



IdeaWatch

REMOTE WORK

Do We Make More Mistakes When Working from Home?

When the Covid-19 pandemic forced many workers to go remote, managers fretted about possible declines in productivity. More than two years later, studies suggest that their fears were largely unfounded. But what about remote workers' cognitive performance? To investigate, a research team turned to an unusual empirical setting: professional chess.

The researchers analyzed a set of online tournaments organized during the pandemic by the reigning world champion, Magnus Carlsen, which were structured to mirror traditional offline contests. Because most participants had competed in at least one recent World Chess Federation tournament, the researchers were able to compare individuals' online and in-person performances, using the AI in a leading chess engine to assess more than 200,000 moves and associated errors. They found that the quality of play was 7.5% lower, on average, when participants competed online. Although the researchers couldn't determine why that happened, they say that the absence of peers probably contributed.

"Cognitive tasks are important in many modern professional, managerial, technical, and creative occupations," the researchers note, and so performance in other remote settings might likewise take a hit. However, the decline in chess players' performance was steepest in the first two tournaments



of the series—suggesting that people adapt over time.



ABOUT THE RESEARCH "Cognitive Performance in Remote Work: Evidence from Professional Chess," by Steffen Künn, Christian Seel, and Dainis Zegners (The Economic Journal, 2022)

GENDER

How Women in the C-Suite Boost Financial Performance

Women now account for roughly one in four executives (though very few CEOs) in the S&P 500. What does that mean for their firms' financial performance? A new study finds that female executives focus on customer relationships more than their male counterparts do—and that bolsters long-term business results.

The researchers studied 389 publicly traded *Fortune* 500 firms from 2007 to 2015. To measure female influence on the top management team, they considered four factors: the share of positions on the team that were held by women, the