

12-12-2021

Workforce Frontiers: Organizational Perspectives on Transitioning Remote Workers to Digital Nomads

Deborah J. Armstrong
Florida State University, djarmstrong@business.fsu.edu

Michael A. Erskine
Middle Tennessee State University, michael.erskine@mtsu.edu

Sam Zaza
sam.zaza@mtsu.edu

Valerie Bartelt
University of Denver, vbartelt@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://aisel.aisnet.org/treos_icis2021

Recommended Citation

Armstrong, Deborah J.; Erskine, Michael A.; Zaza, Sam; and Bartelt, Valerie, "Workforce Frontiers: Organizational Perspectives on Transitioning Remote Workers to Digital Nomads" (2021). *ICIS 2021 TREOs*. 16.

https://aisel.aisnet.org/treos_icis2021/16

This material is brought to you by the TREO Papers at AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). It has been accepted for inclusion in ICIS 2021 TREOs by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). For more information, please contact elibrary@aisnet.org.

Workforce Frontiers

Organizational Perspectives on Transitioning Remote Workers to Digital Nomads

Deborah J. Armstrong, djarmstrong@business.fsu.edu; Michael A. Erskine, michael.erskine@mtsu.edu; Sam Zaza, sam.zaza@mtsu.edu; Valerie Bartelt, valerie.bartelt@du.edu

The COVID-19 pandemic has permanently altered the nature and usage of ‘remote work,’ where remote work is defined as work tasks completed outside a traditional office. Even organizations such as Microsoft, which were once opposed to remote work, had to embrace this alternative. In a post-pandemic world, some organizations may revert to pre-pandemic operations and recall their workers into physical offices. In contrast, others may leverage the opportunities afforded by a permanently remote workforce (or portion of their workforce), such as increased creativity and innovation, and global time zone coverage. But these opportunities can only be actualized if organizations procure the needed talent.

Organizations may find new sources of talent in an emerging population of remote workers who identify as *digital nomads*, individuals who use information and communication technology (ICT) to work beyond the constraint of location (Everson et al., 2021). While location-independent workers have long existed (e.g., writers, truck drivers), digital nomads are distinct in their intense reliance on ICTs to complete work tasks, and unlike peripatetic workers (e.g., military personnel), travel is not mandatory but part of the lifestyle choice. Recent innovations, such as co-working spaces, and ubiquitous global communication networks, have empowered this lifestyle, making it plausible, viable, and desired. This topic is particularly salient for IS researchers, because Everson et al. (2021, np) note that as digital nomads “rely on digital tools and the internet in their work, it’s not surprising that most of them are in high-demand, tech-oriented occupations.”

Before organizations fully embrace this workforce trend, they must weigh the benefits against the potential downsides of utilizing digital nomads, such as decreased mental health, diminished professional identity, and organizational culture clash (cf. Hensellek & Puchala, 2021). We explore the question - will well-established workforce theories anchored in traditional organizations and careers (e.g., performance, satisfaction, and identity) hold for digital nomads, and if so, what are the new context-specific theories? We propose answering these questions through an inductive, qualitative, theory-building study of remote workers. We expect our findings to guide organizations in the recruitment and retention of high-demand, tech-oriented talent.

References

- Everson, M., King, S., & Ockels, C. (2021). Your Company Needs a Digital Nomad Policy. *Harvard Business Review*, <https://hbr.org/2021/07/your-company-needs-a-digital-nomad-policy>.
- Hensellek, S., & Puchala, N. (2021). The Emergence of the Digital Nomad: A Review and Analysis of the Opportunities and Risks of Digital Nomadism. *The Flexible Workplace*, 195-214.