



Economic Review

The Shifting Expectations for Work from Home

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February 23, 2023

Higher income workers in more densely populated areas are more likely to work from home.

As COVID-19 moves to an endemic state, employers have brought workers back to the office. Many workers prefer to continue working from home a portion of time, resulting in a gap between employee preferences for work from home and employer plans. Knowing who currently works from home a larger share of time and where this gap is narrowest across worker characteristics and locations helps explain where and for whom work from home is most likely to remain a permanent feature in the labor market.

Using a relatively new data source, the Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes, Jason P. Brown and Colton Tousey find that the share of paid working days from home is higher for workers with higher income, those who live in more densely populated areas, and those with faster internet connections. They show that workers report a desire to work from home “post-COVID” a larger fraction of time compared with their expectations of their employers’ plans for permitting work from home. Although employer plans on average have moved closer to workers’ expectations over time, the size of this expectations gap varies with workers’ income, age, urban environment, industry, occupation, and internet infrastructure, with the narrowest gap among higher income workers in more densely populated areas. These findings suggest that workers in larger urban areas will be more likely to benefit from the flexibility provided by work from home.

Publication information: Vol. 108, no. 2

DOI: 10.18651/ER/v108n2BrownTousey

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