

Author: Coumba D. Seck, Harrisburg University, Undergraduate Senior, Program: MEBA: Business Analytics

Collaborators: Barb Geisler, EdD, PMP (Faculty), Stephen Penn, DM, PMP (Faculty), Nathaniel Ashby, PhD (Faculty) David Runyon, MLIS, MS (University Librarian), Ryan Unger, President & CEO Harrisburg Chamber & CREDC, Bradley Jones, Harristown Enterprises, Inc.

## Abstract

In coordination with the Harrisburg Chamber of Commerce, Harrisburg University proposes an exploratory case study to examine workforce participation and patterns in the downtown Harrisburg Area as part of its mission to support business creation and economic development. This research interest has resulted from uncertainty regarding the number of local employees returning to work in a face-to-face environment in the post pandemic era compared to other metropolitan areas in the United States. This preliminary research seeks to provide empirical evidence of the current and predictive state of workforce participation in Harrisburg for the purposes of informing urban planners, downtown business owners and other decision makers concerned with many aspects associated with living and working downtown. This research will collect quantitative and qualitative data from organizations in the Harrisburg regions of Dauphin, Cumberland, and Perry Counties via online surveys. Subsequent results can be used as the basis for further research measuring the scope and magnitude of issues identified by area business leaders. Research Question: What is the current and predictive state of workforce participation in the Harrisburg area?



## Hypothesis

The pandemic has forced many to reevaluate their priorities, this has led to many employees realizing the factors they find most important in a company. The pandemic has also made many companies feel as though their workforce policies need changing. Based on this statement I predict that more companies want in person work than those that do not.



## Review of Literature

In early 2020, nonessential workers in companies across the globe were forced to abruptly transition to working from home, bringing imminent challenges for both companies and employees that were without precedent. Remote work has been historically negatively perceived, and in some cases, stigmatized (Smite, et al., 2022). Disadvantages such as less time spent with colleagues, inadequate equipment and hampered communication have been clearly documented in the contemporary literature (Ipsen, van Veldhoven, Kirchner, & Hansen, 2021). However, as companies continue to adjust and thrive in a post-pandemic environment, comparative studies are indicating that positions are changing (Bucurean, 2021, Gensler, 2020) leading to an uncertain future for the business environments they operate within.

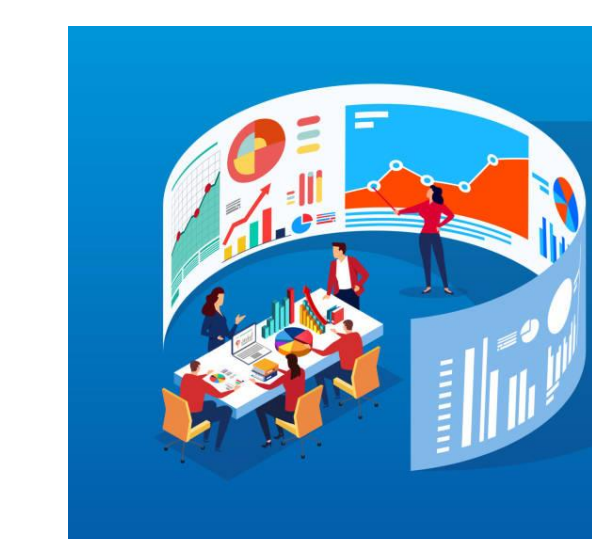
Today, company policies regarding centralized work and working from home continue to vary, depicting the corporate landscape described by Goldberg (2022) as “splintered.” Organizations and their leadership are emerging from the post pandemic crisis with different perceptions and mandates for how work can and should be done. However, research has shown that industry, size of company and company culture each have some predictive power in determining a given company’s remote policy (Smite et al., 2022). Understanding these factors in an applied setting will have intrinsic value to interested parties concerned about the business, community, and economy of the Harrisburg area.

Today, company policies regarding centralized work and working from home continue to vary, depicting the corporate landscape described by Goldberg (2022) as “splintered.” Organizations and their leadership are emerging from the post pandemic crisis with different perceptions and mandates for how work can and should be done. However, research has shown that industry, size of company and company culture each have some predictive power in determining a given company’s remote policy (Smite et al., 2022). Understanding these factors in an applied setting will have intrinsic value to interested parties concerned about the business, community, and economy of the Harrisburg area.



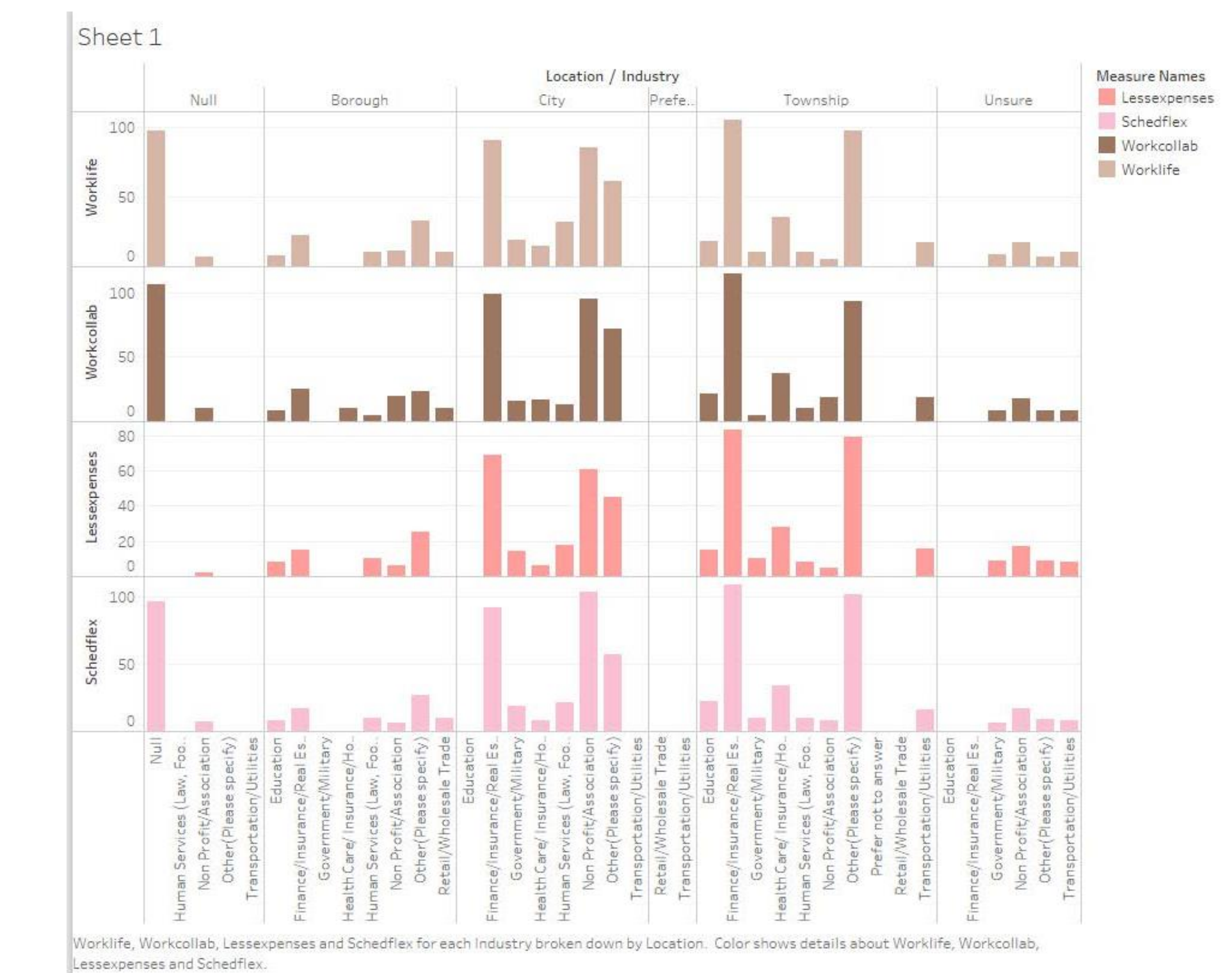
## Methodology

By using a qualitative and quantitative approach, we deployed an online survey that contained 17 questions. The survey was developed and deployed in Qualtrics after having the research proposal approved by the IRB (Institutional Review Board). The respondents were given the option to opt-in or out of the survey and skip any questions they were not comfortable answering. The results of the survey were kept confidential while still giving each respondent the opportunity to request the results once the research study was completed. The exploratory study seeks to understand the phenomenon of workforce participation surrounding the pandemic in a specific geographic region. Due to the qualitative nature and limited sample size of this study, results will not be generalizable to all industries and/ or industry sectors in the greater geographic area by design. Once we reached 161 responses, we closed off the survey and later moved on to analyzing, categorizing, and cleaning the data derived from the results. The focus when it came to cleaning the data was to maintain many respondents while avoiding an excessive amount of data manipulation. After a few test runs on the best way to clean the data, it was concluded that it was better to focus on the questions that have a large impact on a company’s decisions to allow or not allow remote work. Once the results were cleaned and manipulated, the data was left with the focus on the count of employees, employees present, employees remote prior to COVID19, employees remote during COVID, employees remote after the pandemic, and finally, the workforce arrangement that the company has. By narrowing our focus on the results, it ensures we provide the most detailed description of how Harrisburg, PA, was and is currently impacted by remote work.

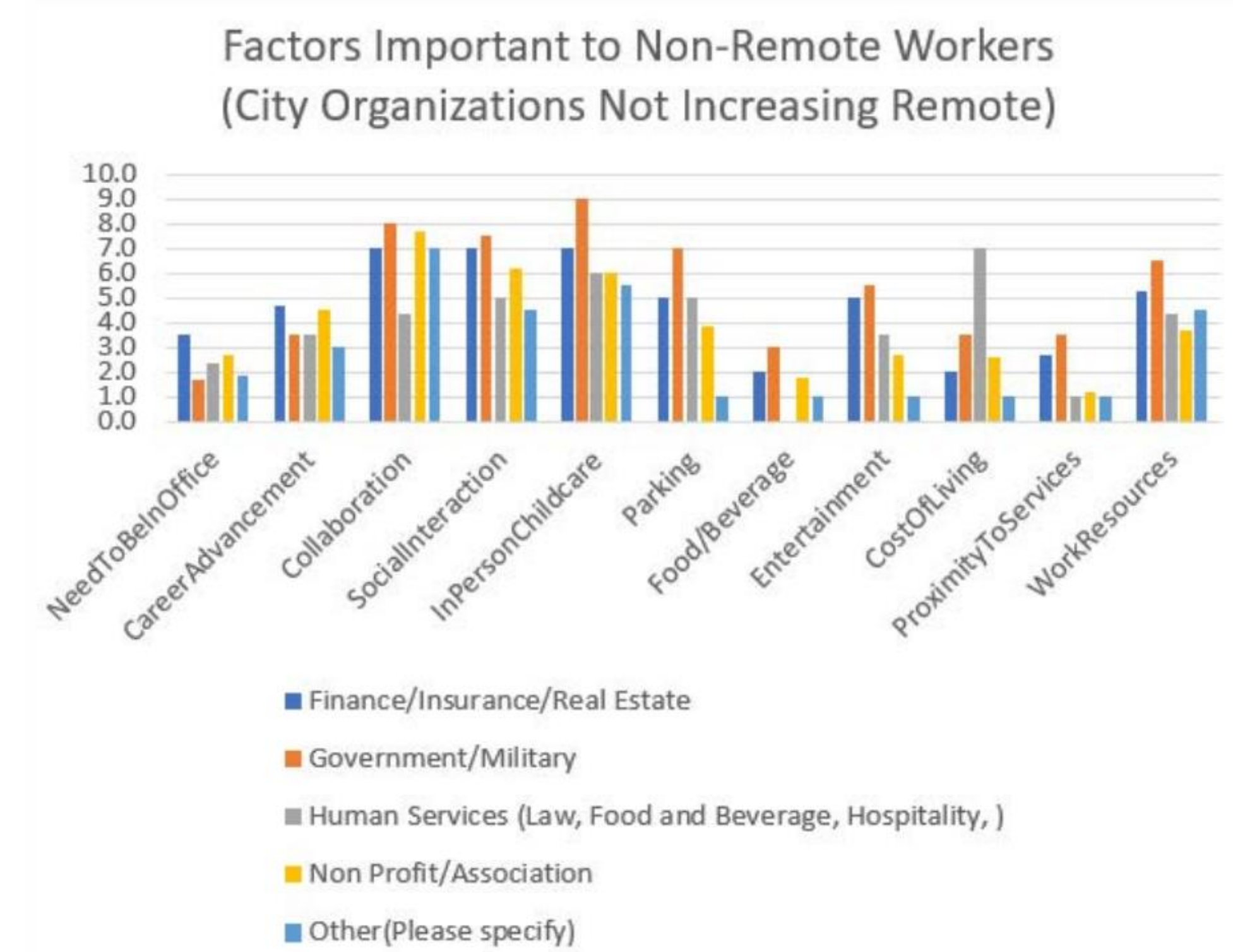


## Results

After conducting the research study focused on workforce policies in the Harrisburg area, it can be concluded that about 50% of the increased work from home during COVID has reduced back to pre-covid numbers. Despite many companies being consider with the lack of in person presence, the research is showing more people are returning to the offices. The research study also demonstrated that leadership positions require and expect more remote work than in person work. The results also demonstrate that there does not appear to be any tie to industry type, though larger organizations appear to have embraced remote work more than smaller ones (marginally significant).



The first graph focuses on separating the different roles from the survey: consulting/other, management/administration, senior leadership, and staff. These categories are broken down further based on the different counties: Borough, City, Township, and those unsure of the locations. The graph is meant to provide insight into how these roles took on remote work before, during, and after the pandemic. The results let us know that senior leadership and management had a higher rate of remote work regardless of the time frame around the pandemic.



The second graph focuses on the factors non-remote workers are most looking for to better complete in-person work. The graph focuses on the aspects that are more so related to interpersonal factors such as social interaction being needed, in-person childcare being needed, more collaboration, better parking options, and more work resources. The industry that needs these factors the most is government/military officials, following behind are finance/ insurance/ real estate.

## References

Altig, D., Baker, S. B., Barrero, J. M., Bloom, N., Bunn, P., Chen, S., Davis, S. J., Meyer, B., Mihaylov, E., Mizen, P., Parker, N., Renault, T., Smietanka, P., & Thwaites, G. (2020). Economic Uncertainty before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Working Paper Series, 2020(9). <https://doi.org/10.29338/wp2020-09>