

May 2021

In March 2020, numerous businesses across the San Diego region responded to the statewide stay-home order by either shutting their doors, changing their business model, letting employees go, or when possible, pivoting to allow employees to work remotely to a degree not seen before. As restrictions began to be lifted during spring 2021, SANDAG partnered with True North Research to conduct a statistically reliable survey of both businesses and employees in the region to understand the degree to which the pandemic changed their remote work policies and practices and how they expected work life to look post-pandemic. This InfoBits report is the first in a series highlighting the results from the full report, which is being used as part of long-term regional planning efforts for the region, including the development of the 2021 Regional Plan.

Did you know?



Post-pandemic, **40%** of San Diego County businesses reported they would offer remote work to at least one employee, one day a week. This is up from **27%** pre-pandemic, but down from the **47%** who did so during the pandemic.



While **2 in 5** businesses expect to incorporate remote working in their business model post-pandemic, just **15%** anticipate that half or more of their employees will work from home most of the week.

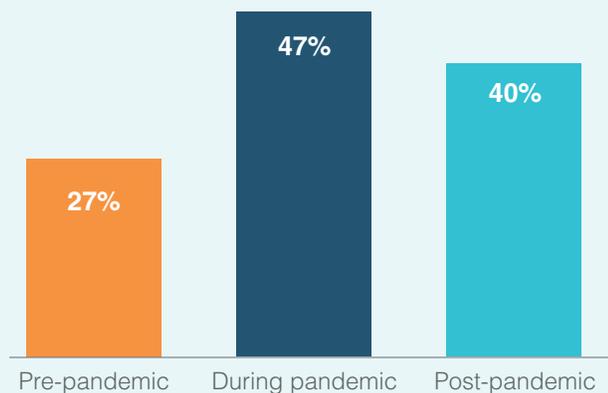


The **three** industries most likely to report a willingness to offer remote work post-pandemic included professional services, financial/insurance, and administrative support services. Collectively, these industries represent **17%** of the businesses in the San Diego region.

How many San Diego County businesses have or will offer remote work options?

As Figure 1 shows, prior to the pandemic, just over 1 in 4 (27%) San Diego County businesses offered remote work as an option to at least one employee, at least one day a week. Not surprisingly, this percent almost doubled during the pandemic (47%) and is expected to decrease post-pandemic (40%), but remain higher than it was prior to the pandemic. The top three reasons given by businesses for not allowing employees to work from home were that it was not possible for their type of work/industry (77%), employees required equipment that was only on-site (10%), and that they were a small business and need employees on-site (7%) (not shown).

FIGURE 1
Percent of San Diego County businesses that offered or are expected to offer employees the ability to work remotely pre-, during, and post-pandemic



21% of businesses that did not offer remote work as an option pre-pandemic said they would offer it as an option to at least some employees post-pandemic.

Source: San Diego Region Business Survey, SANDAG 2021

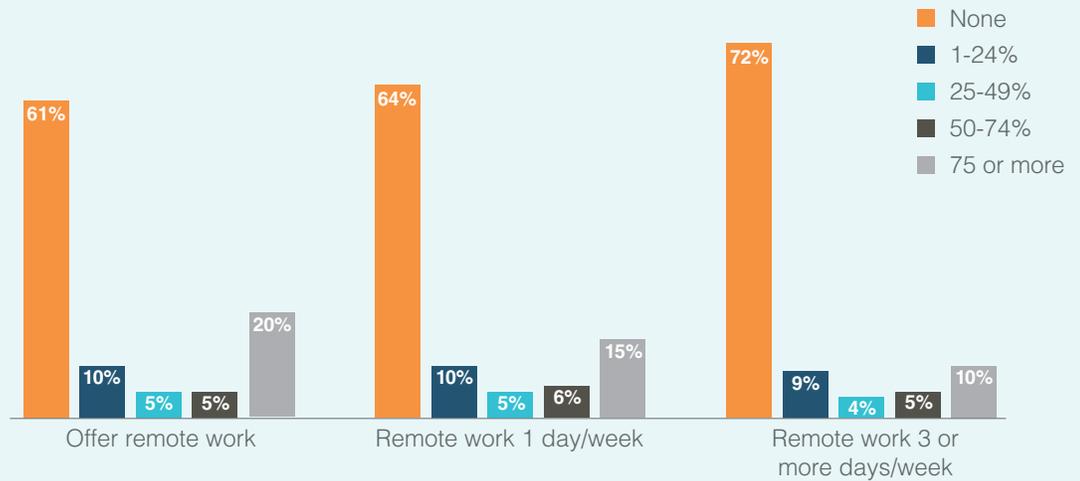
How many employees have and will work from home and how often will they do so?

While 40% of businesses reported they envisioned allowing employees to work from home post-pandemic, this does not mean every employee would be given this opportunity, or that those who work remotely will do so all of the time. Only 20% of businesses reported they would offer working remotely to 75% or more of their employees post-pandemic, and just 15% anticipated 75% or more of their employees would work remotely one day per week and only 10% thought 75% or more would work three or more days per week remotely.¹

FIGURE 2
Percent of employees expected to be offered the ability to work remotely or who will work remotely 1 day/week or 3 or more days/week post-pandemic

Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Source: San Diego Region Business Survey, SANDAG 2021

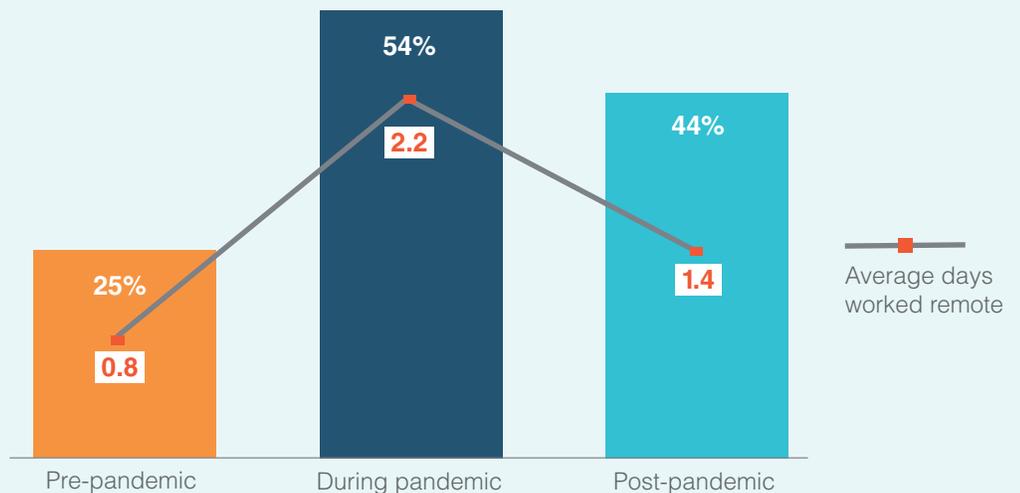


Turning to the employee survey (Figure 3), the percentage of individuals who reported working from home (either whole or partial days) before, during, and after the pandemic reflected the pattern of data reported by businesses shown in Figure 1. This percentage increased during the pandemic and is expected to decrease post-pandemic. In addition, the average number of days worked from home for all employees (including those who were able to work from home and those who could not) also increased during the pandemic (to 2.2 from 0.8) and was expected to decrease post-pandemic (to 1.4). This average demonstrates that overall, most employees will continue to travel to a work site most days of the week.

FIGURE 3
Percent of San Diego County employees who reported they worked or expect to work remotely (partial or whole days) pre-, during, and post-pandemic and average number of days worked from home per week

Note: When the average number of days worked remotely only includes full days, these regional averages decrease to 0.6, 1.9, and 1.2, respectively.

Source: San Diego Region Employee Survey, SANDAG 2021

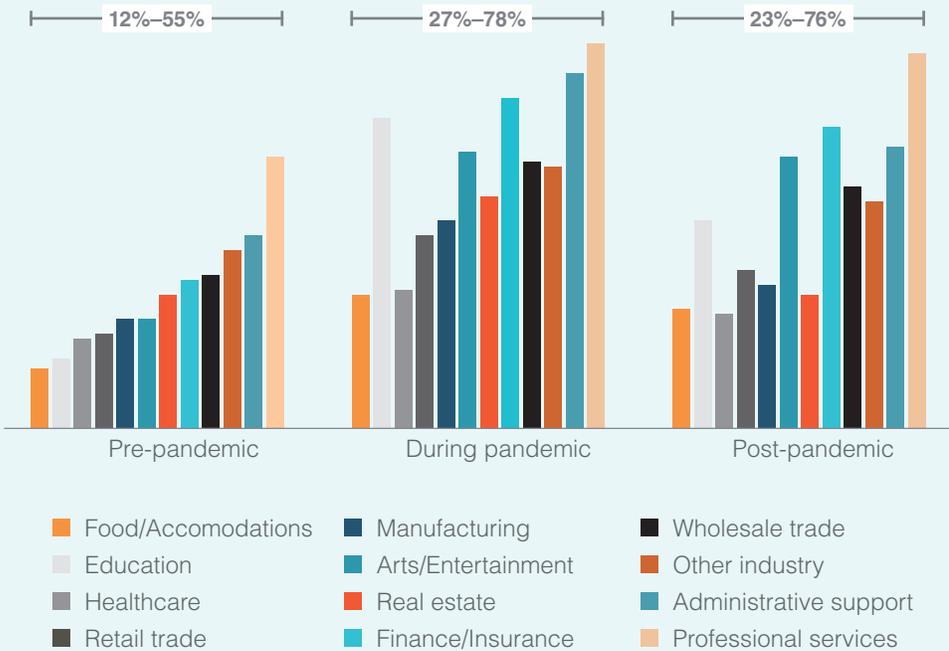


¹ This pattern of data is similar to what was reported by businesses pre- and during the pandemic.

How does working remotely vary by industry?

Industries varied considerably in their ability to allow remote work pre-pandemic (from 12% food/accommodations to 55% professional services), during the pandemic (from 27% food/accommodations to 78% professional services), and post-pandemic (from 23% healthcare to 76% professional services) (Figure 4). It is worth noting that all industries anticipated that their current remote work rates would decline from current levels to post-pandemic, although all but one industry (real estate) also anticipated their remote work rates would settle above pre-pandemic levels.

FIGURE 4
Percent of businesses that allowed remote work pre-, during, and post-pandemic by industry type



Source: San Diego Region Employee Survey, SANDAG 2021

Some other interesting differences across industries included:

- » Professional services was most likely to report they offered their employees the option to work from home during all three time periods
- » Financial/insurance had the second largest increase from pre-pandemic (30%) to during the pandemic (67%) and were the second highest to report remote work options were envisioned post-pandemic (61%)
- » The education sector had the second lowest pre-pandemic remote work rate (14%) and experienced the largest jump during the pandemic (63%). It is also expected to have the largest drop post-pandemic (a decrease of 21%).
- » The food/accommodations sector had the lowest remote work rate in the pre- (12%) and during pandemic (27%) periods, and the second lowest post-pandemic (24%)
- » Healthcare had the third lowest remote work rate in the pre-pandemic period (18%), the second lowest during the pandemic (28%), and the lowest post-pandemic (23%)

What are the pros and cons of working remotely during the pandemic according to businesses and employees?

When both businesses and employees were probed to describe both the perceived positive and negative impacts of having employees work from home during the pandemic, there were some interesting similarities and differences in their responses (Table 1).

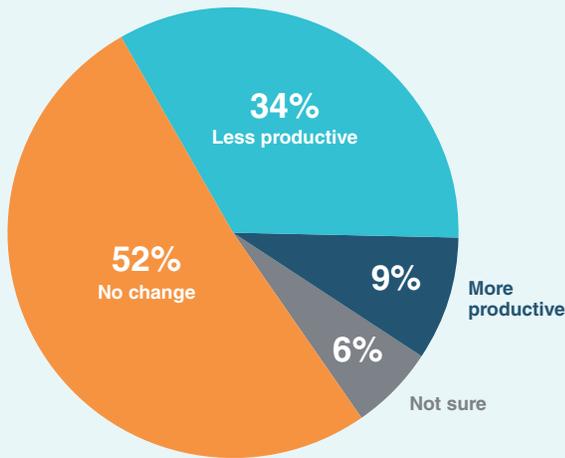
TABLE 1
Business and employee perceptions of the pros and cons of working from home during the pandemic

	Pros	Cons
Businesses & Employees	Fewer expenses	Communication and coordination and poor internet connection
Businesses	Better ability to hire and retain employees	Ability to identify and manage poor performers, profitability, and data security
Employees	Better work life balance, better time management, and increased job satisfaction	

Source: San Diego Region Business and Employee Survey, SANDAG 2021

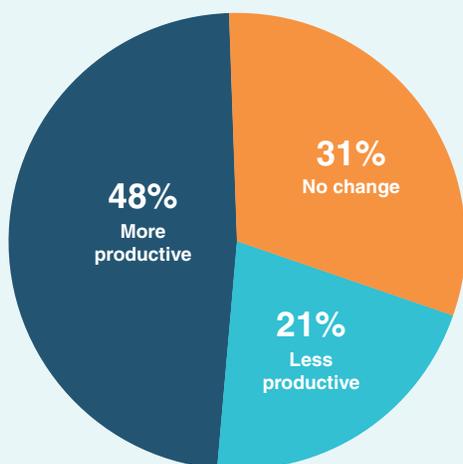
While about half the businesses that allowed remote work felt that employee productivity had not changed during the pandemic with their employees working from home, around one-third thought it decreased, 9% thought it increased, and 6% were not sure (Figure 5). Interestingly, 48% of the employees surveyed who had worked from home thought they were more productive, 21% thought they were less productive, and 31% thought it had no effect (Figure 6). Similarly, while 45% of employees felt the quality of their work improved by working from home, just 16% of businesses felt the same (not shown).

FIGURE 5
Businesses' perceptions of how employees productivity changed during the pandemic when they worked from home



Source: San Diego Region Business Survey, SANDAG 2021

FIGURE 6
Employees' perceptions of how their productivity changed during the pandemic when they worked from home



Source: San Diego Region Employee Survey, SANDAG 2021

Takeaways

- » It is reasonable to expect that more employees across the region will be working from home post-pandemic compared to pre-pandemic, although the practice will be less prevalent than it was during the pandemic
- » Businesses with employees who feel they have greater work-life balance working remotely may want to consider having collaborative discussions with employees as they return to the workplace regarding other opportunities to improve work-life balance (e.g., flexible hours, partial ability to work remote)
- » The ability and/or willingness to offer remote work varies substantially by industry and other business characteristics. The sectors that are most able to offer remote work appear to include professional services, financial/insurance, and administrative services. This information can guide potential outreach and transportation planning around the region

For businesses interested in receiving assistance in developing, enhancing, or formalizing long-term remote work initiatives, support is available through the SANDAG iCommute Telework Assistance Program
icommutesd.com/telework/assistance-program

About infobits

SANDAG serves as the region's clearinghouse for information and data. InfoBits publish timely, relevant information informing the public while providing context on complex issues facing the region.

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