

# WORK FROM HOME



Multi-level Perspectives  
on the New Normal

EDITED BY

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# **Work from Home**

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# **Work from Home: Multi-level Perspectives on the New Normal**

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# Foreword

I am writing this foreword seated at the not-so-comfortable improvised workstation that I have been periodically readjusting atop my dining table, in the living room of my South Dublin suburban apartment. In spite of the typical scepticism Irish have about the arrival of this illusive season, summer has come to our shores and, therefore, windows are flung wide open allowing all the noises of the apartment complex to stream in: children playing and screaming, car engines raving, motorbikes passing, boxes offloading, neighbours talking, etc. and, of course, the olfactory sense kicks in as well, when cigarette smoke wafts from the apartment below to my living room.

This work from home (WFH) scenario, in its myriad variations, has been a common experience for so many of us for over a year now. To be sure, I am one of more fortunate ones: I have a reasonable internet connection, I live in a safe neighbourhood, which is fairly quiet, I live on my own, and my apartment is comfortable enough to work in.

As we are slowly – and, given the emergence of new viral variants- quiet uncertainly – trying to move from that ‘new normal’ into some kind of older/newer normal, it is useful to look back and take stock of what this pandemic-ridden, lockdown-rich year has taught us about work, space, and ourselves. The changes in our work practices during the pandemic have been numerous and with the relocation of workspaces from the offices, factory floors, classrooms, and other organisational settings, into our homes, The book *Work from Home: Multi-level Perspectives on the New Normal*, edited by Professors Payal Kumar, Anirudh Agrawal, and Pawan Budhwar, could not have been more timely.

From my conversations with a broad group of friends and colleagues, I was fascinated to hear about the diversity of experiences and impacts that working from home had on them. While some thrived and resolved to ‘never go back to the old normal’, others encountered multiple difficulties and cannot wait to return to their workplace. The first part of this book, which is focussed on individual-level aspects of WFH, provides multiple scholarly explanations for this diversity of reactions. The second part, which deals more with macro- and organisation-level themes, sheds further light on the issue of differential effects of WFH by examining topics which appeared often in media discussions, such as the different effects of WFH on women and men, and how diversity aspects act as moderators of WFH effects on well-being and performance.

The full range of themes that are included in this edited book covers multiple dimensions of WFH, and I appreciate the critical evaluation of both technologies

and organisational practices that many of its chapter authors engage in. This book strikes a good balance between studies that put forward conceptual frameworks and empirical studies that test current theories and models. I was also satisfied to see the wide range of chapter authors' nationalities, making this book truly international and, as such, relevant for people in both the global north and south.

As someone who has been teaching in higher education for over 25 years, with rich experiences in directing master's programmes and leading in international academic organisations and also having published research on learning, management, and work aspects, I can attest to the rigour and relevance of this book. It would make a valuable addition to organisational scholars from management, sociology, psychology, social sciences, and education disciplines and would also be a useful resource for policymakers, business leaders, and practitioners.

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# Preface

The COVID-19 pandemic is a black swan event that has thrown our lives into deep uncertainty. Firms have been compelled to take drastic measures, including reducing workforce and production, while re-designing organisational processes and delivery. Like disruptive events in the past that changed human and organisational behaviour, this pandemic too has wrought a tremendous change in policies, norms, and behaviour. One such disruptive change that has become the ‘new normal’ is the work from home (WFH) phenomenon. This edited volume – *Work from Home: Multi-level Perspectives on the New Normal* – makes empirical and conceptual contributions on the impact of WFH on individuals, organisations, teams, service providers, and institutions.

Some studies suggest that firms that adopted WFH practices quickly saw their valuations go up, received higher brand visibility, and their employees perceived greater business resilience (Mulki, Bardhi, Lassk, & Navaty-Dahl, 2009). However, the other side of the coin is that some employees face work–life imbalance and strife, and that organisational productivity is not always up to the mark (Deloitte, 2020; Unison Public Service Union, 2019). WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic offers an opportunity for new academic inquiry, which we hope to take further in this edited volume.

Organisations which are fast movers in adopting technology tend to provide greater choices to their employees including the choice of WFH. Many studies have suggested that WFH has seen improvement in work–life balance through reduction in commuting time and increased flexibility in allocating time for work and family. Since people need not commute to work as often as before, WFH leads to decrease in traffic jams and vehicular pollution, and consequently increases sustainability (ILO & EUROFOUND, 2018). While, these benefits are certainly encouraging, it is important to look critically into what types of organisations are best suited for WFH, and how its practice impacts organisational productivity, employee–organisational relationship, and work identity.

This edited volume attempts to answer such questions and more. This book is divided into two broad sections. The first section contains five chapters, and the second contains seven chapters. The first section primarily focusses on conceptual- and individual-level frameworks. This section focusses on the individual perspective and how they could think, adapt, change and re-train, and manage their lives while trying to stay productive and relevant in the new post-pandemic work environment. The second section focusses on the strategic-, organisational-, and policy-level scenarios. It discusses how firms and countries should be

strategic- and policy-driven in managing relevance, employment, innovation, and competitiveness.

The *first section* of this book studies how the transition to WFH affects individuals and how they managed to balance their home life with WFH. WFH may have adverse implications on employee motivation, leading to burnout (Giurge & Bohns, 2020). There are potential conflicts between work and home (family life) from the organisational boundary theory perspective, which could reduce productivity (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). Van der Lippe and Lippényi's (2020) exhaustive cross-country study on team performance in a WFH scenario shows negative team productivity when multiple co-workers WFH. At the individual level, there are many points of discussion which this volume and, in particular, the first section explores.

The first chapter by Carmine Gibaldi and Ryan T. W. McCreedy suggests that virtual work is positively correlated with productivity. Their detailed study investigated how sustained virtual work impacts perceived individual productivity, perceived organisational productivity, collaboration, job satisfaction, and connectedness over 15 weeks. They found that perceived productivity and connectedness were exceptionally high in the initial weeks, tapering downwards as a function of time physically removed from co-workers, while job satisfaction remained essentially unchanged and collaboration yielded no reportable trends. The second chapter by Ada T. Cenkci takes a contrary position to Chapter 1. It suggests that working from home globally has contributed to loneliness and isolation because of the lockdowns while providing practical recommendations to enable organisational leaders and human resource practitioners to decrease workplace loneliness.

Communication plays a vital role in organisational innovation, production, and value creation. Companies offer several channels for employees to communicate their ideas and issues. Digitalisation has brought forth additional channels for communication, which have assumed greater importance in the post-COVID world. The third chapter by Christina Fuchs and Astrid Reichel focusses on employee communication. Their chapter shows that while digital informal voice channels do influence employees' willingness to communicate, they also observe a 'missing spark' in digital communication. Work–life is a significant challenge among young families. The chapter on women's global view on work–life by Kerri Cissna, Lene Martin, Margaret J. Weber, and Amanda S. Wickramasinghe explores the stories of women on work–life integration issues. It offers a strategic framework for WFH that traces theoretical progressions while proposing a new perspective.

When higher education institutions had to be closed suddenly because of the pandemic, instructors quickly adapted to the online teaching environment. Fifth chapter by Holly Chiu, William Hampton-Sosa, and Tomas Lopez-Pumarejo tries to understand the effects of the quality of instructional technologies on compatibility and psychological availability, which further affect online teaching satisfaction and online teaching intention. Their work offers a clearer picture of the experiences of instructors since the imposition of the lockdown.

In their 2020 edited volume, Kumar, Agrawal, and Budhwar suggest that technologies are changing the way employees engage in productive activities and, consequently, leading organisations to re-imagine organisational practices and boundaries. The general understanding is that technological breakthroughs have substantially impacted spatial characteristics of productivity, including WFH (Agrawal, Schaefer, & Funke, 2018; Shamir & Saloman, 1985). However, technology is an enabler and not a solution. Although technology has dramatically helped the WFH transition, it cannot possibly consider the human dimension of this shift. Technology is not a panacea to all problems. We also need to consider the sociological, psychological, and economic costs on individuals and organisations asked to make transitions.

The *second section* explores technological, organisational, and institutional behaviour and their outcomes in the WFH transition. Shared leadership is achieved and maintained through the types of interaction between team members and the leader. Exploring communication problems among teams engaged in WFH, the sixth chapter by Dr Neha Chatwani explores how shared leadership among distributed teams working from home can increase trust, productivity, and effective coordination. Women face well-documented barriers to career success while working in male-dominated spaces. The seventh chapter by Seterra D. Burleson, Debra A. Major, and Kristen D. Egger reviews key career obstacles for women in male-dominated fields. It analyses the impact of WFH on these obstacles while providing actionable strategies for organisations to implement WFH in a way that promotes rather than hampers the success of women in these fields. The eighth chapter by Devalina Nag shows that the varied personality types of employees may hinder employee performance, given that introverts and extroverts thrive in different work environments. It also discusses strategies to accommodate introverts' and extroverts' preferences while designing the physical workplace.

WFH as the new normal has challenged existing organisational cultures. The chapter by Sumita Raghuram reviews research that shows the relationship between remote work and organisational culture and its subsequent impact on critical outcomes of interest such as organisational identification, socialisation, knowledge sharing, employee turnover, and productivity. This chapter includes a model and propositions, adding to previous research on voluntary and mandatory remote work programmes. Organisations promote certain behaviours and norms as and when their culture is developed. However, this can be challenging in uncertain times such as these. The tenth chapter by Matthew D. Deeg, Andrew Fitzgerald Henck, and Doreen Matthes seeks to explain how the organisation, HR managers, and employees can both conflict and complement each other in an internal three-way tug of war during crises, provides recommendations for organisations, and further avenues for research.

The eleventh chapter by Elizabeth Spradley and R. Tyler Spradley extends WFH literature by recasting WFH performances that emphasise agents' manipulation of the scene. Drawing on the dramatist paradigm, the study uses Burke's pentadic criticism to code the social media application Pinterest's 'work from home' and 'home office' pinboards for act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose. Start-ups faced volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity times during



these pandemics. The flexible, start-ups that adapted to WFH environments had higher survivability potential than those that remained dependent on a brick-and-mortar business model.

In this context, the last chapter by Anirudh Agrawal, Payal Kumar, Shalaka Sharad Shah, and Pawan Budhwar explores how start-ups in India are managing the new normal. They draw on an institutional logics framework to contrast the difference between work from office and WFH. Their findings suggest that although WFH is strongly sustainable, it may increase stress in the long run and decrease innovation capabilities and trust. They suggest a hybrid approach to work, as the way for the future.

This volume tries to address a recent event and the related outcomes on employees, organisations, and institutions. It covers a whole gamut of interests, from practical effects on people and technology to a more conceptual approach, to looking back and placing this new normal of work from home in a broader context of employees, theories, nations, productivity, work–life balance, and organisational performance.

Admittedly, we did not envisage that the pandemic would still be raging when we started this book project over a year ago. While scholarship on WFH is in its infancy, we hope this edited volume will make a valuable contribution for other scholars to build upon. It is hoped that both researchers and practitioners alike will enjoy reading this volume and will gain new insights from early research by numerous authors from both the Global North and Global South. We thank the contributors, reviewers, and the publisher for making this edited volume possible.

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