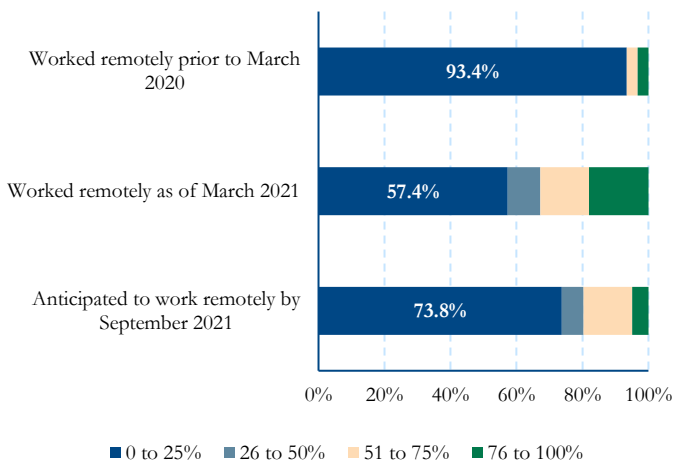With increasing distribution of Covid-19 vaccines and easing restrictions from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), businesses are increasing the redeployment of their workforce. However, there are many uncertainties in the best practices and policies that could or should be implemented with the scaling of people returning to work in office spaces. The Regional Economic Research Institute, in partnership with the Southwest Florida Leadership Institute at the Lutgert College of Business, conducted a brief survey to address these uncertainties.[1] The goal of the survey is to better understand the policies and procedures that companies are developing in relation to workforce redeployment as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey was opened from May 13, 2021 to June 2, 2021 and had 61 respondents.

Percent of workforce that:

Before the Covid-19 Pandemic (until March 30, 2020), over 90 percent of surveyed companies had less than a quarter of their workforce working remotely. Since then, this number has reduced to less than 60 percent of surveyed companies. Seventy-three percent of surveyed companies expected that less than a quarter of their workforce to be working remotely

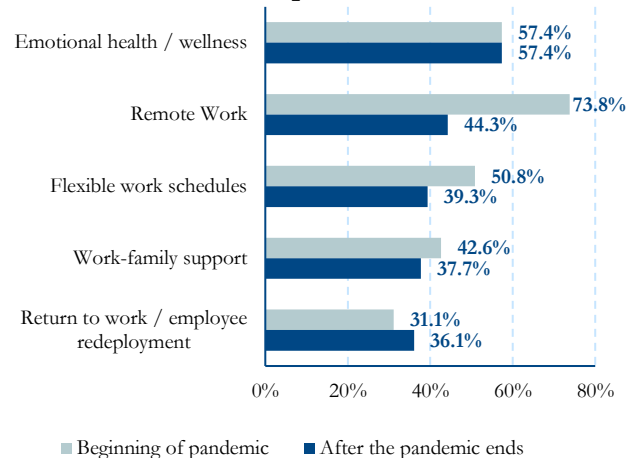by September 1, 2021. Chart 1 above shows some of these patterns.

The main policies adopted by surveyed companies in light of Covid-19 were: remote work, social distancing, masks/face coverings, and additional sick leave. Surveyed companies mostly plan to add or keep the following policies: remote work, flex work schedules, and emotional health/wellness. Chart 2 provides a summary of the main policies adopted that businesses intend to keep after the pandemic ends. In light of these questions, we asked an open-ended question on these policies and practices. The common themes from responses were:

i. CDC guidelines are very important to inform decision making;
ii. There is some vaccine differentiation in terms of practices;

Policies, Practices and Procedures Adopted

Amir B. Ferreira Neto, Ph. D. | Interim Director, RERI | 239-590-7370 | aborgesferreiraneto@fgcu.edu
Jennifer G. Manegold, Ph.D. | Director, SFLI | 239-590-7385 | jmanegold@fgcu.edu
John Shannon, M.S. | Economic Analyst, RERI | 239-590-1430 | jmshannon@fgcu.edu

Lutgert College of Business | Florida Gulf Coast University
10501 FGCU Blvd, S. Fort Myers, FL 33965-6565

Most business (56 percent) did not allow flex work before Covid-19. From the businesses that did not allow flex work before, 27 percent plan to do so moving forward. We also allowed for some open-ended responses regarding flex work. These are the most common practices:

i.   One to two days at home per week;
ii.   Informal practices with no explicit policy; and
iii. Allowing workers to make up missed time;

Most businesses (84 percent) do not believe remote work will have an effect on productivity. Companies plan to monitor remote work through active monitoring, quality of work, and amount of work completed. However, businesses believe that remote work will add some changes, especially in relation to company processes and practices, innovation capacity, and culture - such as team/people orientation.

Conclusion

There is still much uncertainty on what the best policies and practices are as businesses return to on-site work. Business leaders continue to rely on the CDC to inform their decision making. Remote work should increase in the region, and changes to policies seem to be mostly driven by institutional implications rather than productivity per se.

With regards to vaccinations, while there seems to be some different practices across vaccinated groups, there was very little information provided in survey responses on how businesses plan to collect, or elicit, such type of information, especially in light of Florida Executive Order 21-81. In addition, several participants expressed an interest in learning more about vaccine incentive programs, but no additional information was provided by survey respondents to that end.

Example Policies and Practices from the Comments Section of the Survey

- "Approved employees will be able to work remotely 2 days per week (M and F). All meetings and project updates will be held Tues to Thurs."
- "We also instituted a flex schedule policy for administrative staff who wish to work 80 hours in nine days in order to have the tenth day off."
- "Flex scheduling allows employees to make up missed time the same week for scheduled time off for appointments. Time must be during the same pay week and during normal working hours."
- "Start[ing] a new Telework Program for an estimated 7-month trial period (until Feb. 1, 2022), where eligible and approved […] employees may work remotely on Mondays and Fridays of each week. This benefit may be extended, cancelled or made permanent based on evaluations during or after the trial period. Core Working Days in the office will be Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday during an employee's normal working hours."
- "Our senior leadership offered payday loans so sick worker[s] felt it was possible for them to not report."
- "We have an infectious disease response plan for not only the offices but by each job individually."

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Jennifer G. Manegold, Ph.D. | Director, SFLI | 239-590-7385 | jmanegold@fgcu.edu
John Shannon, M.S. | Economic Analyst, RERI | 239-590-1430 | jmshannon@fgcu.edu

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