

Lockdown: How working from home affects performance and wellbeing



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Working from home pre-Covid

- Had been gaining momentum in recent years due to more sophisticated technology, employee preference, supportive organisational cultures.
- **Advantages for the employee**
 - Better work-life balance/more time for family and self
 - Fewer interruptions
 - Less stress
 - Greater engagement
 - Greater productivity

(Charalampous et al., 2019; Felstead & Henseke, 2017, Wang et al., 2021)

- **Disadvantages for the employee**
 - Isolation/loneliness
 - Out of sight/out of mind
 - Reduced access to collegial networks, informal learning, coaching, and mentoring
 - Guilt at the 'privilege'
 - Blurred boundaries between home and work/work-life conflict

(Bentley et al., 2016; Cooper & Kurland, 2002, Koslowski et al., 2019)



The Job-Demands Resources Theory

Demands

‘high work pressure, an unfavourable physical environment, and emotionally demanding interactions...’

(Bakker & Demerouti 2007, p. 312).

- **Workload, deadlines, complexity, conflict, etc.**



Resources (organisational and personal)

‘physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job’
(Bakker & Demerouti 2017, p. 274).

- **Autonomy, support, teamwork, skills, personality, resilience, etc.**



Differences in working from home before & during Covid

1. Few employees WFH
2. Voluntary
3. Could gradually acclimatise
4. Hybrid arrangements
5. Only adult at home



1. All employees WFH
2. Compulsory
3. Sudden
4. Only working from home
5. Everyone at home (for some)



Covid-19 and working from home has impacted positively and negatively on performance and wellbeing

- Raised workloads
- Increased anxiety
- Made communication more difficult
- Added IT complications/technostress
- Increased autonomy and trust
- Influenced work-life balance/**work-life conflict**
- Increased employer efforts regarding employee **wellbeing**



(Anicich et al; 2020; Bilotta et al; 2020; Franken et al; 2021; Waizenegger, et al., 2020)

The current study - research question

What factors have impacted employee
performance and wellbeing
while working from home during lockdown?

This was about the first lockdown, March-May 2020.

Method

Surveys conducted in two NZ service companies – Southern Cross (May 2020, during lockdown), Meredith Connell (June 2020, just after lockdown ended.)

Both wanted to find out how staff perceived the support they had been given during lockdown (and more).

In addition to quantitative aspects, employees were invited to make **written comments** on communication, support, trust, what they liked about WFH during lockdown, what they missed about office life ++.

Southern Cross = 504 responses of 831 staff = 60%

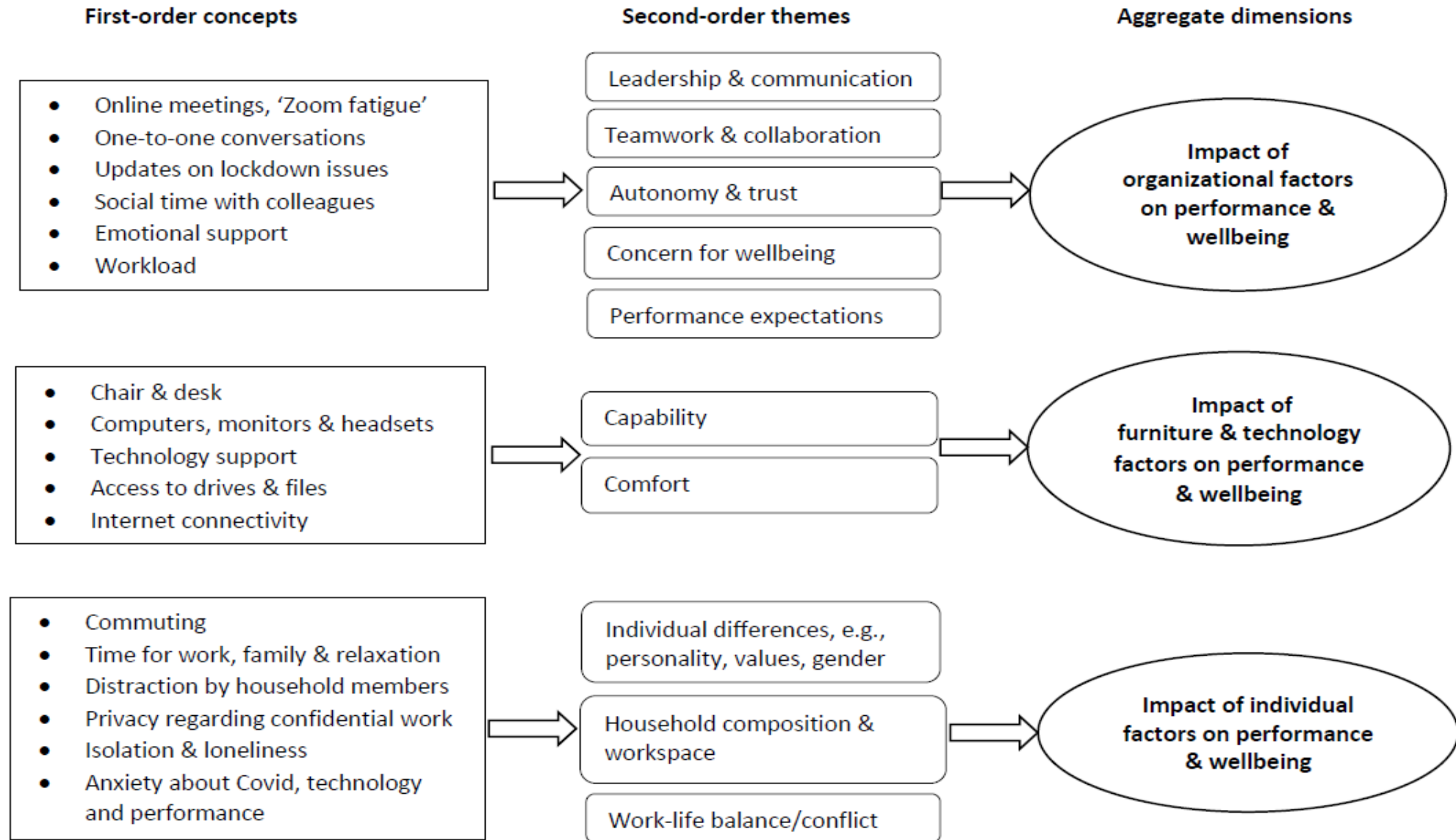
Meredith Connell = 150 responses of 240 staff = 63%

Qualitative data analysis

- **First-order concepts**, often based on participants' own words.
Zoom fatigue, the dreaded commute
- These are condensed into **second-order, theory-centered themes**
Teamwork, trust, work-life [im]balance
- The themes are clustered into **aggregate dimensions**.
Organisational factors, furniture and technology factors, personal factors

(Gioia, 2021; Gioia et al., 2012; Patvardhan et al., 2015).

Findings



Overall...Positive and negative **outcomes for performance and wellbeing** that reflect **demands** and **resources** = mostly positive comments

Some key findings

Demands

- Workloads went up and performance expectations remained high
- Difficult to 'read people'
- Inadequate furniture and devices, IT hassles: poor internet connectivity, "Zoom fatigue", lack of knowledge how to access folders/files
- Crowded houses or loneliness
- Gender imbalances and other work-life conflict issues



Resources

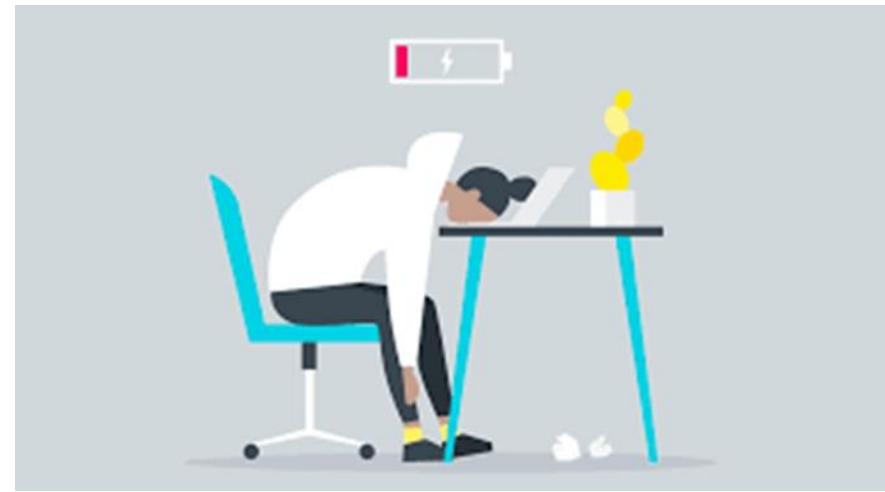
- Support and good communication from the top, line managers, team, IT
- Good workspaces and furniture and equipment, often provided by organisation
- Personality: resilience, self-efficacy, optimism
- The absence of commuting = saved time
- Work-life balance and home support



A few quotes

Positive outcomes

- Work-life balance has really reduced stress in our household and would have made me more productive because of this.
- I like the ability to plan my day, settle into routine and maintain that plan/routine without unexpected interruptions.
- I appreciated having partners who trusted me to get work done without the need to micro-manage how I worked.
- The focus on staying in touch and employee wellbeing.



Negative outcomes

- An expectation that you would always be on the tools, even at like 9/10 p.m., as what else would you be doing in lockdown?
- I had very little idea of what work I was expected to do...when there was no work.
- My experience has just highlighted to me how extroverted I am and how being completely isolated actually makes me less productive.
- As a parent it was incredibly difficult trying to balance kids schooling/entertainment and work during the lock down.

A key question

Has improved performance come as a **result** of greater wellbeing...
or at the **cost** of wellbeing?



Limitations and where to next? When is after Covid???

- Only two companies in NZ
- Data gathered only about first lockdown
- Now we have had five lockdowns in Auckland -
What have we learnt as employees and employers?
- More WFH as a choice v hybrid work v back to the office?
- Vax mandates, masks, social distancing, traffic lights and rampant Omicron...

We need more research into how **demands** can be reduced and **resources** can be increased to enhance **performance** and **wellbeing**, while working from home.



And a final thought...

If you can/have to work from home...Can you home from work?

