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AN EXAMINATION OF THE CHANGES IN THE WORKFORCE DUE TO THE RISE OF REMOTE WORK

Compiled by:

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This project is submitted in part fulfilment of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Business Studies.

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Abstract

This project is focused on examining what changes and challenges Covid brought upon the workforce. It offers valuable insights for anybody who is struggling to settle into remote work, them being either employers or employees.

There were many challenges to overcome after moving to remote work. Companies had to accelerate, develop and buy technologies that were ahead of the time. Employees did not have suitable space to work at home, had to familiarize themselves with new software and get used to the different ways organizations were running.

Considering that there are still many aspects of remote working that have not been mentioned in this paper due to the large arsenal of challenges and changes that Covid brought upon the workforce and to make it easier for readers to pinpoint specific aspects of remote work this research will focus on the following themes: how the lack of employees' physical presence in the office affects their career progression; How communication has changed after moving to the remote working environment; How remote working has affected employees' individual performance; Work-life balance and its effects on stress related diseases in the remote working environment; Analyses of whether remote working, hybrid mode or fully back to the office are preferable between employees and managers in the future after Covid has passed.

Given the complexity of the chosen subject the themes had different outcomes where either primary and secondary research disagrees, or one of the samples disagree with the other and themes that have been proven.

It has been concluded that there were changes that were slowly being implemented before the pandemic happened and the pandemic has only "accelerated" those processes. Hence, remote work was more of an "immediate adjustment before the industry had intended to move towards the online environment" than an "active change to accommodate my workforce into the online environment".

Contents

1.1 Introduction

Remote work is not a new concept. Many articles state that there was a small percentage of the population that already worked from home since the early 2000's. However, this model of work was not very popular. After Covid-19 hit in 2019, there were not many other choices apart from moving to this "new yet old" way of working. The main difference was that people who worked from home in the early 2000's had the choice to do so whereas after Covid – 19 hit people were forced into working from home regardless of their preferences.

There were problems caused by the sudden change. Companies had to accelerate, develop and buy technologies that were ahead of the time, had to rewrite their yearly plans/strategies, change the ways of managing employees, supply appropriate equipment and hardware to their employees. On the other hand, some employees did not have suitable space to work at home, had to familiarize themselves with new software, get used to the different ways organizations were running, change family routines, etc.

Many changes were necessary to achieve a comfortable way of working from home. Now, two years later people are starting to be allowed in the office again. There are diversified feelings about it. Some people want to stay at home full time, others want a mix of both, and others want to go back fully to the office.

1.2 Background of Research

After Covid-19 hit I was fascinated how fast companies acted to accommodate their employees into their houses. I was curious and wanted to analyse and explore the different ways that organizations had to change to adapt to the new work environment,

what points they are still struggling to get right, and how to improve the difficulties that both employees and employers have.

As I am soon to graduate and join the workforce myself, I want to be able to face these difficulties that I have pointed out in this research. Learning how people reacted to these different changes may also help with other challenges that I may come across after I join the workforce.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The researcher believes that remote working will have a strong impact on jobs in the future and that we as a society will never be fully back to the "normal way" of working.

Therefore, this research seeks to understand the different impacts that the sudden change to remote working has brought to organizations and the likelihood that this method will remain in place after the pandemic has finished. This led to the research question: "***An examination of the changes in the workforce due to the rise of remote working***".

By doing research on the topics shown in the 1.3 chapter this research will give valuable insights about the remote work environment to the management of different organizations. It will be particularly beneficial to companies that are not as familiar with this model as well as give employees the help they need to efficiently improve how they work from home as this is still a growing concept.

1.4 Research Objectives

Companies had to introduce many changes to accommodate their workforce in the new environment. In this research the five topics below will be a guide to understanding these changes.

1. How the lack of employees' physical presence in the office affects their career progression.

2. How communication has changed after moving to the remote working environment.

3. How remote working has affected employees' individual performance.

4. Work-life balance and its effects on stress related diseases in the remote working environment.

5. Analyses of whether remote working, hybrid mode or fully back to the office are preferable between employees and managers in the future after Covid has passed.

1.5 Information Gathering and Data Collection

In order to have a deeper analysis about the changes that remote work has brought to organizations a mix method of both quantitative (a survey compost of close ended questions to all staff levels of remote workers) and qualitative (interviews for managers that have medium sized teams) was carried out in Ireland through a link shared on social media (Instagram, WhatsApp and LinkedIn), classmates and friends.

1.6 Chapter by chapter Overview

This chapter gives a quick illustration of the layout of this project in order to make it easier for its readers to have a brief understanding of what each of the chapters will be discussing about.

The first chapter contains the introduction where the researcher states the reasons why this topic was chosen, gives a brief context about the phenomena, states the overall question and the themes that will help to answer the overall question.

The second chapter states what other academics (four to six for each topic) think about the themes that are being discussed in a deep literature review.

The third chapter, the methodology, aims to show how the research was carried out, the philosophy applied, tools used to collect data as well as the sample size and characteristics.

The fourth chapter, findings and discussion, discuss the main findings obtained by the surveys and interviews, how the primary research and second research are connected and if they agree, disagree or partially agree/disagree with each other.

The fifth and last paragraph, composed by the Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations, as the name suggests gives a overall conclusion about the whole project as well as gives recommendations for the next generation of researchers and highlight the limitations/challenges that were encountered throughout the research.

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter a literature review has been carried out in order to deeply analyse the research objectives (Chapter 1.4). To do that, four to six different authors were used to discuss each of the different research objectives to be able to achieve this deeper understanding.

2.2 How the lack of employees' physical presence in the office affects their career progression

To argue how remote working is affecting professional isolation and organizational detachment some factors must be taken in consideration.

Firstly, there are two main points of isolation related to remote working. These are Social and Professional (Kurland, 2002). In this topic the Professional Isolation aspect will be the focus.

One of the main professional aspects of the employees' concern was that they were less likely to be considered for promotions. That is because they would feel forgotten by their managers who would give preference to giving promotions to employees that are on site as managers can control their key performance indicators (KPI's) and outcomes easier.

Studies also have shown that the "passive face time" is a strong factor. As Jack and Suzy wrote in the 2007 Business week Column: "*Companies rarely promote people into leadership roles who haven't been consistently seen and measured. It's a familiarity thing, and it's a trust thing.*" That does not mean that employees who work on site are considered perfect, but their presence gives the presumption that they are working (even if the quality of their work is not being measured) whereas managers can never be sure how much effort their online employees are putting in.

That is where the passive face time comes up. Summarizing passive face time is when managers are seeing (but not interfering in any shape or form) their employees working in the office (Elsbach and Cable 2012). Having them there as said by Jack and Suzy in the paragraph above gives the manager (even that unconsciously) the perception that those employees are more engaged and working hard.

During Covid when everybody was transferred to remote working the passive face was irrelevant. However, managers/other employees tend to remain more sociable with those that they were already close to before Covid hit. Making it difficult for the "shyer" employees to build any connection with the organization/team at all. As said by Raghuram et al., 2001 *"the feelings of organizational disconnectedness, the lack of informal socialization opportunities can be problematic for virtual employees."*

Remote workers also felt that they would miss out on projects which were announced spontaneously in the office in the first instance. E.g. a manager would announce a new project in the office, whoever was happy to volunteer should do so. This occurrence would appear that people working on site had priority to volunteer for these projects as they were already in the office when their managers announced the new team formation. Hence these employers who are working in the office would have advantage over those working online to join the good projects.

Not being able to join those projects would impede very important team bonding, prevent employees from developing their knowledge/skills, and make them even more distant from the organization, teams and management.

2.3 How communication has changed after moving to the remote working environment

Communication is an essential part of the workplace. From the new employee who needs more guidance to learn how to do their new role, to people from different teams that need each other to complete their tasks, communication is necessary no matter how high one is in an organization and it has a strong effect when tasks are done incorrectly. Ineffective communication can bring delays as well as minimize performance and productivity in the workplace.

To better understand what exactly communication is, Keyton defines it as "*the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another*" (Keyton, 2011). However, communication is not successful until both parts have the same understanding of the message. For example, if the sender sends an email but the receiver does not understand (or have a different interpretation of the message) the communication is not being successful. (Ahyia and Oppong, 2016)

The main channels of communication used in the workplace are e-mail, phone calls, instant messages and video calls (Portaankorva, 2021). Nardi et al. 2000 stated that workers mainly used instant messaging if they had a question that required a quick answer or clarification. Whilst emails and video calls are the most used tools for everyday work tasks.

Teams can find it hard to effectively communicate with other teams that they are not part of which causes problems when the tasks interdependency ("*the extent to which an individual needs information, materials and support from others to be able to carry out his or her job*" (Vegt, Van de Vliert, & Oosterhof, 2003, p. 717)) is high.

This phenomenon may occur because of email overload (emails are used for a variety of uses other than receive/send messages like organize meetings, sending documents, etc); complex organisational structures with many teams may mean that some teams never interacted with one another before Covid in the office. Therefore, they are not familiar with each other's roles which may cause them to forward requests to the wrong people/teams, some people struggle to express themselves on electronic vias of communication and ostracism.

Of all issues mentioned above, ostracism is the one which needs most clarification. "*Ostracism is when an individual or group does not engage in actions that include organizational members when it is appropriate to do so*" (Chung, 2020, p. 1). Examples of ostracism are ignoring one's emails and not sharing relevant work information to a person/group.

2.4 How remote working has affected employees' individual performance

A common concern among managers after remote work has been implemented is that their employees would not work as hard at home as they would if they were in the office (Kurland, 2001). Even though there are indeed challenges to overcome at home, papers suggest that many employees disagree with their managers as they see themselves as more productive at home than they ever were in the office.

A way to measure employees' performance is by making some comparisons between how employees' quality, quantity, punctuality, cost effectiveness and interpersonal relationship of work changed between working in the office and working in their houses (Kumar et al., 2021).

During this literature review both positive and negative sides of employees' who worked from home performance were observed. To better understand these points there will be two separated sections stating both points below.

Positive points:

As employees' freedom and control on job tasks, pace, and place increases their productivity also increases (Deole, Dexter and Huang, 2021). Not having to commute (or spending with transportation to do so) to and from the office has a big influence on employees' performance as they were more satisfied about having breakfast with their families before work rather than sitting in traffic before work (Wienclaw, 2019), not having to commute also made it harder to be late for work. Lupu 2017 says that employees were less interrupted by their colleagues which led to better concentration and less social breaks which would increase both quality and time spent on work tasks. People who had to look after family members were less likely to miss work or take sick leave.

Negative points:

As colleagues may be tempted to interrupt in the office, family members may try to do the same (Deole, Dexter and Huang, 2021). A household with children can be particularly challenging even if they are being looked after by somebody else in their home as in their mind it can be difficult not to think that their parents are "available" for

them. As mentioned in Theme 2 of this paper, high task interdependency can affect performance more severely when working from home if employees have difficulties communicating with each other. Studies show that employees are working longer hours as there is this misconception that if somebody is working from home they are available at any time (Kumar et al., 2021). This habit causes work overload, giving the perception that there is more work to do and not enough time to do it leading to stress and consequently becoming less productive. This may eventually lead an employee to become "burnt out". Technological distractions are also challenging in the modern world. Employees must have a high self-discipline not to spend their work time on social media, TV, etc (Wang, 2020).

In order to have a more decisive conclusion on whether or not the positive points outweigh the negative points on this theme primary research is needed.

2.5 Work-life balance and its effects on stress related diseases in the remote working environment

There is no doubt that the most influential things in people's lives are family and work. Remote working has brought these two main aspects together and the lack of boundaries between them can be catastrophic to employees' mental health. The term being referenced in this theme is work-life balance which denotes how individuals prioritize and divide professional and personal responsibilities (Kumar and Mokashi, 2020).

Some people may ask why should organizations care about their employees' work-life balance? According to Cohen and Liani "*An imbalance between work and personal life can have an impact on low productivity and decreased performance of a person for an organization*" (Cohen and Liani 2009). In addition, Ashley Whillans says that companies lose 32 days of productivity each year to depression (Whillans, 2021). She just mentions the loss in productivity which does not include the losses with sick leave or employees who were once good assets to the company who just quit due to the pressure.

It is no surprise that employees who are stressed are less productive and perform worse as studies show that work stress leads to signs of tension, such as physical and mental fatigue (Yu and Park, 2021). If employees are too mentally exhausted to work their levels of procrastination and distraction will increase, decreasing the quality and consistency of their work. In cases where physical fatigue is also seen employees can further exacerbate diseases such as diabetes and obesity.

Wolor confirms this argument saying that work life balance is strongly related to employees' satisfaction, commitment and motivation (Wolor et al., 2020). Meaning that employees who have a healthy work-life balance will deliver a better quality of work.

The main ways that companies can support their employees to have a healthier work-life balance is by being flexible about work hours (allowing employees to go on errands during work time as long as they compensate the time "wasted" working later), doing e-training programs (companies who are constantly developing their employees have a more loyal workforce (Gigauri, 2020)) and organizing well-being related activities like group yoga/meditation which would help both with the organisational communication/bonding and body and mind health.

2.6 Analyses of whether remote working, hybrid mode or fully back to the office are preferable between employees and managers in the future after Covid has passed

Predicting the future is hard as no one can be sure of what is going to happen as the research instruments around remote work post Covid are scarce. Lund et al. defends that the two main points that will influence whether remote working will stay in place is what areas employees are working on and if loss of productivity is seen.

Areas that are more "hands on" / have a high necessity of human connection (e.g. health, care and early education sectors) will most likely go back to face to face as studies shows that children need the social environment that schools provide them in order to develop their social skills as well as elderly people are sensitive to being left alone leading them to depression.

On the other hand, roles where people can technically do from home but their productivity is higher in person can either tend to go to a hybrid or fully back to the office. For example: teams which require high levels of creativity and cooperation.

Lastly, companies/teams which do not require as much human interaction and have already invested highly in the technology and hardware to move their employees to their homes could benefit from a hybrid or fully at home environment. Companies spend thousands per year providing office spaces, parking and third-party services like catering and cleaning (Humphreys, 2019). By having a "hot desk"/hybrid workspace, where employees and their managers can decide whether they need to be onsite or not could increase company savings, by reducing the need for large office spaces.

There are both positive and negative points which were analysed in relation to remote and office work on this literature review. The limited sources have shown that employees prefer working from home regardless of the challenges that it may bring, whether managers would prefer to have a hybrid or fully back to the office environment due to the lack of control on their teams. To have a more assertive conclusion primary research will be needed.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on discussing how this project has been carried out and what methods were utilized to achieve the information gathered. The following sections will discuss what philosophy, data collection, samples and methods were utilized throughout the research.

3.2 Philosophy applied

The philosophy is chosen depending on the researcher's view of life, what the researcher believes would give a better understanding to its fellow readers, their beliefs and the way they see the world.

While there are a significant number of philosophies to be employed, the philosophy best suited for this research was the interpretivist approach conducting inductive research.

> The interpretivist approach believes that "*different people of different cultural backgrounds, under different circumstances and at different times make different meanings, and so create and experience different social realities, interpretivists are critical of the positivist attempts to discover definite, universal 'laws' that apply to everybody. Rather they believe that rich insights into humanity are lost if such complexity is reduced entirely to a series of lawlike generalisations.*" (Saunders, 2015. p.140)

This philosophy was chosen given that different aspects may not have been discussed in the literature review given that Covid happened so suddenly. As beings who possess different opinions and personalities it is extremely likely that the change of environment (office) to the other (home) was more impacting than the theories may suggest.

It is fundamental for this research that the opinions from those who had real life experiences of the changes in the workplace during Covid can be heard. In this way a deeper understanding of the topic can be achieved.

3.3 Justification for the adoption of method

The mixed method involving both qualitative and quantitative semi structured interviews was chosen in order to have a deeper understanding of the topic given the nature of this study being relatively new and unexplored. After all, Covid just hit at the end of 2019. In this way the use of both methods was crucial as it merged the strengths of both methods and lessened their weak points.

The beneficial points taken in consideration were the high numbers that can be collected with close ended questions (quantitative) since there was a significant demographic which was moved to remote work after Covid hit.

For the qualitative method it was used deep informational semi structured interviews that gave the sample more freedom to show their perspective of the impacts caused by the sudden change instead of keeping the sample restricted to close ended questions.

The qualitative sample was collected from those who have the power to make changes within the organization and were crucial to adapt the workforce to the new way of working throughout the pandemic (managers) while the quantitative survey was sent to anybody who worked remotely throughout the pandemic.

3.4 Sampling technique and sample size

Due to the short time that was given to finish this project the sample was collected based on the individual's approachability, location (Ireland) and only applied for remote workers.

The main requirement in the quantitative questionnaire that was created with Google Forms, that possessed 17 questions and shared by different social media platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook and LinkedIn), where 71 people have answered it, was that the sample had to be a remote worker who had worked throughout the pandemic from different sectors and different levels.

Whereas, the main requirements in the qualitative open ended questions that possessed 15 questions, where three managers of medium sized teams answered, was that managers had to have managed medium to big sized teams throughout the pandemic and the individuals had to be from different companies.

3.5 Thematic Coding

Throughout the project there will be quotes from the interviewees who participated in the open-ended questions. In this section there will be a thematic coding in order to organize and differentiate the different interviewees.

Manager 1	
Themes	Keywords in the interview (Codes)
Organisational detachment. How the lack of employee's physical presence effects how they work and what consequences it may bring to their careers	Other managers update me about people/situations I'm not very familiar with; difficult to promote people; difficult to get salary increase; positive feedback; proactiveness; time efficiency; hard working; culture; needs to be seen; only performance isn't enough.
How communication has changed after moving to the remote working environment	My team was used to this way of working/ was already global; conflict within teams and with other teams caused by the wrong message being transmitted; would be easier if some teams could ask questions directly face to face; not meeting colleagues face to face can lead to conflict; better relationship with colleagues if you meet them face to face; working from home it is hard for new hires; not being able to read people's reactions and expressions can lead to conflict.
How remote working has affected employees' individual performance.	We work more at home; we take more social breaks in the office; we work better at home; some teams weren't trained enough and changing to remote work made their life harder.
Work-life balance and its' effects on stress related diseases in the remote working environment during the pandemic.	Relatives dying; stress levels high; small children; no childcare facilities open; company wasn't supportive; company at the beginning would have calls with employees but they stop it shortly; giving unofficial time off; offering to talk; freedom; flexibility; not everybody was opened.
Analyse whether remote working, hybrid mode or fully back to the office are preferable between employees and managers in the future after Covid has passed.	Different teams have different preferences; hopefully the company will let us choose; it'd be very hard to try to enforce how many days employees should go to the office now; some of my team was already working from home before Covid.

3.6 Ethical Section

To make sure this project was carried out in accordance with the ethics and GDPR rules both surveyees and interviewees had to agree with a consent form prior to start to answer the survey/interview.

On these two consent forms (one for each kind of research instrument) there were underlined the rules which the researcher and the college were obliged to follow. Among with some of the rules that were included was the secrecy of the interviewees' identification, the anonymity of the surveyees, all the storage timeline that the college and researcher were allowed to keep the answers for and that the participants were free to not answer any questions which they did not want to or quit the research at any time.

In the case of the surveys and its nature of being a shareable link, it would be very difficult to control how many people would agree or disagree to give their consent. To overcome this problem the survey's consent was attached in the first page of the chosen platform (Google forms) where it was forced upon the surveyees that they had to agree with the terms and conditions before continuing the survey. If they did not agree they would be automatically transferred to the end of the survey and no answers would have been recorded or used for the project. If they agreed the answers could be used for research proposes.

The consent for the interviewees was a consent form which underlined all the responsibilities of the researcher and the college this consent was sent via email and sent back by the interviewees with their signature under the signature of the participant field. This document will not be disclosed in the project to keep the promise of secrecy of identity but there will be a screenshot of their consent given to the college.

The researcher tried their best not to be biased and not to persuade the sample to answer ambiguous questions that could have led to confusion. It was used simple and direct language on both quantitative and qualitative questionnaires where a native English speaker also corrected it and made the questionnaire clear and concise.

Chapter IV
Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter each of the research objectives shown in section 1.4 will be discussed based on the analysis of both the survey and the close ended questions results in comparison with the literature review. This process is known as the triangulation approach.

It is important to emphasize that this chapter will have great influence from IT professionals' perspective through no fault of the researcher but due to the large number of IT professionals that answered the survey (42%) in comparison with other work sectors.

4.2 How the lack of employees' physical presence in the office affects their career progression

In this theme the literature review suggests that the employees have this constant fear of if they are not seen in the office working or are not close to their bosses after being moved to remote work, they would be forgotten and not have many chances of being promoted. (Kurland, 2002)

Although the literature review seems to be sure that this fear is a common concern among employees, the quantitative research did not have a clear opinion about the matter. Only 45% of the surveyees think that team members that are closer to their boss have a professional advantage over them, while 28% don't have an opinion in the matter and 27% disagree.

Regarding to the interviews the results were also divided, two of the interviewees suggest that managers seem to try their best to include their whole team as much as possible, so nobody is left behind and that they would promote people based on merit, individual characteristics and feedback from other people, which disagrees with

Raghuram et al., 2001 that states that the lack of team interactions make teammates disconnected. While the other interviewee seems to agree with the literature review in parts.

> *"You should always promote somebody on merit and on capability. What you try and do is you have somebody taking on the responsibilities for a period of time, or if you've got a couple of people, you might spread the same kind of tasks around and see who's best suited for the role".* (Manager 2)

According to what Manager 2 described he seems to give all their team a fair chance to prove to them that they are capable of being promoted. This disagrees with the literature review where employees believed that they would be forgotten if they are not familiar with their bosses.

Manager 3 however, seems to agree in parts with the literature review. She says that her company does not allow her to give detailed information about how the promotion is carried out within the company, but she says that:

> *"People who are trying to get promoted and are working remotely have to put in a little extra effort to be visible. Whether that means travelling during critical projects to different locations, being more assertive in their online communication and being more proactive. Kind of "poke" people when they see something interesting happening."* (Manager 3)

While Manager 3 did not mention anything about how familiar people have to be with the management, she do confirm that people who are working remotely have to put themselves "out there" and show management that they are eager to participate in the company's projects if they want to have a better chance of being promoted.

A point where all the managers seemed to disagree with the literature review was that the quieter people in the team would become forgotten after changing to remote work. All three managers suggested that they would try, in one form or another, to have continuous contact with the whole team together, at least once a week, to know how every person was doing and even have periodic one-to-ones.

Once again, the surveys did not have a precise opinion about the matter where results were divided in 60% and 40% when they were asked if they felt more distant from their teams/organization after moving to remote working.

The only part that could be answered in this theme was that managers that were interviewed seemed to be real team leaders who try their best to familiarize themselves with all members of their teams. Sure, their teams could face challenges to get promotions when working remotely, but that would be more likely linked to the upper management judgement and personal characteristics rather than a lack of opportunities within the teams.

4.3 How communication has changed after moving to the remote working environment

On this theme the literature review states that efficient communication among different teams has become harder after moving to the remote environment. While the meaning of efficient communication can be vague, Keyton defines it as "*the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another"* (Keyton, 2011).

This definition means that the communication is only effective when both sender and receiver have the same understanding of the message that had been transmitted. (Ahyia and Oppong, 2016).

In the survey 75% of the people stated that they need other teams to complete their tasks efficiently. 50% out of this 75% people say that they struggle to get information from other teams that not their own. The survey has broken even in the results which means that this theme cannot be proved or unproven. However, it is still possible to highlight the main communication challenges.

The main challenges found in the literature review when working with different teams were Ostracism, email overload, miscommunication and that the complex division of teams within the company would make it complicated for employees to know who they can ask for help with issues they are not familiar with.

According to the survey Ostracism was almost irrelevant in contrast to delays to answer emails being the most relevant. In addition, miscommunication and the difficulty to find the right team for the right job were both somewhat relevant issues.

9) What are the main challenges of working from home when dealing with different teams? Tick as many options as you like:

64 responses

Some teams won't/rarely answer to my emails	14 (21.9%)
Some teams take too long to answer to my emails	36 (56.3%)
I need to send many emails to some teams so that they understand what I need/want from them	23 (35.9%)
Sometimes I don't know who I can reach out to help me with issues I don't usually deal with	24 (37.5%)

Furthermore, the interviewees agree with the literature review as they believe that communication has become more difficult after moving to the remote work environment. However, only one of the issues stated in the literature review was mentioned as a critical point (the time frame that people took to answer emails). While the other main issue revolved around the generation of conflict caused by the lack of body language.

> *"If you're in the office you can just walk over, get your question answered and sort out maybe some of the problems face to face. It's different if you do that only via e-mail or chat this can quickly lead to conflicts since we can't see how they react, their expressions, voice tones. And we don't have this problem as much when meeting face to face we have a better relationship with people."* (Manager 1)

This quote shows how important it is to have a clear communication and choose the wording of emails carefully. Considering that if the reader misinterprets the words being used by the sender, they can take the email as aggressive which will impact on their cooperation. While body language is better understood when talking face to face.

> *"It's not easy when you completely move on to remote work when you're used to having 25 to 50% of your conversations by the water cooler. There's still like some additional time to coordinate even if you're sending an e-mail to somebody in the same time zone, you can't just walk over to your desk and ask question you have to wait for them to show up on chat, or maybe send an e-mail and hope they see it like it's not as quick, you can't take shortcuts."* (Manager 3)

Manager 3 also states another problem with the pace at which emails are answered. Such as other teams tend to make rushed decisions if they do not receive answers in the time that they judge appropriate, causing projects to be sent back for revision on some occasions leading to delays.

This theme was partially answered. The surveyees did not have a concrete opinion if communication has worsened with the change to remote work but the managers believe it has. Both managers and general employees believe that the issues seen in the literature review were relevant. They also added the impact that different time zones and body language have in communication.

4.4 How remote working has affected employees' individual performance

In this theme the literature review believes that employees think that their performance increased after moving to the remote work environment. On the other hand, their managers believe that their team's performance decreased after moving to remote work (Kurland, 2001).
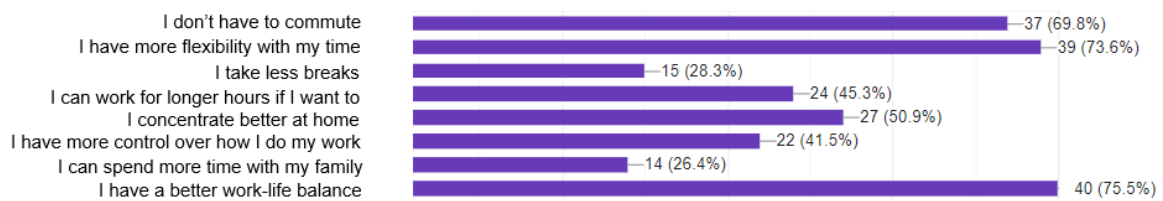
As said in the second paragraph of the literature review, an efficient way to measure employees' performance is by making some comparisons between how employees' quality, quantity, punctuality, cost effectiveness and interpersonal relationship of work changed between working in the office and working in their houses (Kumar et al., 2021).

According to the quantitative data collected 61% of the employees believe that their performance did increase, 29% say that their performance have not changed after moving to the new environment and only 10% think that their performance has decreased. In this way even though it can't be said that the performance increased for sure, it definitely has not decreased, it either staid the same or increased.

Of all reasons stated in the literature review as to why the employees' performance increased the ones that were the most "voted" in the quantitative data was the time flexibility, better work-life balance and not having to commute to work.

5) I think my performance has increased because (tick as many as you like):
53 responses

Response	Count (Percentage)
I don't have to commute	37 (69.8%)
I have more flexibility with my time	39 (73.6%)
I take less breaks	15 (28.3%)
I can work for longer hours if I want to	24 (45.3%)
I concentrate better at home	27 (50.9%)
I have more control over how I do my work	22 (41.5%)
I can spend more time with my family	14 (26.4%)
I have a better work-life balance	40 (75.5%)

Unfortunately, due to how the quantitative research was structured, the people who believed their performance had decreased after moving to remote work were instructed to skip this question (5). In the same way that the people who believed their performance increased skipped the following question (6) "I think my performance decreased because…". This caused a smaller data collection in question 5 and an unusable data collection on question 6.

Regarding the managers point of view of the theme they disagree with the literature review as they did not believe that performance in general decreased. Instead, they believe that general performance cannot be measured given that each of their employee's performance is strongly influenced by their personal traits, their role and house suitability.

> "There are some people that need to be constantly supervised, just given the nature of their attitude to work and what they do. And then there are some people who can only do their jobs in work because of the nature of the job. And then there are some people who are very professional and who regardless of where you put them, they will always work and they're very driven and they're very positive towards it." (Manager 2)

In addition, Manager 3 believes that the best way to achieve the best performance is actually by having a hybrid mode. As they agree that other employees can be very distracting and focusing at home is easier. On the other hand, face-to-face dialogue is crucial and cannot be replaced with online software.

To conclude, the quantitative data partially agrees with this theme as the employees believe that their performance has not decreased, it has either stayed the same or increased. On the other hand, managers disagree with the literature review as they believe that general performance cannot be measured as different employees have

different personal traits, roles and life routines which affect each individual's work performance in a different way.

4.5 Work-life balance and its' effects on stress related diseases in the remote working environment

In this theme the literature review highlights the problems that the increasing stress of working from home brought upon employees as well as how the seamless combination of life and work makes it harder for employees to discern how much time they should invest in their families and at work (Kumar and Mokashi, 2020).
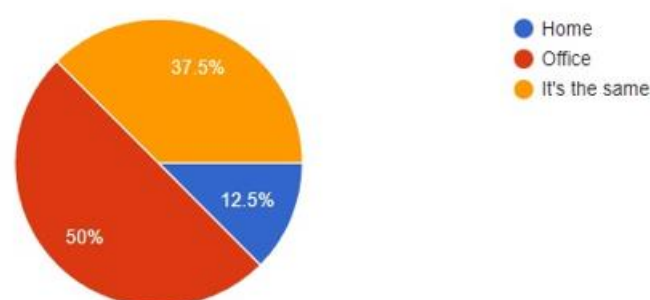
According to o Cohen and Liani "*that imbalance between work and personal life can have an impact on low productivity and decreased performance of a person for an organization*" (Cohen and Liani 2009)

Once again, the survey results disagree with the literature review. Only 12.5% believe that working from home is more stressful, in comparison with 37.5% of the people who said that their levels of stress are the same regardless of where they work from and 50% who say that working from the office is more stressful.

As stated in the previous theme employees actually think that their performance either improved or stayed the same after moving to remote work. Curiously, having a better work-life balance was the most voted reason that employees believed to be the cause of their performance increase.
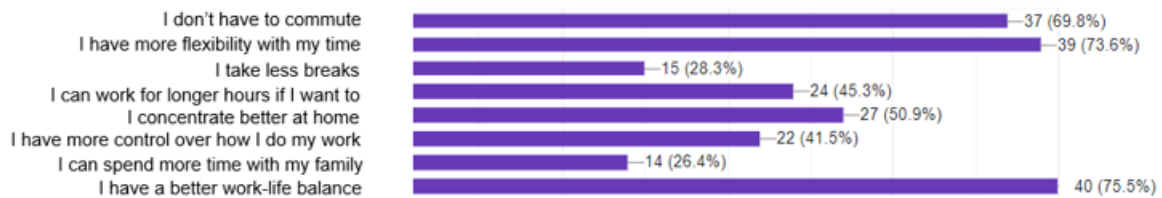
11) Do you find it more stressful to work from home or the office?

72 responses

5) I think my performance has increased because (tick as many as you like):

53 responses

I don't have to commute	37 (69.8%)
I have more flexibility with my time	39 (73.6%)
I take less breaks	15 (28.3%)
I can work for longer hours if I want to	24 (45.3%)
I concentrate better at home	27 (50.9%)
I have more control over how I do my work	22 (41.5%)
I can spend more time with my family	14 (26.4%)
I have a better work-life balance	40 (75.5%)

Although employees do not think that remote work has increased their stress levels, they either agree that they would perform better if their companies provided wellbeing activities (65.7%), or they do not know if they would perform better (21.4%). This percentage of people who do not know if their performance would be affected shows the lack of interest of companies to provide wellness activities to their employees, while a significant number of employees know its importance. This data leads to the next question which is shown in the chart below.

12) Does your company provide you with wellness programs?

72 responses
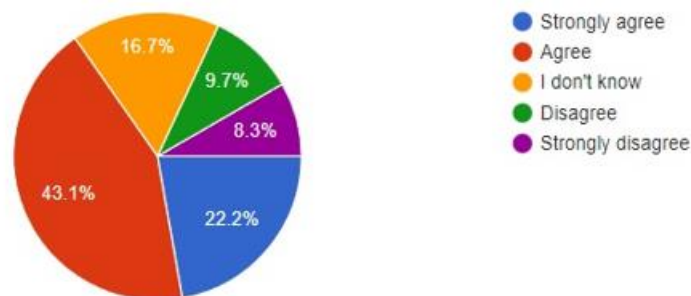
Making a comparison with both data, the number of people who believe that they would perform better if they had wellbeing activities is very close to the number of people who say their companies provide them with wellness programs, which reaffirms the importance of these programs. While 18% believe that their company does not provide them with wellness programs and 16.7% who do not know. With this data it can be

assumed that if companies provided their employees with more wellness awareness the number of people who would acknowledge its importance would be higher.

Managers disagree with the literature review as they believed that the stress levels were higher only in the beginning of the transition between work environments, but it was not because of remote work itself, it was giving the restrictions that they were under due to the pandemic.

> *"In general, everybody felt a bit scared, a bit isolated, even for introverts they still dealt with the fact that oh, I can't travel, I can't go outside. I'm scared of catching this disease…*
>
> *…then three or four months when my company started closing down the offices and really leaning into the remote infrastructure that was already there everybody started realising like "oh, I can still do my work" so it wasn't so bad."* (Manager 3)

To conclude, both general employees and managers disagree that remote work would lead to more stress related diseases. The pandemic was a stressful period, but it was mainly caused by the restrictions and isolation that the employees were under rather than remote work itself.

4.6 Analyses of whether remote working, hybrid mode or fully back to the office are preferable between employees and managers in the future after Covid has passed

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter this project has a strong influence from the IT industry as 42% of the sample state that they work in this sector. Other industries cannot be precisely evaluated as the data in other industries were too small. For that reason, this theme will have a more general answer to the question that is being asked.

1) What sector do you work in?
71 responses

As stated in the literature review Lund et al. defends that the two main points that will influence whether remote working will stay in place is what areas employees are working on and if loss of productivity is seen.

It has already been discussed that employees believe that their performance either stayed the same or improved. The majority of employees (68%) says that their companies let them choose where they want to work from, as well as 64% says they would prefer moving to hybrid, 29% says that they would want to stay working fully from home and 7% going back fully from the office.

This data suggests that the literature review is wrong when it says that the main points that will influence if remote working stays in place are the areas where employees are working on and if loss of productivity is seen. Since employees say that their companies actually let them choose where they want to work from, that means that companies would give their employees the freedom of decision rather than relying on their KPI's to decide.

Managers also stated their companies would give their employees the power to decide where they would want to work from. They agree that there are sectors that would work better fully from the office, while others do not need to be in the office every day or at all.

> "M*e and my team were used to work with our colleagues only on the phone and as a team we were all already well prepared for a lockdown. However, I could understand that other teams which were totally based in the office would be completely differently affected, these teams really would benefit from going back to the office full time but not us."* (Manager 1)

"Working from home Mondays and Fridays it's really nice. Sometimes I need people to stop talking to me so I can get work done and it's easier to concentrate at home, but usually a lot of my work involves collaboration and mentoring, so I felt a lot more effective in the office." (Manager 3)

Those two quotes given by the different managers agree that different sectors have different needs. As stated in the literature review companies/teams which do not require as much human interaction and have already invested highly in the technology and hardware to move their employees to their homes could benefit from a hybrid or fully at home environment (Humphreys, 2019). While roles where people can technically do from home, but their productivity is higher in person can either tend to go to a hybrid or fully back to the office.

To conclude, both managers and employees believe that their companies will give them the decision of where to work in the future after Covid has passed. The quantitative data may not give a clear result of the topic regarding other sectors given that the sample was strongly influenced by the high numbers in the IT sector. However, managers agree that different teams have different needs in relation to what environment they would perform better.

5.1 Conclusion

This project was carried out with the objective of answering the main question, "***An examination of the changes in the workforce due to the rise of remote working***", where the challenges and difficulties that were brought with the sudden change between the office environment and the home office environment were explored, as well as the likelihood that remote work would still be around after the pandemic has gone away.

Remote working is a revolutionary phenomenon in the workplace. Even if this phenomenon was rushed and forced upon the workforce in the beginning, the findings show that this model is now staying. The hybrid model of work seems to be the preferred model among both employees and managers as it takes the best, as much as it lessens the weakness, of both models (remote work/office).

In this project the themes were either proven, partially proven or unproven through the triangulation approach. The quantitative and qualitative sample disagreed in some aspects of the research, but that could have been caused by the strong influence of only one sector in the quantitative research and the complexity of how different sectors have different needs and how these different needs must have been tailored in a more specific matter in order to have a more precise result.

Overall, this project has been partially answered. Given that there were changes that were slowly being implemented before the pandemic happened and the pandemic has only "accelerated" those processes. It has been shown that remote work was more of an "immediate adjustment before the industry had intended to move towards the online environment" than an "active change to accommodate my workforce into the online environment". This means that companies were very likely to have a well-prepared remote work structure in the future even if the pandemic had never happened, but since it did happen important aspects that were in the development phase had to be rushed.

5.2 Limitations

Considering that this project is considerably small the researcher was restricted to a short word count and time limitations.

A bigger project would allow a more detailed analysis in the triangulation process. However, in this project the findings and discussions had to be summarized substantially in order to follow the word count parameters set by the college.

Another influential challenge when writing this project was that the students still had to invest time and resources in other assignments and work, which may have impacted on the final outcome of the project.

The time constraints were also problematic to find a more specific sample. For example, this research would highly benefit from a HR manager point of view, but the researcher could not find any HR managers who were available to undergo the interviews in the given time.

5.3 Recommendations

Considering that the sample of this paper had a considerable bias towards the IT sector and that a substantial number of questions in the quantitative research did not show clear results, further research in specific work sectors would be more beneficial in order to have a more tailored data and in-depth understanding of how each work sector has been affected by remote working.

The collection of a bigger sample and a HR manager point of view of some of the challenges described throughout the research would also be recommended.

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