

Tapping Business and Household Surveys to
Sharpen Our View of Work from Home¹

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Abstract

Work from home (WFH) has become more prevalent in the U.S. economy but timely business-level measures are lacking. We review survey-based efforts to quantify the incidence and character of WFH and highlight gaps in our knowledge. We describe our efforts to deepen our understanding by developing questions for the Business Trends and Outlook Survey (BTOS) drawing on lessons from other business and household surveys. Our three main findings from BTOS are as follows. First, a little less than a third of businesses have employees who work from home; underlying this is tremendous variation across sectors: the share of businesses in the Information sector with WFH employees is almost 10 times the share in the Accommodation and Food Services sector. Second, apart from feasibility concerns, the next largest concern reported by businesses is productivity (cited by 11.7% of firms). Third, 15.6% of businesses do not perceive a productivity difference between work from home and onsite employees as compared to 8.7% of businesses that perceive a difference (mostly favoring onsite employees). These and other lessons learned help inform research to enhance content on the American Community Survey. This dual perspective enables us to paint a more comprehensive and complete picture of WFH.

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