

Homeworking and the Future of the Office

Dr Matthew Davis, Leeds University Business School

Working From Home (WFH) pre-COVID19

People working from home:

12.3%

pre COVID19

Vs

44.4%

in May 2020*



People more likely to WFH tend to:

- Be in sectors such as: IT, communications and finance
- Have higher qualifications
- Are older.

Good news! Compared to office-based colleagues, homeworkers report:

- Higher job satisfaction and general well-being
- Higher levels of commitment; feel valued and trusted
- Lower levels of work-family conflict and stress, and greater work-life balance
- Being more productive.

However...

They are also more likely to work longer and have difficulties managing the work-home boundary.



How does WFH affect..?

Work relationships



Knowledge sharing



Career progression



- Spending more than 2.5 days a week working remotely is linked to worsening working relationships with colleagues
- Those WFH report greater professional isolation and missing out on networking opportunities and informal learning
- Physical separation reduces frequency of knowledge sharing between colleagues
- Workers WFH experienced no difference in the number of promotions received, but did show lower salary growth over time.

But lockdown is not a normal WFH situation

Previous research has focused on "knowledge workers". This is unlikely to be reflective of the broader workforce currently forced to WFH.

Those previously WFH have shown they "can be trusted"; those new to it have to earn this trust. The positive link between WFH and job satisfaction is tied to the level of independence and discretion within the role.



Some people face difficulties such as: limited childcare, have multiple people sharing the home workspace, being unable to go to different locations to break-up the day and establish boundaries.



Why do we need an office?

Some roles cannot be performed "offsite" e.g. due to security, technology, safeguarding etc. They provide the social and technical functions that we can't achieve WFH.

But our view of what an office is may change: it may become less a space "where you go to work" and more a place where people visit to meet and come together.

It's a balancing act

Although WFH can bring job satisfaction, there is a tipping point. The flexibility and other benefits that homeworking provides may be off-set by difficulties in maintaining work relationships, loss of face-to-face interactions etc.

WFH means distractions such as interruptions by colleagues can be cut-out, but organisations lose out when individuals aren't able to share knowledge as easily, have chance discussions, and provide support and mentorship.

And it's not all equal

The benefits of being in the office are unlikely to be equally shared:

- Younger, less experienced workers typically stand to gain from sharing the office (and interrupting) experienced colleagues
- Not everyone has a safe or supportive environment to WFH
- Not all jobs will suit WFH.



For further information

<http://bit.ly/adaptingoffices>

Dr Matthew Davis, M.Davis@leeds.ac.uk

#AdaptingOffices



Economic
and Social
Research Council



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Leeds University Business School