

# How Prepared Was Your Team for Remote Work During COVID-19?



## Introduction

Prior to March 2020, most law firms and organizations had already implemented at least rudimentary telecommuting policies. These may have ranged from one or two scheduled remote days a week to a more casual “work from home when absolutely necessary” approach. Pre-pandemic, only about [5% of full-time office employees](#) worked mainly from home.

Then COVID-19 struck, turning the world of business on its proverbial ear. Given its reputation for being slow to accept change, many thought the legal industry would be left scrambling as offices everywhere shut down and workforces went online. After all, this is a profession that believes in the virtues of face time.

**The results of a survey conducted by Major, Lindsey & Africa tell a different story entirely.** From January-March 2021, we asked chief legal officers, general counsel and legal operations leaders across the United States how prepared their teams were to make the abrupt shift to remote work when COVID-19 took hold. We received more than 200 responses.

## Key Findings

**83%** said their legal department was **well-prepared when COVID-19 forced operations to be conducted remotely.**

**87%** said their company had **supported its legal department working remotely** right from the onset of the pandemic.

Despite being mostly ready to shift to all or primarily remote work, many departments still faced a few challenges:

**11%** said that **remote access was complicated**, resulting in the need for new supporting technologies.

**12%** said the **pandemic exposed glaring gaps in technology and talent**, which they sought to remedy internally.

**3%** reported they felt **overwhelmed with their lack of resources** and needed help finding the right tools and talent in 2021.

What kinds of steps have legal departments taken in the last year to enable efficient remote access for their employees?

**64%** were **already fully remote-capable** and didn't need to make further accommodations.

**27%** had to make **internal adjustments** to provide access to critical records and data.

More than a year into the pandemic, some legal departments are still working on making the transition to remote work and exploring different tools and solutions to help them do so.

## Lessons Learned in 2020

As chaotic as the past year has been, the pandemic has delivered some valuable lessons in business innovation, preparedness and survival. According to our survey, some legal and legal operations leaders found their departments were actually more productive working remotely, contrary to commonly held beliefs.

Another revelation was that physical proximity to decision-makers and clients is important, but not absolutely essential (although in-person collaboration was cited as being helpful in problem-solving).

## Redefining Normal?

The work-from-home concept has always been fodder for debate, and some firms and legal departments have resisted giving remote work a clear green light. However, when the COVID-19 crisis made telecommuting the only safe way to do business, a surprising truth was revealed: **it can work**—and work well.

Not only can legal work be done effectively and efficiently via remote means, it provides distinct advantages for both employers and employees. By offering remote options, organizations can potentially reduce overhead costs, attract better candidates and even remove geographical hiring barriers to open up a broader pool of talent. Lawyers themselves benefit from less commuting time, greater mobility and more flexibility to balance work with family and personal commitments.

Digitization of the legal industry is well underway, and departments that embraced remote work out of necessity at the start of the pandemic will likely have an edge when it ends. If our survey findings are any indication, it seems most are already well-positioned for the future.

## Other lessons shared by our respondents included:

- “Poor work-from-home setups led to worker’s compensation issues.”
- “2020 forced us to look at the work we are doing, how we do it and where it should be done differently or not at all.”
- “COVID identified gaps in organizations flexible workplace policies and technology gaps.”
- “There is a real need to keep up morale and culture. It is the responsibility of leadership.”
- “The legal profession can change the way it operates.”
- “Having good talent that has the mindset to shift [is important].”