

Working from home before and during covid – setting the scene!

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A decorative blue geometric pattern consisting of various shades of blue triangles and polygons arranged in a jagged, vertical border on the left side of the slide.

Synopsis

- The “new (post-pandemic) normal” in workplaces is characterised by a reliance on technology for communication and a rise in remote working which have fundamentally **changed how employees interact** with each other
- Where and when our colleagues will work is increasingly **unpredictable**, and this can have a profound impact on collaboration, productivity, and how co-worker relationships emerge and are maintained
- Scene setting:
 - What are the positive and negative impacts of virtual and remote work on worker well-being?
 - How can virtual co-workers maintain relationships?

Setting the scene – A thought experiment



The impact of the covid-19 Pandemic will not last forever

- But, perhaps what **is** permanent is hybrid/flexible work...

What would have happened if the pandemic occurred in 2000?

2000

vs

2020

Consider...



WebMD



We picked a pretty good time to have a pandemic

The tech allowing us to work from home (now) may be as **important as electricity** was in terms of altering the working landscape.

- Affordable, reliable PCs with Word and Excel became more common in the early 90s
- Mid 1990s email was introduced
- By 2010 cell phones turned to smart phones, allowing instant communication anywhere
- High speed (inexpensive) internet became more accessible to more people
- 2010-2020 cloud computing allowing instant sharing of data
- 2010-2020 video conferencing technology



Davis, Morris A., Andra C. Ghent, and Jesse M. Gregory. *The Work-from-Home Technology Boon and its Consequences*. No. w28461. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2021.

Covid-01?

- Immeasurably harder to work remotely 20 years ago
- The ability to work from home, and the fact it happened now (not in 2001), buffered the impact of Covid-19 on productivity, incomes, mental health (and survival!)
- What has changed (because of the pandemic) is our **willingness and ability** to use **existing technology** – adopting it *en masse*
 - The impact of tech relies on it's prevalence
 - No point writing an email if no one reads it
 - Video conferencing works only if everyone has high speed internet
 - “Everybody does it”, so everybody *can* do it

Workplace relationships



Bob works from home to escape the distraction of office chit chat

Benefits of shared spaces(?)

- Previously researchers have maintained that flexible and/or shared work environments are associated with improvements in relationships, collaboration and wellbeing
- It turns out that may be wrong... if you don't have your own space, or perhaps just share with a couple of colleagues, perhaps you are better off working remotely (at least part of the time – **enter... Hybrid working arrangements**)
- Empirical findings linking shared spaces with:
 - Negative health and wellbeing outcomes (Richardson, Potter, & Paterson, 2017)
 - Lessening face to face interaction and collaboration (Bernstein & Turban, 2018; Morrison & Macky, 2017)
- **Inverted U of proximity / interaction**



Advantages of face-to-face interactions

- Zoom / Teams and shared documents cannot entirely replace sharing space and time with colleagues
- F2F = more effective (but possibly less efficient) communication
- Educational, learning, and development benefits
 - Mentoring and upskilling requires interactions
 - Especially important in **early career**
 - Especially important for **newcomers**
- Emotional and wellbeing benefits
- Social and relational benefits
- Serendipitous information exchange
 - Exchanging work-related information during shared meals
 - “Firms can enhance team performance by leveraging the mundane and powerful activity of eating” (Kniffin, 2015).

Research: Virtual watercoolers

- Serendipitous meetings are (actually) usually with those who are close/similar
- In a **virtual space**, interns “met” senior managers
- Bojinov et al. (2021) looked at performance effects of “virtual water coolers” for remote interns.
- Interns who had randomized opportunities to interact synchronously and informally with senior managers were:
 - more likely to receive offers for full-time employment
 - achieved higher weekly performance ratings
 - had more positive attitudes toward their remote internships





Work from anywhere (not necessarily from home)

Distributed workforce (e.g. India's tech hubs)

- Co-working space?
- Remote office?
- Home?

Reverse brain drain

- Emerging markets can “get talent back” (India's small towns... NZs small towns)

Non-pecuniary benefit

- Value other than money
- E.g., military spouse can keep jobs no matter where they move

Where is the “best” place to conduct work?

WORKING FROM HOME

EXPECTATION:



REALITY:



Working from home?

- Will office work return to pre-pandemic levels? **Probably not.**
- Too many workers have “seen the light”
- Predictions range from 5% to 40% working from home (1 to 3 days a week)
- Worker expectations of flexibility when job seeking
- Challenge of encouraging people back on-site - there needs to be a “point” to it
- Non-work-related consequences may include:
 - Changes to migration patterns
 - Real-estate prices
 - “Real income” rises (no longer living in an expensive areas)

Productivity...

“Shirking from home?”

- Three great enemies of working from home
 - Fridge
 - Bed
 - Television
- Research findings related to productivity are mixed
- Workers miss camaraderie, support, social learning, company, information exchange



- Some employers/managers don't like WFH because they can't see what employees are doing
- Purchases of surveillance software have grown enormously since lockdown. Generally disliked by workers

Research findings of downsides to WFH

People working from home feel more **social isolation** (Golden, Veiga & Dino, 2008; Mann, Varey & Button, 2000; Kurland & Bailey, 1999; Reinsch, 1997)

Remote workers have **less social interaction** (including **fewer friends**) with colleagues and supervisors (Allen, Golden & Shockley, 2015; Cooper & Kurland, 2002)

The **quality of relationships is worse** (Allen, Golden & Shockley, 2015)

They often perceive a **lack of support** from colleagues (Mann, Varey & Button, 2000; Sardeshmukh, Sharma & Golden, 2012)

They receive **less feedback** (Sardeshmukh, Sharma & Golden, 2012)

Some also feel more **barriers to teamwork, loss of team spirit** and **increased conflict** with their supervisor (Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012)



On the other hand...

- Gajendran and Harrison (2007) found that relationships with a supervisor were better, and relationships with co-workers were no different for those who work at home
- Some people working at home did not miss the office environment because not all communication between people is positive
 - *“You don’t miss the back biting and all the bickering that goes on in an office”* (Mann, Varey & Button, 2000, p. 677)
- **Work-life balance...**

Work-life balance if working from home

- **Better** – less commute, ability to take care of household/family tasks if and when needed
- **Worse** – work and home become intertwined “always on”
- Work-life conflict increases



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Home alone or office drone? How to get the balance right

<https://iby.imd.org/technology/home-office-working-how-to-get-the-balance-right%E2%80%AF/>

Get out of my face! We're more antisocial in a shared office space

<https://theconversation.com/get-out-of-my-face-were-more-antisocial-in-a-shared-office-space-64734>

How women's life-long experiences of being judged by their appearance affect how they feel in open-plan offices

<https://theconversation.com/how-womens-life-long-experiences-of-being-judged-by-their-appearance-affect-how-they-feel-in-open-plan-offices-124765>

Goodbye to the crowded office: how coronavirus will change the way we work together

<https://theconversation.com/goodbye-to-the-crowded-office-how-coronavirus-will-change-the-way-we-work-together-137382>

San Diego employers are mostly not allowing remote work post-pandemic, report finds

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/business/story/2021-05-11/san-diego-employers-are-mostly-not-allowing-remote-work-post-pandemic-report-finds>

The Cautionary Tale Of The Washingtonian Magazine CEO Who Warned Employees What Would Happen If They Didn't Return To The Office

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2021/05/09/the-cautionary-tale-of-the-washingtonian-magazines-ceo-who-warned-employees-what-would-happen-if-they-didnt-return-to-the-office/?sh=53a32c796931>

Remote Work Evolves Into Hybrid Work And Productivity Rises, The Data Shows

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/joemckendrick/2021/05/30/remote-work-evolves-into-hybrid-work-and-productivity-rises-the-data-shows/>

Facebook follows Twitter, will allow some employees to work from home permanently

<https://www.techspot.com/news/89361-facebook-follows-twitter-allow-employees-work-home-permanently.html>

Almost one in four want to work from home forever

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2021/04/18/almost-one-four-workers-never-want-go-back-office/>

Some lighter reading