



WHEN RETURN-TO-OFFICE IS ABOUT MORE THAN WORK

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Leadership decisions about where work happens are often framed as questions of productivity, collaboration, and culture. This research suggests that leaders' own motivations for **power and status** may also shape their attitudes toward remote work, with important implications for how organizations make workplace decisions.

Why it matters

- ▶ Return-to-office mandates can affect employee **satisfaction, retention, engagement, and trust**.
- ▶ Leaders often assume resistance to remote work is driven by **organizational needs**, but **personal motivations** may also play a role.
- ▶ Decisions about workplace flexibility influence culture, autonomy, and perceptions of **leadership credibility**.

How we know

- ▶ Researchers examined public statements from 259 Fortune 500 CEOs alongside measures of **leader narcissism**.
- ▶ Additional studies involving hundreds of organizational leaders explored why some leaders **oppose remote work** more than others.

What researchers found

- ▶ Leaders higher in **narcissism** were **more likely** to resist remote work.
- ▶ Resistance was driven in part by concerns about losing **power, control, visibility, and status**.
- ▶ Remote work can reduce many of the traditional signals of authority and admiration that some leaders value.

What this means

- ▶ Leadership decisions may be shaped by leaders' **personal motivations** as well as **organizational considerations**.
- ▶ Effective leaders distinguish between what benefits the organization and what reinforces their own **preferences** or sense of **authority**.
- ▶ **Self-awareness** is critical when evaluating policies that affect employees' work experiences and organizational culture.

Now what?

To make more effective workplace decisions, we suggest:

- Leaders should examine whether their assumptions about remote work are grounded in evidence, organizational needs, or personal preferences.
- Teams should create opportunities for open dialogue about how different work arrangements affect performance, collaboration, and well-being.
- Organizations should evaluate workplace policies using objective outcomes and employee feedback rather than relying solely on leadership intuition.

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