remote working tools to keep remote employees connected and productive but our focus will be on Microsoft 365. Below is a categorization we have created to help us segment the remote working tools:

- ▶ Digital workplace
- ▶ Collaboration and Communication
- ▶ Project Management
- ▶ Remote desktop
- ▶ Screen sharing and recording
- ▶ Video Conferencing
- ▶ Cloud storage

Note that there are other collaborative tools that we could not mention in this white paper. However below we talked about the MS remote working tool

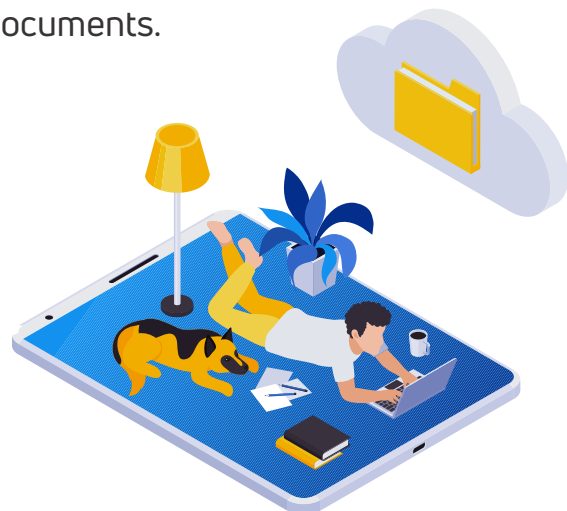
“This is not to say there has not been a collaboration tool before covid but the pandemic now made it a necessity for most organizations.”

3.1 MICROSOFT 365 AS A REMOTE WORKING TOOL

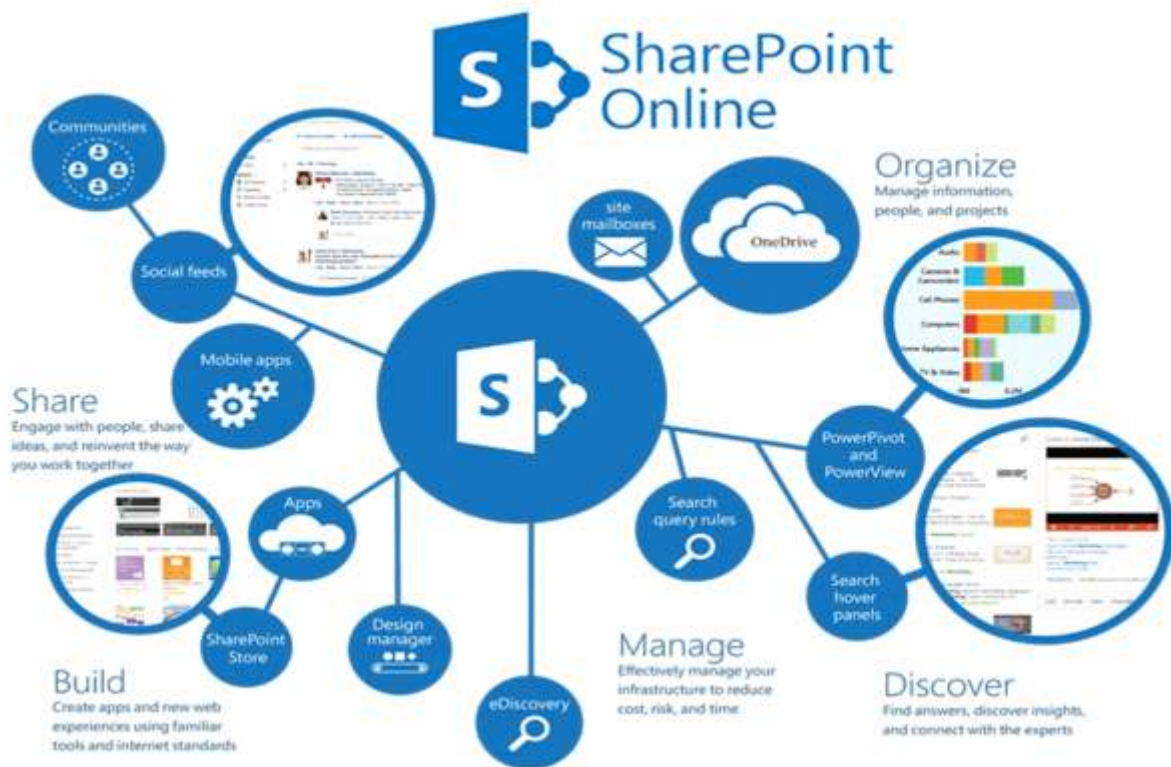
As the volume of remote workers quickly increased over the past two to three months, the IT teams in many companies scrambled to figure out how their infrastructures and technologies would be able to handle the increase in remote connections. Many companies were forced to enhance their capabilities to allow remote workers access to systems and applications from their homes and other locations outside the network perimeter. Companies that couldn't make changes rapidly enough to increase capacity for remote workers might rely on remote access using the remote desktop protocol, which allows employees to access workstations and systems directly (Azure security:2020)

3.2.1 MS SharePoint

SharePoint is one of the most important Microsoft 365 apps in any organization's stack if they manage remote teams. This is because it makes it easier for departments to share files and other documents as it serves as a central hub for all their documents.



Remote Work (RW) Tools



Every team no matter how remote a “website” have(a virtual workplace place where files are stored). If your team members are looking for something specific, they can easily use the search & filter function. This will significantly help

with knowledge sharing and makes long email threads obsolete. Not just that, sharing and collaborating on documents in real-time, SharePoint also allows you to share knowledge bases:

- ▶ If you are working on a project, simply upload your project plan and your entire team will see and know why their inputs matters.
- ▶ Also, if you are creating a process just Explain it, and upload it as a document to SharePoint so your team members from anywhere have a road map to success.
- ▶ Instead of sending separate notifications you can just create an automated workflow that can be viewed by all your team members

And since SharePoint Online is part of the Microsoft 365 collaboration suite, you don't have to pay for it separately or worry about integrations.

Remote Work (RW) Tools

Communication has become a key issue in the modern workspace, especially for organizations that practice remote work. Microsoft Team is a great Microsoft 365 suite app that can help your team communicate seamlessly, no matter where in the world they are.



Microsoft teams have three key features, and they are:

- ▶ Online meetings
- ▶ Instant messaging
- ▶ Real-time collaboration.

This is a great tool for communicating across different locations where files can be shared, and the meeting recorded for future references.

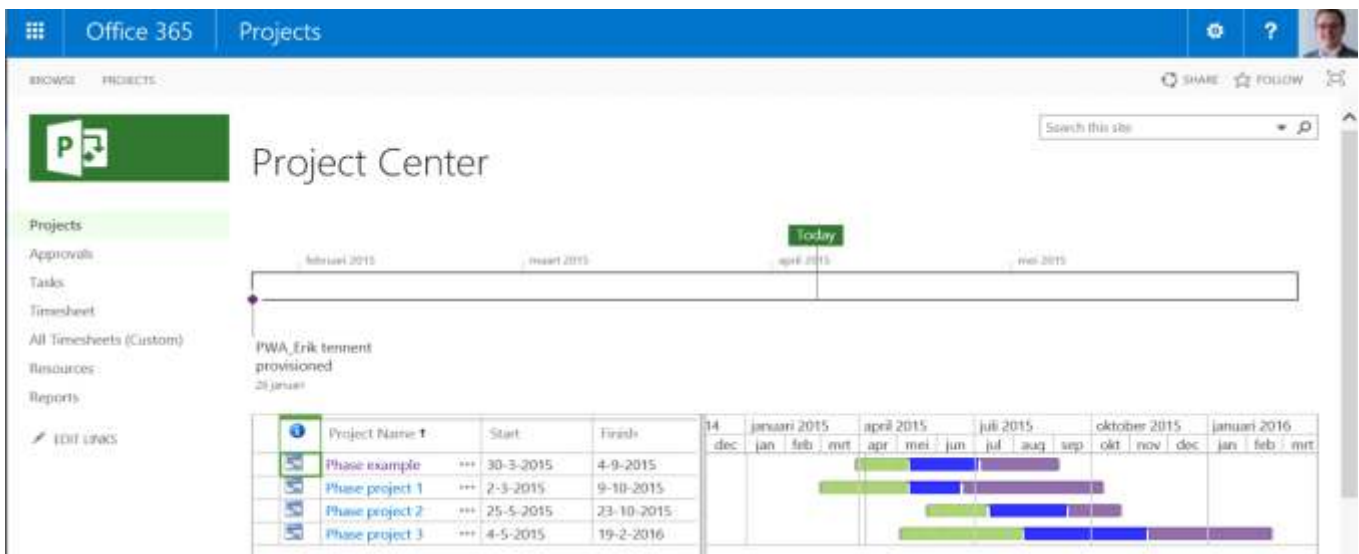
Firstly, your team can meet from anywhere, via voice or video. This makes everyone feel like they're in the same room. It improves the trust teams need to seamlessly collaborate. You can as well Launch video conferences on Microsoft Teams. All it takes is a push of the button, and you'll be good to go. Secondly, your team can constantly stay in touch with MS Teams team chat. Your team members can share their opinion, discuss feedback, and get the information they need to do

their jobs by chatting with each other live on the team's app. Finally, your team can collaborate on file sharing in real-time. Teams allow your department members to access, share and collaborate on Word, PowerPoint, and Excel files in real-time. This is very important. All in all, MS Team is a powerful solution for team communication. Since it also offers video conferencing and integrates tightly with the rest of the MS 365 collaboration suite, it makes life a lot easier for teams working remotely.

3.2.3 MS Project Central

This MS tool is a great task management platform for teams that work remotely. You can visually organize your projects with cards, each one having its task list inside. For project managers, this makes it easier for them to track project progress and the ones that need to be prioritized to achieve project objectives.

Remote Work (RW) Tools



With this tool a project manager can assign tasks, add new team members, and even create a new project on the app. MS has designed the platform in such a way that it is so easy to work on with its drag and drop features. The tool is simple, Project Central doesn't have a learning curve at all. Even if your team is not a tech team at all, you'll be able to get everyone on board. Secondly, you can easily **increase visibility across your team**. There won't be any confusion. And because Project Central integrates tightly with the Office 365 suite, you can **upload and attach your files to tasks**, and collaborate on them in real time. Give your team context with the Project Dashboard. Add details like background information, project scope, terms of reference (goals, deliverables, resources required), or anything else that's relevant.

3.3.4 Office 365

Microsoft 365 brings together premium Office apps like Word, Excel, and PowerPoint with 1 TB of OneDrive cloud storage, advanced security, and more, to help you get things done on any device. Office 365 is a toolbox. A very large and powerful toolbox. You do not install it on your computer. It lives online. If you open a web browser like Chrome or Internet Explorer, you can work with Office 365 regardless of what computer you use. Because it is a collection of so many different tools. Microsoft has recently enabled online collaboration, so if you know how to collaborate on Google Docs, you'll know how to collaborate on Word, PowerPoint, and Excel docs. All the tools listed above are already installed in Office 365 so a user does not need to remember passwords for different tools rather one password can give access to all the tools. All the tools are Hundred Percent(100%) integrated into office 365.

Remote Work (RW) Tools



With one drive an employee can access any of his documents on Office 365 as it is a cloud-based solution and has the highest level of security to prevent any form of attack on data and other sensitive documents.



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REMOTE WORKING AND ADOPTION CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA



We will look at these challenges from two perspectives. The one from an employee perspective and the one from the organization's (Employer) perspective.

There has been an increase in the demand for remote working this demand has increased significantly in 2020/2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This unexpected situation has forced individuals and organizations to quickly train employees and adopt the use of online working styles, seeking to maintain the same level of productivity as working from the office.

Some students across the globe have conducted a deep stick survey on the

challenges of adopting remote work by either employees or their employers. We will use the survey conducted by Amin Al-Habaibeh and his colleagues from the Product Innovation Centre, Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom (Amin Al-Habaibeh et al:2021) Where they use an online survey format to capture why adoption has been challenging for some employees and their organizations. A total of about 212 respondents completed the survey with most of them being residents of the UK. The result of the survey is seen below:

Remote Working and Adoption Challenges in Nigeria

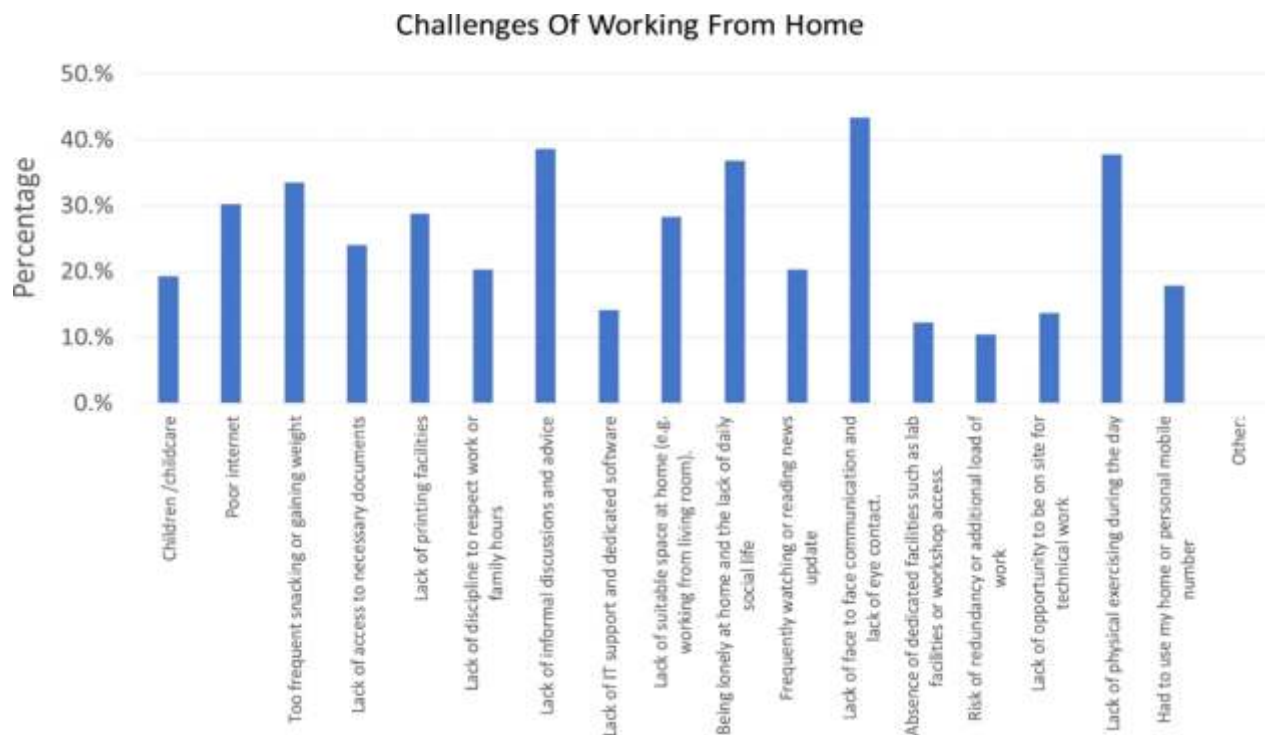


Image courtesy: [Sciencedirect.com/article](https://www.sciencedirect.com/article)

The result above showed that lack of face-to-face communication and eye contact was the main reason (43%) why adopting remote working has been challenging even in the UK followed by a lack of informal discussion and advice. In the Nigeria perspective where we live in a society of high employment rate employees will also rather want their bosses to see them working (eye to eye contact) rather than working from home where nobody sees them.

Does the data above capture the Nigerian side of the adoption challenge story? I doubt it because if we look at the below list of challenges, the student did not capture that in their data, so this means we have other adoption challenges that are not prevalent in developed nations.

working in Nigeria remotely is often faced with some challenges. A typical Nigerian who resides in the country knows that **electric supply** is nothing to write about. The poor supply of electricity has seen most remote workers spend a large part of their income on buying petroleum products to use to power their generators to carry out their work. While some others have opted for the use of solar. Some of these remote workers who cannot afford any of them have seen themselves miss out on gigs, unable to maintain steady communication with their employers, and missing out on deadlines and vital information. Due to the challenges of not keeping in touch with their employers and skipping work due to poor power supply, some of their employers have been forced to lay them off from work. (Emmanuel:2022)

Remote Working and Adoption Challenges in Nigeria

Also, one of the challenges of remote working that was not captured in the survey conducted by the student from Nottingham Kent University is the **cost of internet in Nigeria**. This is a major factor that has impacted negatively on the adoption of remote working. Nigeria has a high rate of unemployment and also underemployment and this has a massive impact on the remuneration of employees in Nigeria. Though some organizations provide internet allowance for their staff who work from home, most don't and so the employee will have to buy data themselves. Compared to many other countries, the cost of internet services is high in Nigeria, and it has always been a serious financial consideration for every business with the need for internet service in the country. The data gets wiped off before its due date of expiration, even when the subscriber is on an unlimited plan. Before the coronavirus pandemic, companies learned how to save data and cut costs. Many switched it on only when it is necessary and turned it off as soon as they are done. But that was then when there was still such a choice. In a time of crisis when the survival of businesses is lying on probabilities and governments all over the world are doing what they can to salvage the economy, the sustenance of every business counts.

Beyond just the cost of internet in Nigeria, there are also the issues of poor

internet connection. Most Nigerians are saddled with the issue of poor connection or no connection at all at some locations including the cities. Over 80% of internet users in Nigeria use their SIM cards or phone hotspot for internet connection. Apart from MTN other network providers have locations where their services are either not available or poor. Even MTN sometimes still has a poor network connection, especially for internet connection. It has become routine for network operators to send out messages informing their customers of an impending network downtime without considering what the consequences are. The Erratic internet connection is routine in Nigeria, with the country trailing the world in terms of broadband penetration and speed averages, but the extent of this albatross does not hit a chord until it is measured in terms of the human cost. (Premium times:2021).

“The poor supply of electricity has seen most remote workers spend a large part of their income on buying petroleum products to use to power their generators to carry out their work.

While some others have opted for the use of solar.”

Remote Working and Adoption Challenges in Nigeria

Down by a place, Nigeria ranked 82nd in the world among 110 countries — the highest in West Africa — on the 2021 Digital Quality of Life Index, a global digital well-being study conducted by Surf shark, an Amsterdam-based cybersecurity firm. The country ranked fifth in Africa behind South Africa, Mauritius, Kenya, and Tunisia - and just ahead of Morocco and Algeria..(Premium times:2021).

This factor has made employers and employees invest heavily in different data sources but with no change in the result as those other providers are often worse than the telcos

The International Labor Organization (ILO) surveyed Nigeria and why employers are not adopting Remote working as fast as in other countries. The following factors were attributed based on the survey conducted:

Figure 4: Reasons why businesses did not implement remote work

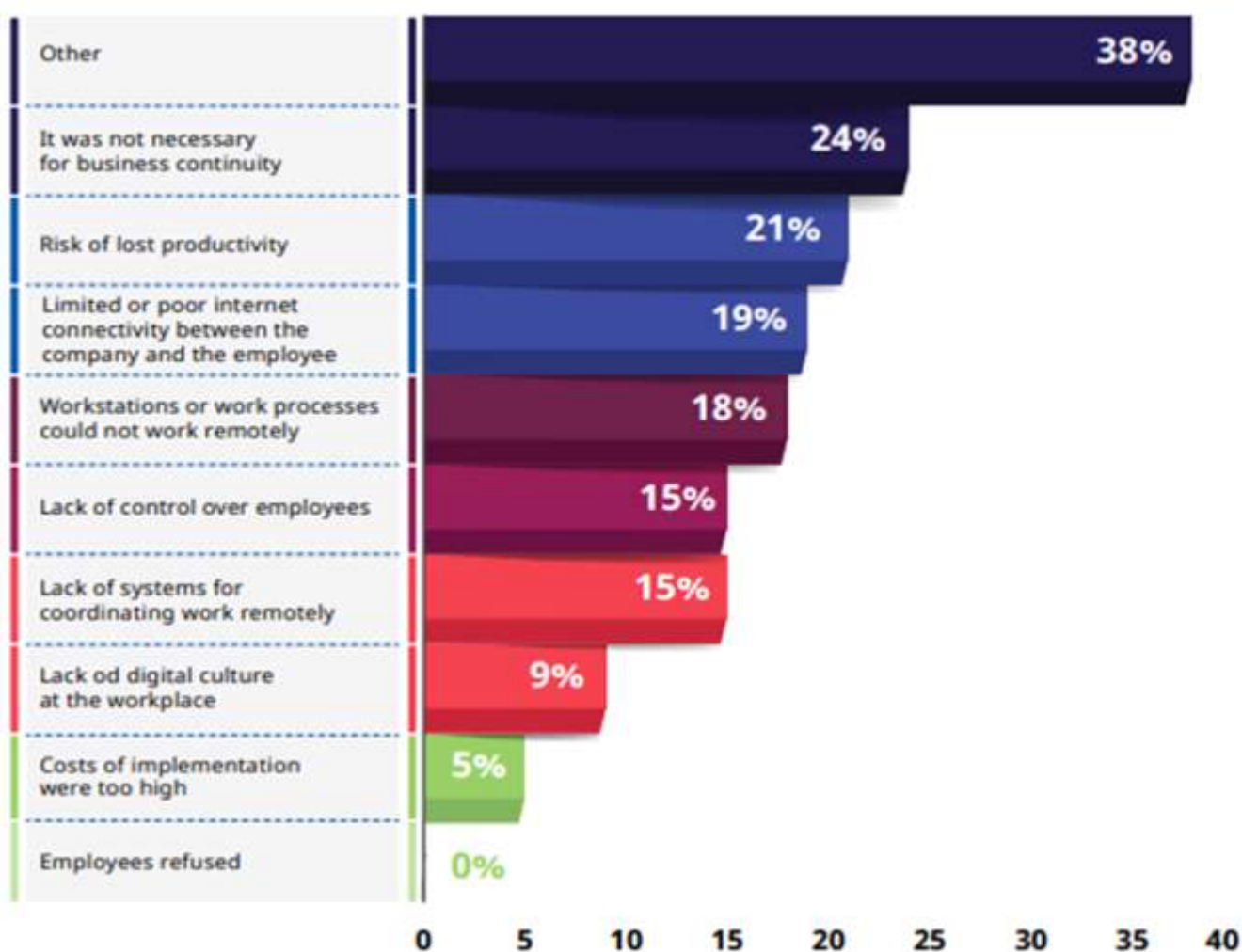


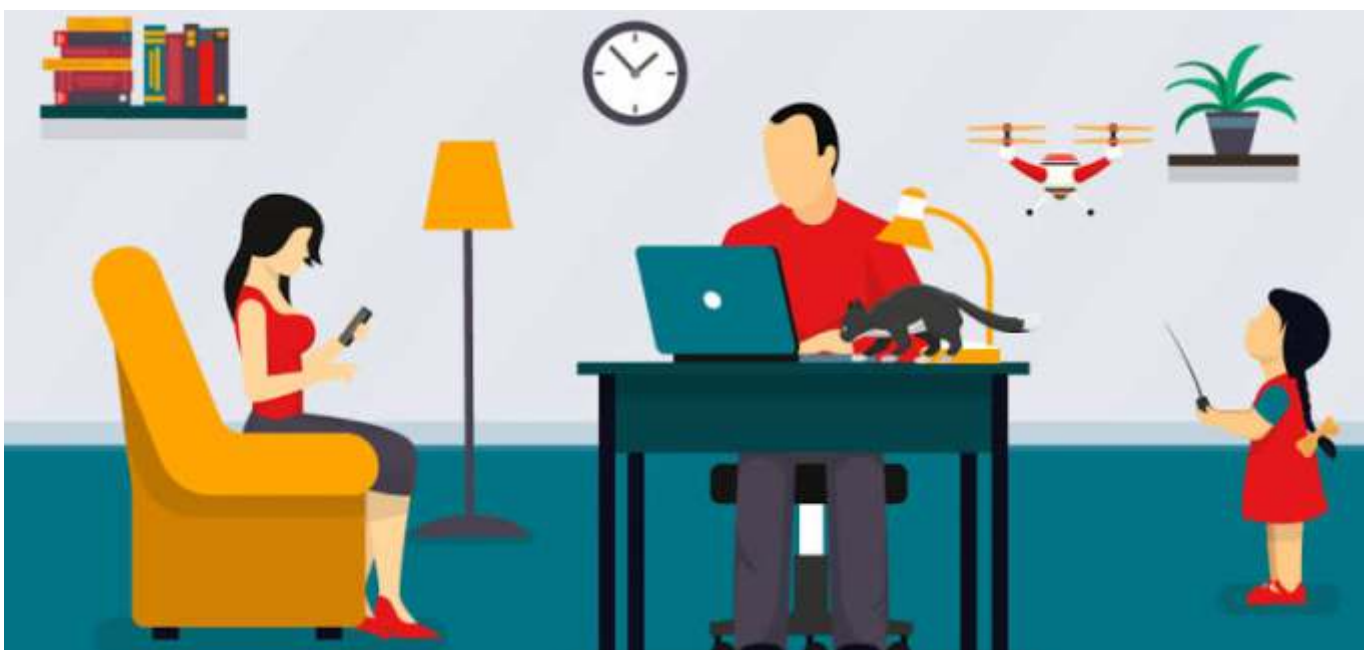
Image courtesy: International Labor Organization(ILO) 2022

Remote Working and Adoption Challenges in Nigeria

So beyond just lack of electricity or poor internet or the cost of data for internet other factors are also responsible for the poor adoption of remote work in Nigeria. For example, the data above showed that business who thought that remote work is not necessary for continuity is on the high side(24%) so how then do you sell remote working tools to such employers? There is also the risk of loss of productivity which has been proven to be false anyway. But again, in Nigeria, most employers feel once they allow their staff to work from home their productivity will drop but using SATH as a case study this has not been the case employee productivity has doubled in the last 2 years. Most employers also decline or are reluctant to adopt remote working because the cost of implementation was too high. This is because of so many factors from inflation to the high cost of Dollars

because those tools are provided by global tech firms e.g Microsoft

Despite these challenges the concept of remote work has gained momentum in Nigeria, especially in the tech industry, and has also enabled cross-border recruitment and work. Some organizations now practice what is called hybrid work mode. This is a situation where the organization practices both on-site work mode and remote working model. For some organizations, this has reduced the operational cost of their businesses as the amount spent on fuel to power the premises has reduced since most of the employees now work from home. There is also the issue of reduction in the overhead cost of employees, some employers who pay monthly or weekly transport stipends now don't need to do that because their employees now work from home, and no need for them to transit from one location to the other.





LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

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While some of us have been finding ways to adjust to Remote working or working outside of the office, research students have been busy studying it. Many are wondering, what is the future of remote working? What researchers have learned through studying trends and reactions about remote work may surprise many of us. **Increased remote working is likely to be a legacy of the crisis.** Although the transition towards virtual working was a forced experiment for many, it has produced several positive results including the temporary reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, greater potential for improved work-life balance, and cost savings. Remote working may also create new job opportunities for people who would not have otherwise joined the labor market, particularly women and people with certain disabilities. These positive aspects, and

evidence that remote working can be effective, are likely to mean that remote working arrangements, at least in a hybrid form, are here to stay.

Researchers have concluded therefore that the future of work is the **Hybrid work model**. Simply put, a hybrid work model is a combination of remote working with time in the office. Global brands and even some organizations in Nigeria have all announced plans to implement a hybrid work model in the future. A hybrid model may offer the best of both worlds – it can mean lower business costs for the company while keeping its employees happy, healthy, and motivated. As with any remote work, however, staff are at risk of burnout, so companies need to take care that their digital communication plans are just as solid as if their business were fully remote (RaveTeam:2022). A survey was

Looking into the future

carried out by research group GALLUP to determine the future of remote work and majority of the over One Hundred and Forty Thousand(140,000) workforce who participated in the survey said they prefer

hybrid work environment. One of the questions that was asked was why people prefer a hybrid work environment. See the below graph representing the various answers.



Image courtesy; GALLUP research group

The top three reasons employees say they prefer hybrid work indicates a strong desire for more personal freedom to work when, where, and how it best suits them. Employees demands for better wellbeing, work-life synergy and flexibility represent a new dynamic or should we say “will of the workplace” a work force that won't accept the traditional office going forward. Employees' fourth and fifth reasons remind us that in our increasingly “internet of things” or digital world, they still need to feel the need to connect to their coworkers and their organization.

Having that connection with their team and feel that they are part of the company culture is simply easier to experience in person. It is revealing that 38% of fully remote workers would prefer hybrid work. In other words, although fully remote employees enjoy their flexibility, four in 10 would rather once or twice a week give up some of that time at home to have in-person office experiences.

Finally, the most important reasons why people want a hybrid work environment center on having the flexibility to manage their week while still having some form of

Looking into the future

connection to their organization. Looking into the future all signs indicate that hybrid is fast becoming a new reality for the workforce. The future of this great global work experiment will be decided by how employers respond to the opportunities and challenges afforded by two years of learning to work differently. SA Consulting has over time shown competence in partnering with organizations across Africa in deploying solution that helps organization prepare for the future of work.



///The top three reasons employees say they prefer hybrid work indicates a strong desire for more personal freedom to work when, where, and how it best suits them ///

Resources

Remote work 2020 | Introduction | Remote Work 2020

An introduction to Remote Work (forbes.com)

---COVID-19 spikes remote work, online education adoption Business the Guardian Nigeria News Nigeria and World News

Security guidance for remote desktop adoption - Microsoft Security Blog

Challenges of Working Remotely in Nigeria - Tekedia

SPECIAL REPORT: Dogged by slow internet connectivity, Nigerians and their businesses count losses- Premium Times Nigeria (premiumtimesng.com)

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