



workforce WindsorEssex

REMOTE WORK IN OUR COMMUNITY

ABOUT

Workforce WindsorEssex is a workforce and community development board whose mission is to lead regional employment and community planning for the development of a strong and sustainable workforce.

Workforce WindsorEssex is an experienced leader in the development of regional labour market tools, research, guides, and events that create positive change in the local labour market while saving others time and effort. These resources, created in close coordination with employment, education, and industry partners, are designed to help jobseekers, employers, students, and educators, as well as the community, make more informed labour market decisions using locally-responsive, data-rich, and unbiased resources. To learn more about Workforce WindsorEssex and view our tools and resources, visit www.workforcewindsor.essex.com.



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PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to dispel myths concerning remote work and encourage local employers to adopt innovative work strategies to better accommodate their employees.

Remote work is defined as working outside of a central office operated by the employer, whether that be from home or in a shared office space elsewhere. Implementing or maintaining remote work in our community post-COVID can prove to be beneficial for both employers and employees, if done correctly. Therefore, it is essential to understand the many misconceptions attributed to remote work and the various ways in which remote work can improve productivity, boost worker satisfaction, and reduce costs for employers. The efficacy of a remote work environment may vary depending on the staff, industry, and level of collaborative work, but the numerous benefits make remote work an initiative worth pursuing.

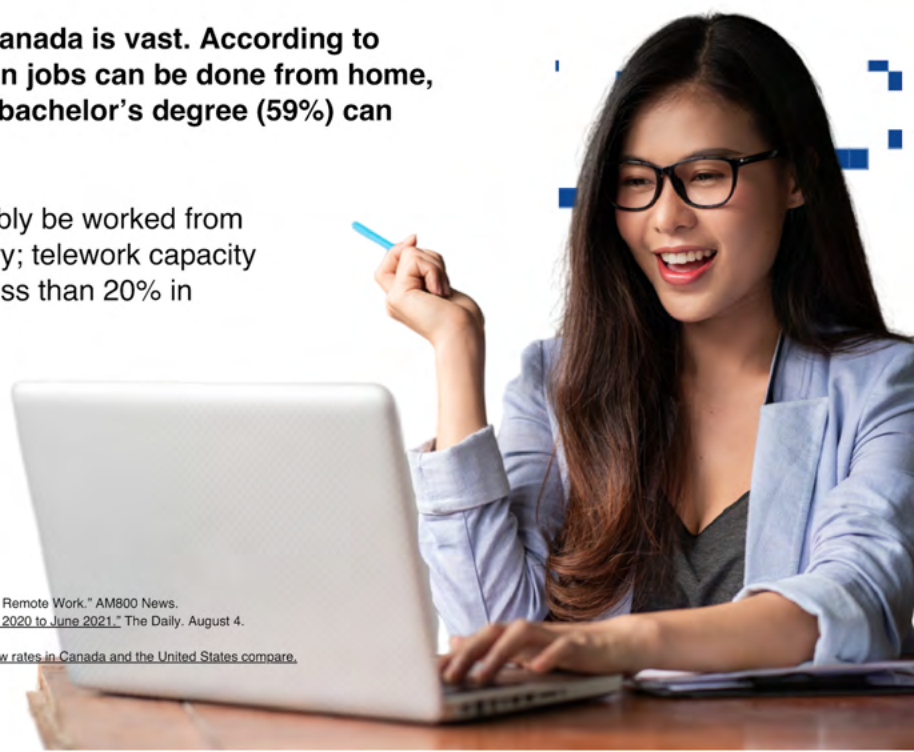
As the option of work-from-home (WFH) opportunities becomes more normalized in workforce conversations, some employers and employees are still not supportive due to perceived limitations for productivity. However, there is a large body of research showing the productivity levels of staff increasing when in WFH settings. With many myths surrounding remote work opportunities, employees may feel that their work setting and associated supports has been a temporary solution not designed for long-term use.

Based on findings from a recent survey, approximately 75% of responding local employees felt positive changes since working remotely and 84% noted they would like to continue working remotely. Approximately 73% of respondents said that remote work options would entice them to apply to job postings.¹ While many employers are unsure of the benefits of remote work, or feel unprepared to offer them long-term, there is a misalignment that could lead to reduced retention and potentially affect future recruitment.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work became the new norm for many businesses, significantly changing the landscape of the traditional workplace. In April 2020, 40% of the Canadian workforce was working most of their hours from home, compared to 4% in 2016.² The number decreased again to 23% as of August 2021, as many employees returned to in-person work as pandemic restrictions and closures were lifted due to vaccinations and decreased cases.

The potential for remote work in Canada is vast. According to Statistics Canada, 40% of Canadian jobs can be done from home, and almost 6 in 10 workers with a bachelor's degree (59%) can work from home.

The number of jobs that could plausibly be worked from home differ depending on the industry; telework capacity is less than 15% in agriculture and less than 20% in manufacturing, but it ranges from 84% to 85% in finance and insurance, educational services, and professional, scientific, and technical services.³



1. Mahoney, Aaron. 2021. "Workforce Windsor/Essex Survey Finds Employees Fond of Remote Work." AM800 News.
2. Statistics Canada. 2021. "Working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic: April 2020 to June 2021." The Daily. August 4. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-001-X.
3. Clarke, S., Hardy, V. 2022. Working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic: How rates in Canada and the United States compare. Economic and Social Reports.

ATTITUDES TOWARD REMOTE WORK

One big barrier toward adopting a remote work environment in our community is an unfavourable perception of remote work. According to the Economic Development (EcDev) survey conducted by Workforce WindsorEssex, many local employers feel as though the greatest obstacle to pursuing remote work is the negative perceptions they hold toward WFH. Businesses reported that they assumed their employees' work levels would not be the same, collaboration would become very difficult, and there would be a downturn in the quality of work and team cohesiveness. Others claimed that the endeavor would be too costly, and the internet bandwidth would be far too limited for the level of data that their company maintains. During employer consultations, it was also observed that many businesses believed that remote work was a fad that would soon run its course, and we should expect a full return to an office environment in the next few years.

Some of these businesses noted that employee retention would suffer and their turnover rate would increase when employees were not physically present and an office environment was no longer enforced. According to employers, the connection to the office/management is weakened and comradery between the staff is believed to suffer when a remote work environment is adopted. These misconceptions contribute to the move away from remote work, despite its many benefits.

Conversely, employees and potential employees seem to have a very different perception of remote work. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) surveyed thousands of firms across 25 countries and found that 90% of workers expressed a preference for doing more of their work from home in the future, post-COVID-19.⁴ A survey done in the London Economic Region found that only 5% of workers wanted to return to a full-time (five days per week) work environment, while 54% expressed interest in a hybrid model and 39% wanted to continue remote work full-time.⁵ According to consultations with employers, hiring has become difficult because they believe that the next generation entering the workforce (being accustomed to remote work over the past two years) are seeking out employment with organizations that allow them to work remotely.

As a result of these opposing attitudes toward remote work, there is a disconnect between the wants and needs of employers versus employees. This gap could potentially lead to worker dissatisfaction, problems with recruitment and retention, and an increase in labour shortages if an innovative work environment is not being actively considered and pursued by capable employers.



4. Statistics Canada. 2021. "Working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic: April 2020 to June 2021." The Daily. August 4. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-001-X.

5. Siman, Emilian. "Remote Work Surveys." Workforce Planning and Development Board Elgin Middlesex Oxford. 2021.

REMOTE WORK IN OUR COMMUNITY

As a community with an expansive manufacturing industry, remote work is not an applicable model for many organizations in Windsor-Essex. As of October 2021, the manufacturing industry in Windsor-Essex made up 19% of the regional labour force. However, there are still many industries that could adopt remote work.

The four industries that have the most potential to maintain a remote work environment are:



**PROFESSIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC &
TECHNICAL
SERVICES**



**FINANCE,
INSURANCE,
REAL ESTATE &
LENDING**



**EDUCATIONAL
SERVICES**



**PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION**

**MAKING UP A TOTAL OF 23%
OF THE LOCAL WORKFORCE**

**AS OF OCTOBER 2022, THERE ARE OVER 270 FULLY
REMOTE JOBS OFFERED IN WINDSOR**

As it stands, there are many local businesses pursuing a remote work environment to some extent. In the EcDev survey, 33% of respondents claimed they were still maintaining a hybrid or fully remote work model and 33% said they would be willing to extend remote work after COVID restrictions eased. According to employer consultations with some of these companies, businesses have adopted remote work in an effort to remain competitive. There are many people entering the workforce that are specifically looking for remote work, and employers that can offer the option of working remotely open up their pool of candidates significantly. It allows employers to hire skilled employees who are only looking for remote work, and it gives them the option of hiring outside of Windsor-Essex.

CHALLENGES TO REMOTE WORK

A challenge observed during consultations with local employers in Windsor-Essex was that many organizations were finding it difficult to compete with bigger cities offering remote work. Even in the case that local companies were also offering remote work opportunities, a company in Toronto, for example, can afford to offer potential employees a much higher salary. This has caused a problem in recruitment and retention for smaller businesses that cannot compete with the wages offered by larger companies. Moreover, remote work has allowed for many more Windsor employees to be poached from other companies, which has added to the labour gap in certain industries. The positive aspect is that workers are exposed to better wages and potentially better benefits when they can easily outsource their skills through remote work. Regardless, the idea is to make remote work effective for employees and employers in Windsor.

When it comes to the perceived notion that remote work causes a decline in productivity, statistically, a small decrease in productivity has been observed in firms that require a higher level of interdependent work. When it comes to companies that often undertake collaborative projects, the lack of a shared office space becomes a detriment to their efficiency and their ability to work as a team; according to a study by Sherman (2019), in a collaborative, low-performing, or small firm a 7-10% reduction in productivity can be observed.⁶ The OECD survey of thousands of firms across 25 countries found that more than 75% of managers expressed the main disadvantage of working from home as being the difficulty of teamwork.⁷

The perceived decline in productivity has also been attributed to the lack of face-to-face supervision. Employees can struggle with the lack of managerial support, and employers feel as though their employees are not working as efficiently as possible without direct supervision.

However, more innovative technology, such as videoconferencing and cloud sharing, has made it easier for teamwork to persist in a remote work environment. One thing to consider before transitioning to remote work is whether the company can offer the technological support that would be needed to sustain a remote work environment.⁸ Another consideration would be whether a hybrid model would be a right fit to balance collaborative and independent work.



6. Sherman, Eliot L. 2019. Discretionary Remote Working Helps Mothers Without Harming Non-mothers: Evidence from a Field Experiment. *Management Science* doi/10.1287/mnsc.2018.3237

7. Statistics Canada. 2021. "Working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic: April 2020 to June 2021." *The Daily*. August 4. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-001-X.

8. Hickman, Adam. "Can You Manage Employees You Rarely See?" *Gallup.com*. Gallup, June 10, 2022.

BENEFITS TO REMOTE WORK EMPLOYEES



For employees, remote work is associated with greater worker autonomy and job satisfaction. This may be due to the opportunities remote work offers employees in terms of scheduling, home comforts, and money saved on transportation. It also has been found to decrease stress and work-family conflicts. These aspects often improve productivity, in turn, as there are fewer sick days and more opportunities to work independently and creatively. Worker satisfaction also offers a better chance at keeping on employees who are satisfied by the work environment, which can improve retention for employers. A case study of a call centre firm in China found that there was a 50% drop in attrition when they transitioned a portion of their workforce to a remote environment.⁹ Considering retention in Windsor seems to be an ongoing problem, transitioning permanently to remote work could be a possible solution to avoiding employee attrition and attracting workers from outside of the city to fill local skills gaps.

Surveys conducted in the London Economic Region found that employees thought the three greatest benefits from working remotely were increased flexibility balancing out work and life daily activities, reduced risk of contracting COVID-19, and increased focus on work done (less office distractions).¹⁰ The fact that the two of the top three reported benefits of remote work are unrelated to COVID displays the longevity of the remote work model post-COVID. Employees have also reported that working from home has allowed them to eat healthier and save money and time, as they no longer have to eat out or spend time preparing a lunch in advance.

In the long term, working from home can insulate workers from work interruptions during future pandemics, which would increase job security for employees, and employers would be able to avoid a major decline in output during an unexpected transition to remote work.

BENEFITS TO REMOTE WORK EMPLOYERS

Statistically, remote work has been known to improve productivity in larger firms and firms with high-skilled employees. In firms that do research and development, a 9% increase in productivity has been observed.¹¹ Also, surveys conducted in the London Economic Region revealed that 56% of employees thought they were more productive working from home than working in the office and 33% felt that they were just as productive at home. Only 11% said they worked more productively in an office environment.

Moreover, a positive aspect of outsourcing employment is that employers can find geographically-distant employees that could potentially fill certain labour shortages that are present in Windsor. It also offers connection and networking opportunities for smaller firms. The search for top talent could be easier for employers if they could access a much larger labour market. Remote work gives highly sought out employees a chance to work without factoring in the costs of moving to another city, something many employees are reluctant to do, and employers are now able to hire a valuable new member who might not have accepted the position with the condition that they had to relocate. A study found that 35% of employees would change jobs if it meant that they could work off-site.¹² Furthermore, travel costs can be reduced or eliminated for employees, and travel time can be factored into the work day instead, which would ultimately benefit employers and the productivity of the firm. A reduction in commuting could also lead to a reduction in carbon emissions.¹³ It is estimated that a transition to full telework capacity could lead to a reduction in annual emissions of greenhouse gasses of about 8.6 megatons of carbon dioxide equivalent in Canada. This represents 6% of the direct greenhouse gas emissions from Canadian households in 2015, and 11% of their emissions attributable to transportation that year.

In addition to productivity and a reduction of costs, studies have demonstrated that many employees want to work remotely. Accommodating employees through remote work can improve worker satisfaction and promote a healthy workplace culture, which should be a top priority for employers as it allows them to retain their top talent. Workers who enjoy their job are more likely to stay and more likely to turn in a higher quality of work.



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RECOMMENDATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

According to the EcDev survey, local employers responded that the three most important resources to starting a remote workplace are management techniques, maintaining a workplace culture, and outlining technical needs. Adapting the workplace to properly manage a staff that is working from home is vital. To correct the problems that could arise due to a lack of face-to-face supervision, daily check-ins can be scheduled to ensure that any questions the employee may have are being answered and that the employer is communicating their needs clearly. Another concern is the diminishment of workplace culture when the social aspects are reduced. To correct this, organizing regular team building exercises, whether that be virtual meetings to discuss company updates or planning a group activity, will strengthen relations between coworkers and management, despite the physical distance.

For employees, the biggest concern regarding the productivity of a remote work environment is having access to the technology they need to perform their jobs effectively. Being provided with the necessary equipment or being reimbursed for equipment they might have to purchase is an integral part of ensuring that employees are given the tools they need to work productively in a remote work environment.

Moreover, in the EcDev survey, 42% of respondents found that government funding and incentives for technology to support staff working remotely is an important support for their businesses. In an effort to promote transitioning to or maintaining a remote work environment, government support programs should focus on providing funding for technical needs.



When it comes to the possible detriment to collaborative work, using many different communication technologies can help to maintain an interdependent environment. Using tools like Microsoft Teams provides businesses with the option of live chats and video conferencing, which can mimic the face-to-face interactions you would have in an office. Limiting employees to email only communication may have the effect of alienating employees and can restrict the social element of a work environment.

Once employers see remote work as a permanent aspect of the new work environment, they can cut down on costs that involve keeping people on location or in the office, and then they can use those savings to offer more competitive wages. Downsizing on real estate and rent costs could mean an increase in wages or benefits. It could also mean employers can take on more employees without worrying about the logistics of providing them with sufficient office space. This allows employers to expand their workforce without expanding their offices. In a Stanford study, they found that optimizing office space by offering remote work saved the firm \$2,000 per employee.¹⁴

In order to remain competitive with larger companies, employers have also sought to improve workplace culture and offer better benefits to their employees in lieu of higher wages. Their hopes are to create an environment that workers will be reluctant to leave. This is a positive change for employees, and it is a long-term investment in retention for local employers. Improvements in workplace culture often benefit all workers, and it has the added benefit of ameliorating the likelihood that employees will commit to that company.

Technical support and oversight can ensure that there is no decline in productivity and a collaborative environment is maintained. In offices where team projects are frequent, a hybrid model could be adopted. Employees could meet on certain days of the week to collaborate, which would mean that a smaller office space could be maintained, resulting in a cost-effective and efficient work environment for employees and employers.



RESOURCES FOR REMOTE WORK COMMUNICATION



Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams

A hub for video calls, messaging, and file sharing that integrates all Microsoft tools into one streamlined application.



Slack

A chat/channel tool that facilitates online communication with individuals or groups, available in both mobile and web versions.



Zoom

A video-conferencing tool that integrates directly into Google Calendar and allows its users to screen-share and utilize virtual whiteboards.



Chat

Google Chat

A video-calling and messaging tool that doesn't require you to download any software.



RESOURCES FOR REMOTE WORK

FILE SHARING



OneDrive

A file-sharing service operated by Microsoft, a simple and effective system for businesses that utilize other Microsoft Office applications.



Google Drive

A cloud storage platform that allows documents, spreadsheets, and slide presentations to be stored in one centralized location.



Dropbox

A cloud-based file hosting service that allows its users to store all of their data in one application.



RESOURCES FOR REMOTE WORK

TASK MANAGEMENT



Trello

A project management tool that uses cards with tasks attached to delegate assignments and track progress.



Redbooth

A web-based collaboration tool that facilitates communication and task management.



Basecamp

A task management tool with built-in calendars, to-do lists, automated check-ins, and message boards to ease communication and collaborative work.



Asana

A remote work management tool that allows its users to create project timelines and compartmentalize small tasks into bigger project boards.



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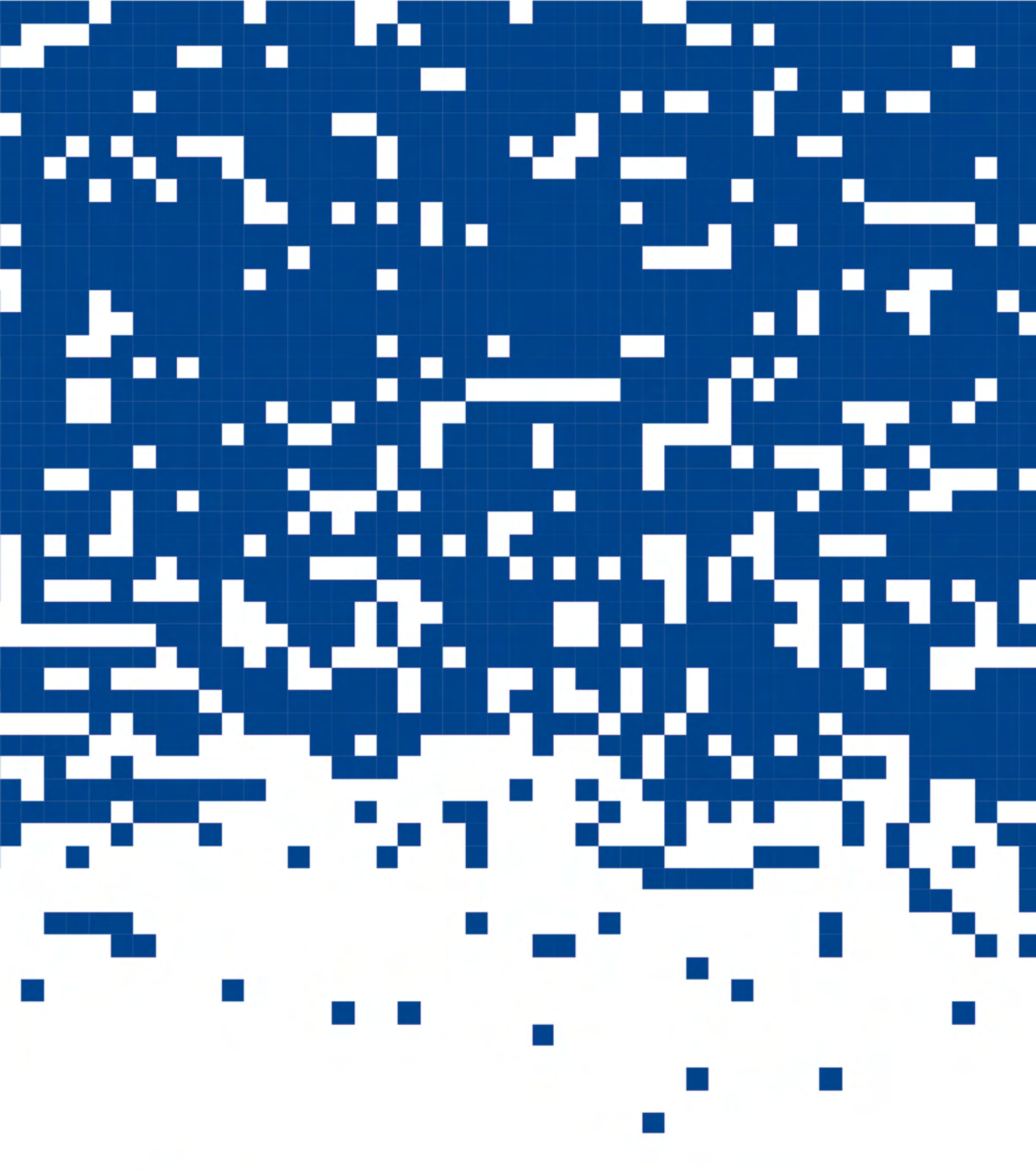
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