

While a lot of Federal Sector Managers reported during the Covid pandemic that their staff have been more than productive while working from home, The Federal government wants to enforce a mandatory 3 day / week working from the offices instead of working from home.

Federal Equity-Seeking Group employees (such as women, racialized communities, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals) may face several challenges with such mandate to work three days a week from the office instead of working from home.

Here are some key issues:

1. Accessibility and Accommodation Issues

- **Persons with Disabilities:** Employees with disabilities would find commuting to the office more challenging due to inaccessible public transportation, office infrastructure or difficulties handling long distances.
- **Neurodiverse Employees:** For those who are neurodiverse, office environments can be overwhelming due to sensory sensitivities, noise and social interactions - which may impact their productivity and well-being.

2. Increased Exposure to Discrimination or Microaggressions

- **Racialized Communities and 2SLGBTQIA+ Employees:** These groups may face an increased risk of discrimination, microaggressions or exclusion in an office environment, where in-person interactions are more frequent and where they may feel less safe or supported.

3. Work-Life Balance and Caregiving Responsibilities

- **Women and Caregivers**:** Women, who are more likely to take on caregiving roles, may find it more challenging to balance work and personal responsibilities with the need to commute to the office. Working from home allows for more flexible arrangements to manage caregiving duties, such as childcare or eldercare.

4. Financial and Time Burdens

- **Lower-Income Employees:** Those who are from lower-income groups may face financial stress due to increased costs associated with commuting, parking and other expenses. These costs can disproportionately affect employees from equity-seeking groups who may already face economic disparities.
- **Longer Commutes:** Employees who live farther from the office due to housing affordability may face longer, more expensive and more time-consuming commutes; which can add stress and reduce time for other activities, including caregiving or self-care.

5. Health and Safety Concerns

- **Immune-Compromised Employees:** For employees with underlying health conditions or who are immune-compromised may have concerns about increased exposure to illnesses (as we saw with COVID-19) or other communicable diseases, when returning to shared office spaces.
- **Mental Health:** Employees who have benefited from working from home in terms of reduced stress, better mental health and more autonomy will experience anxiety or mental health challenges when returning to an in-person work environment.

6. Lack of Inclusive Workplace Policies

- **Lack of Flexible Arrangements:** A "one-size-fits-all" approach, will not meet the diverse needs of equity-seeking groups. There is a need to have inclusive policies that provide flexibility, rather than pressure employees to conform to such "one-size-fits-all" approach.
- **Barriers to Career Progression:** Employees who require more flexibility or accommodation have a valid fear of being unfairly judged as less committed or less productive, potentially impacting their career advancement opportunities.

7. Digital and Workplace Culture Gaps

- **Remote-Work Inclusivity:** A return to the office would reverse some of the positive changes which employees have adapted to a more inclusive remote work culture that better supports diverse communication styles and collaboration methods seen during the period of remote work.

These challenges suggest that a hybrid work policy requires consultation with employees' representatives and meaningful communication with Equity-Deserving Groups to carefully implement with accommodations, flexible work arrangements and measures to foster a more inclusive workplace culture.