

Think Remote Work is an Easy Ride? This New Hiring Trend Predicts a Harsh Reality for Entry-Level Workers

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Fresh management research covering 50 million job postings reveals that working from home has triggered a massive upshift in qualification demands—and it's bad news for anyone trying to break into the market.

We know that remote work is here to stay, as a new normal in our post-pandemic world (even if this annoys certain ego-centric bosses who press for "return to office" rules.) It's changed the modern workplace, and we're all still getting used to the subtleties brought about by the shift. Now fresh research into how companies think about remote working standards has revealed an interesting trend linking workers' higher experience and permission to work remotely. The data may have you reconsidering your company's own hybrid and remote working policies. It may be another bad omen for entry level workers, too.

The new study, by management science researchers, found that as remote work became more common in recent years, it led to a simultaneous upshift in the level of experience, qualifications and skills that companies were requiring of their new hires. Essentially companies are asking that their new workers have more skills and more work experience for similar jobs now, in the remote and hybrid working era, than they were before. The researchers note that their data, from 50 million job postings, covers "nearly all industries and occupations," Phys.org explained, which suggests that this is a very widespread trend.

The data shows that remote jobs that are very comparable to in-person roles tend to come with a requirement of about 25 percent more skills, more higher education qualifications, and an average of an extra 0.1 years of working experience.

Your common sense engine may have kicked into high gear here, driven in part by your own experience of leading a team of remote workers, and you may be thinking “well that’s obvious: if I’m going to hire someone new into a remote work role, I’ve got to trust that they’ll get up to speed really quickly, work reliably without me hovering over their shoulder, and deliver high quality work when I need it. Higher experience and education go hand in hand with that!” The research does support this somewhat, with the study noting carefully that “By reducing face-to-face interaction and real-time communication, remote work makes training and employee support more challenging.” This suggests remote work may put a higher initial load on employers and managers, as well as certain more demanding ongoing pressures, and this has led employers to push qualification demands higher for new job applicants.

But the researchers also found there’s another mechanism ticking away inside this trend. Jobs that come with remote work perks tend to attract a much bigger number of applicants, ranging from perhaps 20 percent higher to as much as 10 or 20 times as many. This is arguably because the jobs are suitable to many more job seekers in the talent pool because there are fewer geographic limitations, as the study suggests. But it’s also worth remembering that remote work is very popular indeed, and many people may be attracted to these jobs because they’re remote, rather than seeking, say, a similar in-person role near where they live.

Thanks to the number of applicants, HR teams managing remote work hiring processes may find that raising skill and expertise requirements helps them filter through the list more speedily, or managers may use the opportunity to argue something like “why not hire a very experienced person for this role? It can only do us good.”

Deeper context and implications of this trend

There’s a powerful argument to be made that managers’ reservations about remote work are coming from the wrong place. CEOs like Amazon’s Andy Jassy have aggressively pushed against remote working trends, and have even ignored the strident comments of their staff members, because they say that in-person working is better for teamwork. But psychologists have suggested it’s much more to do with managers’ over-inflated self-importance and ego, even narcissism, than true business benefits.

This conclusion may pour a little cold water on these new arguments explaining why managers want more experienced new hires in remote roles. You may thus see difficulties in onboarding and trusting remote hires as a failure of imaginative and effective management, rather than workers’ inexperience.

What it means for your company

The big takeaway from this for any employer is that remote work is now part of a new normal in the average workplace. Whether it’s fully remote or part-time hybrid, remote work is

commonly offered by many employers and favored by many workers. If you don't offer remote options to potential new hires, you may be missing out on great job candidates who'll seek out work at your competition.

Secondly, it's probably worth checking that you're not asking too much in terms of experience and skills for your remote workers. It's acceptable to set high standards, but you may have overshot the mark, and may potentially be overlooking the skills and passion that younger, less experienced workers can offer. We know that [AI](#) has upset the entry level job scene, so overlooking young workers for remote jobs may be harming job seekers' skills in the long-term.

Lastly, remember that remote workers, especially youngsters, won't have firsthand experience of your company's culture. Fostering a sense of inclusivity, and making them part of events is a good way to build camaraderie and relationships. Allowing extra training time for "soft" psychological aspects of onboarding may also be good policy.

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