



The Remote Work Movements in Australia and Canada: Benefits, Challenges and Cybersecurity Responses

Dr Shuana Zafar Nasir - Lecturer, Australian Institute of Business.

Nasir Mahmood - OLF, Australian Institute of Business; Lecturer, Victorian School of Commerce; and, Lecturer, Victorian Institute of Technology

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Introduction

COVID-19, an unprecedented event, pushed many employers and employees to move to a remote or hybrid working environment. Now, almost four years after the beginning of this pandemic, the work environment landscape has been drastically reshaped, and many employees are still enjoying the advantages of virtual work, whether it be partially or completely remote. According to [Stanford University hybrid-work expert Professor Nicholas Bloom](#), 37% of Australian workers now work from home regularly, which suggests new norms around flexible arrangements, while approximately 20% of Canadians work most of their hours from home each week. Furthermore, Professor Bloom forecasts a steady shift towards even more remote work arrangements than the workforce has ever seen before over the next five years.

However, with more people working remotely than ever before, the quality of work remains a concern for employers, and they have started to take notice of the pros and cons of different work arrangements. This article examines the benefits and challenges of virtual workplaces and highlights the cybersecurity responses of companies and leaders in Australia and Canada to provide insights into the evolving business practices of both nations.

Remote Work Demand: Industry and Profession

A [shift was emerging](#) with knowledge workers before 2020 due to rapid advancements in digital connectivity and technology. People started wondering about the [necessity of being in offices physically](#) to complete their tasks. However, it was the lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic that showed people can perform their tasks well from home without the need to be collocated with colleagues and peers to perform the assigned jobs.

In 2023, the information technology (IT) sector emerged as the top industry for remote work, and this aligns with the fact that work on the IT side is digital in nature and requires a reliable internet connection. However, other job sectors are also catching up; for example, accounting, marketing and project management have shifted greatly towards remote work by leveraging digital platforms and tools to maintain the continuity of tasks. Interestingly, the health sector has also moved towards remote work, driven by the rise of digitisation of health records and telehealth services.



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Moreover, the human resources (HR) sector, specifically the recruiting division, is taking advantage of remote work, allowing these units to function efficiently through virtual collaboration tools, [irrespective of location](#). Executive assistants, financial analysts and customer representatives are also among [prominent remote job](#) postings. Although these roles are diverse in nature, they can be performed efficiently with the use of the right technology without even being physically in the office.

Remote work: Trends in Australia

In Australia, this trend of remote work is having a [profound impact on the economy and society](#). Potentially, it can reshape how people work and earn, helping them socially by allowing them to balance personal and work lives and economically by potentially cutting down living costs. Furthermore, the hybrid work model is gaining popularity since it offers efficiency and flexibility. However, there are challenges to remote and hybrid work. Let's look at how an Australian company managed the challenges from the onset of the pandemic.

[Deloitte Australia](#) identified three phases to navigate at the start of the pandemic: respond, recover and thrive. During the first phase, the focus was primarily on immediate issues, such as employee health or safety and the transition to remote work. In the second phase, reflecting, rethinking, and re-engaging took place. The recovery phase yielded mixed outcomes, including improved productivity alongside increased well-being challenges. The thrive phase was the one where the 'new normal' was defined. It was about adapting to disruptions and, as a result, creating resilience. Thriving is not only about returning to work after the pandemic but also embracing new insights to reimagine the future accelerated by COVID-19. While many companies focused on technological aspects, Deloitte believed in the prioritisation of human-centric designs in the future of work by creating a supportive and effective environment to recognise and address workers' emotional states.

Moving forward, remote work now seems to be a permanent aspect of the Australian workforce. Both employers and employees are now understanding the advantages of [flexible work arrangements](#). With more Australian companies embracing hybrid work models, the distinction between traditional work setups and remote work is blurring; leaders must intentionally plan interactions, recognising the fact that almost [77% of Australian employees](#) are asking for a better reason to go to the office. In Australia, the future of work is likely to be characterised by a balance between remote and traditional in-office work environments.

With an increase in hybrid work models, Australian leaders are adapting to significant changes. They are focused on managing resources in a digital environment by utilising new communication tools and training programs, fostering a sense of connection through regular check-ins. [Australian leaders](#) of top companies (like Telstra, Commonwealth Bank, Woolworths Group and Deloitte Australia) show resilience and understand that an inclusive approach is essential for success, especially in this new work landscape.

However, with the rise of remote and hybrid work models, cybersecurity is one of the greatest concerns. Research shows that 65% of Australian Small and Medium Businesses (SMBs) suffered a [cybersecurity incident in 2021](#). [SMBs are crucial to Australia's economy](#) by contributing over \$500 billion per annum and creating employment for approximately 43% of the private sector workforce.



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However, these Australian businesses often express concerns over the lack of resources, time and expertise to enhance their cybersecurity. Additionally, these businesses struggle to attract skilled cyber professionals and, as a result, take longer to make a recovery from cyber incidents. To address this issue, the Australian government plans to introduce a [cyber health-check program](#) offering a free assessment of cybersecurity maturity for SMBs. The aim of the program is to build cyber resilience and help businesses manage cyber threats. Now, let's explore key emerging trends in remote work in Canada.

The rise of remote work in Canada: Key Trends to watch

In the Canadian context, the ethos of work culture has transformed, emphasising resilience and adaptability. The traditional days of 9 to 5 office hours are gone, having given way to flexibility. According to [Agilus Work Solutions](#), Canadian workers are interested in remote work and are even willing to accept pay cuts to continue working from home; as such, many companies are offering remote and hybrid work options wherever possible.

During the pandemic, Canadian companies demonstrated bold acts of leadership and faced the challenging task of making complex decisions about how to steer through this crisis. Around 25% of workplaces made a commitment to their workers that they would not be laid off (zero layoffs). This provided a sense of job security to their workforce during challenging times. [Mastercard Canada](#) assured its workers that their jobs would remain secure and safe despite the challenges of the COVID pandemic. This proactive stance enabled the employees to prioritise their own and their family members' health and well-being. Moreover, the stance provided peace of mind to adjust to the evolving 'new normal.' Similarly, [ChefHero](#), a leading food industry, experienced severe financial setbacks during the pandemic. However, it maintained resilience and handled emerging issues with empathy. To avoid employee layoffs, the company implemented a salary cut of as low as 10% for its workforce, while the CEO accepted a substantial salary reduction of 40%, and the remaining leadership team was asked to take a 25% salary cut.

The post-pandemic evolving landscape has sparked curiosity among the workforce about future expectations. Employees have experienced greater autonomy, increased job satisfaction and even fewer expenses due to less commuting and fuel consumption, which have positively impacted the environment by reducing [greenhouse gas emissions](#). However, despite some positives, there are [challenges associated with remote work](#). As many employees use their personal network connections instead of secure office systems, this poses a [cybersecurity threat](#). To make remote work safer, the [Canadian government implemented various strategies](#), such as adding continuous protections against viruses/malware and expanding multifactor authentication. For improved security, the government created a security operations centre to monitor networks. Outdated technology is one of the main reasons for privacy breaches and cybersecurity incidents. The Canadian government also modernised the IT infrastructure to protect against such threats.

Conclusion

In summary, the shift to remote and hybrid work in Australia and Canada, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has reshaped work culture by enhancing flexibility, work-life balance and operational



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efficiency. This transformation is evident in industries like IT, health, and HR, where remote roles have proven effective. Leaders in companies in both countries, such as Deloitte Australia and Mastercard Canada, have responded with innovative, human-centric approaches that support employee well-being and engagement.

However, with this shift comes heightened cybersecurity risks. Governments in both nations are actively addressing these vulnerabilities by investing in cyber resilience initiatives to protect businesses and support sustainable remote work. As organisations continue refining remote models, balancing flexibility with security will be essential. By embracing adaptable, inclusive strategies, Australia and Canada are creating resilient work environments that prioritise employee needs while driving business innovation and growth.



Dr Shuana Zafar Nasir

Lecturer, Australian Institute of Business

Shuana completed her PhD in Business Management from the University of Bolton, UK, in 2021. She has almost 17 years of teaching experience in Australian and international higher education institutions. She has obtained a Fellowship of Higher Education Academy (FHEA) from the UK. Besides teaching and learning, she held various leadership and administrative positions. Shuana's research interests include emotional intelligence, employee retention, employee engagement, work-life balance, peer support and career development.



Nasir Mahmood

Online Facilitator, Australian Institute of Business; Lecturer, Victorian School of Commerce; and, Lecturer, Victorian Institute of Technology

Nasir holds a Master of Public Administration and a Master of Applied Economics and is currently doing a PhD in Finance from the UK. He has around two decades of experience in higher education teaching and in the corporate sector. He has obtained a Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA) from the UK and is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP). Nasir's research interests include capital market, corporate finance, leadership, corporate governance and public finance.

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