



# An Investigation into employee's perceptions of working from home and how this impacts work-life balance

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## **Abstract**

### **An investigation into employee's perceptions of working from home and how this impacts work-life balance**

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Working from home has grown in popularity over the past few years and flexible working in general has been hailed as a way to combat increasing dissatisfaction with work life balance. This research is concerned with those who are primarily office based workers but work from home a minority of the time. This is usually one or two days a week maximum but could be less often. The effect of working from home on the participants work life balance is the focus of this research.

Recurrent themes in previous research on this topic were identified and summarised in the literature review. Based on these themes objectives were written. Along with the main objective there were four sub objectives to be answered. These related to the work environment at home, the positives and negatives of working from home, the impact of working from home on career and relationships with management and the effect of working from home on life outside work. A qualitative approach to this research was taken. Ten participants were interviewed. The participants worked at six different companies across various industries and were at different levels of their careers.

It was found that all participants were very happy with their working from home arrangement and often it did contribute positively to their work life balance. However this mode of working was not without its negatives which were also expressed by participants. Some of these negative effects resulted in work infringing on home life leading to further dissatisfaction with work life balance. There were more effects on life outside of work from this type of working than there was on career progression and relationships with management according to these findings.

The research findings suggest new directions for future research in the area of working from home. Implications for employers are identified in the conclusion along with recommendations for future research. The findings of this research are not generalisable across other industries or companies.

## Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Work life balance is now a major issue for organisations and their employees. Devi and Rani (2012) note that employers working with employees to maintain a work life balance are more likely to retain their employees than those who are not. While Johns and Gratton (2013) state that top talent increasingly not only values but demands work life balance. Unwilling employers may be forced to take notice of work life balance if they wish to attract and retain the best talent. It is important to balance home and work to ensure a person remains healthy physically and emotionally but also it is important for the success of the company that they harvest a contented workforce (Cooper, 2005).

Flexible working among other things has been put forth as a partial solution to work life balance issues in the literature (Briscoe, Wardell & Sawyer, 2011; Marsh & Musson, 2008). There are various types of flexible working including job sharing, part time work and teleworking (Tietze and Nadin, 2010). While Smith and Karavattuveetil (2004) note there are many benefits to these types of working arrangements they are also quick to point out that there are trade-offs for both parties involved. Wheatley (2012) notes the challenges presented by this working arrangement but also notes that home based workers in his study report greater satisfaction levels than other workers. Emerald Group publishing (2008) reports that benefits to the company of the introduction of flexible working can be increased productivity, lower turnover rates and lower absenteeism along with empowering the human resource function within the business. While there are many rewards associated with working from home, Barron (2007) suggests that those considering this work arrangement think about the negatives carefully before signing up.

Global Place Analytics has reported that the number of teleworkers has increased steadfastly since 2005 in America, with 2.6% of the workforce or 3.3

million people citing their home as their primary place of work in 2013. Official information is unavailable on those that work from home less than half the time but estimates as of 2014 put the number at 25 million people in the United States (Lister, 2014). While the majority of the participants in this study are female it has proved difficult to uncover statistics on the numbers of females working from home versus the number of males.

While teleworking has been around for some time and seems to usually denote, according to literature, full time working from home, the term working from home has become popular to describe those employees who work part of the week at home and part of the week at the office (Barron, 2007). Richardson (2010, p: 137) points out changes in the workplace have led to a “growing trend towards allowing employees to work from home one or more days a week.” While teleworking or more permanent home based working still only applies to the minority of the workforce, there has been increased growth in the number of employees who work from home on an ad hoc basis (Wheatley, 2012).

While popularity of working from home has increased over the past decade, it has not remained popular with all organisations. This type of working arrangement has featured prominently in the media of late and has been largely brought to the fore by Yahoo and the controversial decision of its CEO Marissa Meyer to end working from home as an option for Yahoo’s employees (Emerald Group Publishing, 2013). Richard Branson has described Meyer’s decision to revoke the privilege of working from home as backward when working from home has never been easier or more effective (Branson, 2014). Other companies such as Toshiba UK and Dell have embraced this type of working arrangement with 65% of Dell’s workforce now practising some form of working remotely (Foster, 2012; Pollitt, 2006). There has been much debate throughout the literature of the benefits and negatives to working from home for both the employee and the company. In spite of the high profile decision at Yahoo and the negatives associated with working from home many companies continue to introduce and grow this type of flexible working arrangement. Telus, a Canadian

based telecommunications provider estimates that by 2015 only 30% of its workforce will work full time in a company building (Johns and Gratton, 2013).

In June 2014 the United Kingdom announced the introduction of legislation enabling all employees to request flexible working. This development signals a move towards this mode of working becoming more main stream. Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) have produced guidelines for employers on working from home which state that those who work from home part of the week and are based at the office the remainder of the week have expressed the greatest satisfaction with work life balance (ACAS, 2014). The BBC has noted that this mode of working will bring working practises up to speed with modern family's needs and choices (BBC, 2014).

With these conflicting views from top company executives and amongst researchers on working from home, this research aims to look at working from home from the point of view of employees who work from home regularly one or two days a week but also spend the majority of their working time at the office. It ultimately aims to decipher if the employee's experience is that of increased satisfaction with work life balance due to working from home or if they feel that working from home blurs the boundaries between work and home life to the detriment of home life. The research should also determine whether employees feel working from home has a negative impact on their career, if they feel working from home actually contributes to their workload and whether it is simply the hours of work and not the location of that work that have the real impact on work life balance.

This research was conducted using a qualitative method. Ten participants were interviewed and the interviews were semi-structured in design. The reason that a qualitative approach was taken was that it lent itself more easily to answering the specific sub objectives of this research. Much of the previous research consulted on working from home also used a qualitative design (Nadin & Tietze, 2011; Tietze, 2005; Wheatley, 2012; Tietze & Musson, 2010; Marsh & Musson, 2008). The purpose of this research is to ultimately understand the effect of

working from home on work life balance as perceived by the participants. In order to do this, sub objectives were developed around the work from home environment, satisfaction with working from home, perceived effect of working from home on career and relationships with management and the effect of working from home on life outside work. The interviews were then transcribed and the findings analysed in order to extract common themes and differentiations between responses. The findings were then compared and contrasted with the literature review in the discussion section.

The remainder of this research is structured as follows:

Chapter two is the literature review and discusses previous research concerned with work life balance and flexible working. This chapter will discuss flexible working as it has been discussed in previous research. It will also discuss work life balance and the idea that flexible working may contribute to a better work life balance for employees.

Chapter three rationalises the research objectives and their grounding in the literature is explained in this chapter.

Chapter four is the methodology chapter and justifies the chosen methodology for this research and how this will enable the objectives to be achieved.

Chapter five discusses the empirical findings of the research. The findings are divided into the four themes of the sub objectives and each discussed accordingly.

Chapter six is the discussion chapter and links previous research from the literature review with the findings of this research. Findings are compared and contrasted with the literature consulted for this research. The value and implications of this research will become apparent in this chapter.

Chapter seven is the concluding chapter and summarises the main findings of the research. It also offers some insight into how employers may find the

research of interest. Recommendations for future research are also provided here.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Work life balance issues are a serious problem in today's society as people struggle to balance their work and personal lives. Working from home is a possible solution to mitigate this problem for employees and employers. There are advantages and disadvantages to this type of working which will be discussed in this chapter based on previous research. The literature review will discuss the themes and objectives as per the research aims of this dissertation. This chapter is divided into the following sections: work life balance and theories surrounding this, flexible working and teleworking, benefits of working from home, negatives of working from home, work environment and work schedule. Each section discusses and analyses previous research related to the heading. The themes identified here were then used to develop the objective and sub objectives of this research.

### **2.2 Work-Life Balance**

Sturges (2008) noted that the management of one's career may be to the detriment of work life balance for some people. Based on the available research, it may be vastly more than "some" people who struggle to find balance between their work and home lives. According to Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep (2009), much of today's workforce desire balance between work and home life but few manage to successfully achieve this. Work-life conflict has been shown to have negative consequences for both employees and employers. Julien, Somerville and Culp (2009) argued that this problem should be taken seriously by all stakeholders. It is in the employer's interests to take seriously the problems facing its employees in order to attract and retain a productive and contented workforce. The advancements in technology, while beneficial in many regards create more challenges than ever with regard to work life balance as

people struggle to create a distinct division between work and home. It has become harder for employees to switch off mentally and leave work at work resulting in increased stress levels as boundaries between work and home become blurred (Major & Germano, 2006). Kreiner et al. (2009, p: 704) offered support to this theory citing “boundaryless organizations, virtual workspaces, and the potential for constant wireless connection to one’s work” as some of the modern day challenges which contribute to the problem of work-life conflict. Work-life balance is an issue that employers cannot ignore. Conflict between work and life amongst employees has been linked to negative outcomes such as employee health, attitudes and behaviours towards work (Turner, Lingard & Francis 2007).

It can be argued that employees of an organisation are one of its most advantageous resources. Morris, Thompson Heames and McMillan (2011) acknowledged that increased stress levels associated with balancing work and personal commitment is likely to result in decreased performance on the job. Turner et al. (2007, p: 207) supported this point with further elaboration by hypothesizing that “work-life conflict has a damaging effect on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, productivity turnover, and absenteeism” The ultimate goal of the employer should be retaining their employees according to Allan (2011) and putting in place strategies which will assist with this retention through improved work-life balance.

High stress levels at work can have serious consequences for home life. Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark and Boltes (2010) drew from role theory and resource drain theory to explain the relationship between work life conflict and stress in the workplace. According to role theory, an individual’s behaviour is largely driven by roles, whether at work or at home, that are prescribed by society for the specific context (Michel et al., 2010). Each role that a person assumes can therefore be deemed to be defined by public opinion. Resource drain theory describes the stress associated with the demands of performing multiple roles at home and at work. While these two theories differ they also share some overlap

in that they are both concerned with overloading the individual with too many roles. People have finite resources. There was significant evidence that a close relationship exists between stress at work and stress at home. It can be deduced that minimising stress at work will ultimately lead to a happier, more productive workforce (Michel et al., 2010). Boundary theory is based on the hypothesis that employees need to work towards separating their work and home lives and in some way erect an imaginary boundary between the two to prevent overlap. Management of this boundary is important in achieving work life balance. Hahn & Dormann (2012) advocated boundaries as separating and adding structure to the various roles that individuals have at one time. The management of this boundary can be highly beneficial to employees. However it may not be something that is easily achievable for most as work activities often impinge on personal lives (Sturges, 2008). Conflict theory was more extreme and proposed that work and home lives are incompatible and each can hinder the role performed at the other (Michel et al., 2010).

Each of these theories suggested that work life balance can be enhanced by more flexible working arrangements particularly working from home provided the working from home is structured and does not cause boundaries between work and home to merge. If this were to happen, it may result in a less fulfilling work life balance as people try to differentiate their working life from their home life. If working in the home can be kept separate from home life it should result in a more satisfactory work life balance.

### **2.3 Flexible working and teleworking**

Flexible working arrangements in organisations have been repeatedly suggested throughout the literature as a means to assist employees balance their work and home lives (Russell, O'Connell and McGinnity, 2009). Briscoe et al. (2011) suggested that employers who wish to retain their employees should attempt to accommodate work-life needs by implementing flexible working among other things. Russell et al. (2009) defined flexible working as

encompassing various work arrangements at the discretion of the employer including part-time work, job sharing, flexitime and teleworking. Available research points to increased use of non-conventional working arrangements with Tuttle and Garr (2012) citing an increase in the number of individuals working something other than the traditional 9-5 day schedule.

Cable and Elsbach (2012, p: 56) are certain that the phenomenon of teleworking is not going anywhere “after decades of debate about changing work practices, the impact of technology, flexible working, hot desking and so on, telecommuting is undoubtedly here to stay.” Working from home, researchers point out, will undoubtedly change the relationship these employees have between their work and their home life (Tietze and Musson, 2005). Whether this change is a positive or a negative is dependent on many factors.

While Tremblay, Paquet and Najem (2006) identified three types of teleworking – working at home, work on client site and work in business centres or satellite offices, they highlight working from home as the type which has been most often put forward as a solution to work life conflict.

## **2.4 Benefits of working from home**

According to Johns and Gratton (2013) there is a prediction among experts that within a few years more than 1.3 billion people will work remotely. Accordingly it can be deduced that this working arrangement is gaining popularity among employers. Dell has embraced this type of working and believes the flexibility it offers increases job satisfaction, engagement and enables attraction and retention of top talent (Foster, 2012).

There are benefits of working from home for employers as well as employees. Savings may be made by the employer in terms of office space, energy used and insurance (Rogers, 2011). Richardson (2010) in her study found that participants did not have a permanent desk at the office but availed of hot desking – a phenomenon whereby employees make use of open cubicles

during time spent at the office. Through this method the company is able to save desk space. Dell has implemented similar measures and encourages employees to share communal spaces when based at the office (Foster, 2012). At the same time these savings for the employer may result in costs to the employee as once working from home they will need to utilise their own energy and make provisions for a home office. Dell has introduced a formal working remotely policy and offer employees an allowance to cover costs of running a home office (Foster, 2012). Other companies may not offer this allowance and the cost involved may be seen as a negative, it can also be argued that employees are saving on the economic and environmental costs of commuting. They can avoid the stress and time of commuting (Emerald Group Publishing, 2008). As Rogers (2011) put it time spent commuting can be time put back in to work and not commuting will also save the employee money. The actual savings or costs resulting from teleworking can be difficult to quantify as one cost appears to trade off against a saving.

According to Emerald Group Publishing, (2013) productivity can be increased when people are not constrained by a schedule and can work at their own pace and to their own timetable. Different employees may be more productive at different times of the day and working from home gives people the flexibility to plan their own day around such realisations. Rogers (2011) supported this point and notes that once the teleworker is available during core business hours and working as many hours as the office based employees an early start or a late finish should be at the employee's discretion. Rodgers (2011) also discussed other advantages such as scheduling appointments or running errands at quieter times of the day in order to save time. Wheatley (2012) noted the same benefits with employees able to schedule the day around home responsibilities. The indication is that employees with more control over their working day are ultimately happier, more satisfied employees with more time to invest how they choose. For many employees it is easier to work uninterrupted at home than at work as people are more comfortable telling their family not to interrupt them than their colleagues or boss (Tietze and Musson, 2005). Boundaries in the

home are important however so that workers can minimise interruptions and family members are aware of where they stand. Some people in the study carried out by Tietze and Musson (2005) used a change of outfit or lipstick to distinguish work time from home time. All used some form of marker to differentiate between the two.

## **2.5 Negatives of working from home**

While much of the literature focuses on the benefits of teleworking, there are also criticisms. Isolation, blurred boundaries between work and home and lack of career progression are highlighted by Wheatley (2012) as potential challenges to working from home. Marsh and Musson (2008, p: 31) described this particular type of flexible working option as blurring “physically and emotionally the boundaries between work and home.” It can be difficult for some people to separate the two in this environment as the option to leave work at the office has been removed. Barron (2007) goes further by claiming that teleworking is capable of consuming all of a person’s personal hours unless prevented from doing so.

Johns and Gratton (2013) noted while employees may gain in some areas through working from home, there are also negative consequences to be considered. They have maintained that employee’s career progression and leadership development may suffer as a result of not being based in the office. Richardson (2010) also referred to employee’s concerns of negative impacts on their career progression and relationships with managers due to working from home. Rogers (2011) suggests a helpful attitude may assist in overcoming these difficulties somewhat – being flexible and open to additional work and assisting colleagues can go a long way. It could be argued that as a result those working from home may need to actually put in more work than their office based colleagues simply to prove themselves. This may be the sacrifice that one must make in order to have the privilege of home based working.

Personality types also play a role as to suitability to this type of work. Rogers (2011) was aware that while some people may flourish working from home it is not suitable for every person – particularly those who thrive on personal interactions. These people may actively dislike this type of work arrangement and even feel imprisoned in their own home or isolated by it. Cooper (2005) agreed that this type of working leads to feelings of isolation. At Dell it was found that new inexperienced recruits and mothers returning from maternity leave prefer not to work from home (Foster, 2012). Employees must be able to adapt in order to adjust to working from home (Wheatley, 2012).

Rogers (2011) also maintained the importance of being able to separate work time from home time while working from home and not let work encroach on all parts of the home life due to its increased accessibility. Should this happen, working from home may also damage work-life balance. Cable and Elsbach (2012) identified other negative consequences that may result from working from home – employees may receive less positive performance evaluations than their office based colleagues and fewer promotions often in spite of working just as hard if not harder. Another previously unmentioned negative brought up by Johns and Gratton (2013) is the legitimate concern about the knowledge that may not be transferred by employees who are nearing retirement due to lack of interaction.

## **2.6 Work environment**

Rogers (2011) noted that it may actually be easier to find peace to do effective work in the home as opposed to at the office although working at home still presents its challenges. In general there is a lack of consensus as to whether or not a home environment is more conducive to work than the office. This trade-off may depend on a number of factors, including the specific stresses and distractions of the available environments and the nature of the work. Furthermore, the act of working at home has the potential to negatively impact the home environment. Working environments have changed vastly over recent

years. The desire amongst employees to escape the office environment was cited repeatedly as a motivation to work from home (Tietze et al., 2006; Crosbie & Moore, 2004 and Tietze & Nadin, 2010) While Tietze et al. (2006) acknowledged in their results that this did not resolve the problems for the employee it did reduce stress levels and consequently they reported being happier with the arrangement.

Watson (2001) put forward an opposing view and asserted that there are those employees who like to escape the home environment and go into the office as the home can also be an all-consuming environment. Tietze and Musson (2004) reported that it was difficult when working from home not to have a blurring of the boundaries between work tasks and domestic tasks especially if there were others present in the house with the person working from home. Tietze and Musson (2010) described the home environment as having the potential to become unbalanced and unsettled by the arrival of paid work. It has been argued by Brocklehurst (2001) that the merging of the work and home life can result in a conflict of identity for the individual. Pyoria (2003) supported this point and asserted that the infringing of workplace norms on the home environment may overshadow any improved work-life balance with the individual developing a confused identity.

Eng, Moore, Grunberg, Greenberg and Sikora (2010) noted that those who choose to work from home are more likely to have a structured environment at home in which to do the work and hence have a more productive experience with it. Those who bring work home due to work overload are in an entirely different situation and are working from home out of necessity rather than choice.

The working environment at home is very personal to the individual being interviewed. Each home situation is different and leads in to whether or not the home is a suitable place for working and whether or not the individual embraces working from home.

## 2.7 Work schedule

There is a lack of information in the literature regarding working from home on a partial basis – perhaps once or twice a week. Much of the information available focuses on those who work from home on a more permanent basis known as teleworking.

There is a notable distinction between planned work from home and extra hours worked at home (Eng et al., 2010). It is the former that is being referred to in this research. Eng et al (2010) concluded from their research that it is not the place of work that contributes to work family conflict but the hours of work. Hence, working from home according to their study was not necessarily linked with an increase satisfaction or dissatisfaction with work life balance.

Rogers (2011, p: 164) advocated splitting time between work and office in order to “establish relationships with your colleagues and bosses that can be sustained even if you are not visible.” Building relationships with people via remote methods can be challenging. This highlights the importance of attending the office at least part of the week. In a case study carried out at Toshiba UK the company experienced positive effects from their encouragement of working from home (Pollitt, 2006). Management have noted positive effects such as improved productivity and employee morale and decreased absenteeism since working from home was introduced at the company.

In an opposing view, according to Marissa Meyer what she experienced at Yahoo prior to her decision to end working from home was a reduction in innovation and creativity which she deemed was a result of employees not interacting face to face (Emerald Group Publishing, 2013). She also judged that remote working disrupts teamwork when the team has reduced opportunities to meet and this is particularly problematic when team members have been carefully selected to complement each other’s skills and work styles. Johns and Gratton (2013, p: 69) supported this theory by noting that home based workers “missed the kind of ideation that results from serendipitous encounters and

hallway conversations.” Barron (2007) claimed that those working from home may feel out of touch with world events as they are not immediately informed of news stories by colleagues in the mornings.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

According to previous literature discussed above working from home is becoming increasingly popular as a method to increase satisfaction with work life balance amongst employees. Given the above evidence from the literature it is clear that working from home has the potential to mitigate the work life balance problem for many people. While there are many advantages to this mode of working as highlighted above there are also disadvantages which should not be overlooked and have been identified in previous literature. Many of the problems of working from home such as missing out on career progression, isolation and loneliness could be minimised with a part time work from home arrangement. Such arrangements thus far have been largely unexplored in the literature which is why this study is important. The effectiveness of working from home as a tool to increase satisfaction with work life balance seems to depend largely on the individual, their circumstances and their personal differences in terms of ways of working and motivations.

This study will explore working from home from an employee’s perspective exploring the perceived advantages and disadvantages on an individual level. It will also explore the perceived effects working from home has on the individual’s career and relationship with management along with the perceived effects on the individual’s life outside work.

## **Chapter 3 - Research Objectives**

### **3.1 Overall objective**

To investigate employees perception of working from home and how this impacts on their work-life balance

### **3.2 Sub objectives**

#### **3.2.1 To understand the characteristics of the work from home environment**

According to Tietze and Musson (2010), the levels of satisfaction experienced by employees attributable to working from home depends largely on the individual's adaptability to the home environment in a work capacity. While some in their study were unphased by this others found it a challenge.

Working from home means that work is constantly present in the home. Some employees may find this situation makes it more difficult to leave work at work and due to phones and work emails always being on, it is difficult for people to switch off (Russell et al., 2009). Russell et al. (2009) noted the strong connection between home based working and long hours of work. Briscoe et al. (2011) also blamed this increased availability and work hours for those based at home on modern technology and the very technology that enables working from home in the first place. Barron (2007) notes that time that used to be spent preparing for work and commuting is now spent on work tasks. Tietze and Musson (2010) note that the location of the employee is closely linked to that employee's identity and that a move from the office to the home can essentially disrupt this.

It is probable those working from home see their arrangement as a privilege and as such are happy to put in extra work (Richardson, 2010). It is also probable based on the available evidence that they will need to put in more work than office based colleagues. Desrochers, Hilton and Larwood (2005) regard any

form of working from home as potentially disruptive to the home environment, blurring lines between home and work life and therefore leading to increased dissatisfaction with work life balance.

It was important for this research to understand the work from home environment and what affect this had on the work and productivity levels of individuals. There was an indication from the literature that the environment affects the productivity of individuals. The purpose of this objective was to clarify whether that is the case for the participants in this research and also to establish any differences in schedule between office and home.

### **3.2.2 To establish key positives and negatives of working from home according to the perceptions of employees who work from home**

While positives associated with work life balance are plentiful in the literature it doesn't always live up to its potential. Tietze and Musson (2010) have reached new conclusions on why this mode of work is sometimes very successful and sometimes not delivering on its expectations. The existing literature lends itself much more easily to positivity associated with working from home. It would be useful to decipher if participants interviewed had similar perceptions.

There were also negatives throughout the literature regarding working from home. Though these were not as prominent as the positives they were still a constant feature. Tietze and Musson (2010) described how relationships can be disrupted negatively by work encroaching on the home domain. Establishing the positives and negatives of working from home as perceived by the participants is an important objective of this research as this will directly affect how it improves or doesn't improve their work life balance.

### **3.2.3 To understand how people who work from home perceive it to affect their career progression and relationships with Managers**

Managers have expressed concern about this working arrangement and its potential effect on productivity particularly when introduced as a new concept to a business (Emerald Group Publishing, 2013). Wheatley (2012) found that many managers remain sceptical regarding the misuse of employee's time spent at home. Without the support of one's manager this mode of working is likely to fail as employees may feel the constant strain of trying to prove oneself to a manager. Richardson (2010) noted managers who were resistant to flexible working were seen as old fashioned or outdated. Managerial style would need to be adapted to manage new work styles. If a manager deems those working from home as falling behind in certain skill sets as compared to their onsite colleagues, it may be assumed that they would be less likely to be selected for promotion than their office based colleagues. Wheatley (2012) described employee's worries over their careers as legitimate with a loss in social interaction and strained relationships with managers based on working from home to blame. According to Richardson (2010) managers need to trust those working from home more so than those based at the office. This increased trust placed in employees can increase productivity and commitment from them.

The literature is divided on whether working from home has a negative effect on career progression. If the implications for career progression associated with working from home were negative, it may lead to individuals not wanting to pursue working from home. How the participants perceived it to affect their career progression and relationship with management is a central objective to this research.

### **3.2.4 To determine how working from home impacts life outside of work**

Eng et al. (2010, p: 106) noted that "doing regular work at home was not related to work family conflict." Therefore, they deduce it would be possible to draw

from this that it is neither place of work nor type of work that influences work life balance so much as hours of work. Voydanoff (2005) supported this point by noting similar results – that working from home does not equate to job flexibility and therefore has no effect on improving home life.

There is a distinct difference between hours of work at home being planned and bringing work home unexpectedly as pointed out by Eng et al. (2010). Those who plan to work from home usually have a more structured environment at home in which to work while bringing work home as a result of not getting it finished at work indicates work overload rather than flexibility (Eng et al., 2010). There is some debate over this point in the literature with others arguing that the flexibility to bring work home actually decreases conflict between work and home life (Breugh and Frye, 2008).

According to Eng et al (2010) it was the level of control and the amount of flexibility that employees have over their work schedule that increases satisfaction with work life balance. Therefore, if employees have a say in when they work from home, this may be even more beneficial in reducing work family conflict than simply working from home when the employer decides. Russell et al. (2009) in their findings discussed the difference between those who work from home and those who do not who held similar types of roles. It was concluded that those who work at home had higher stress levels than those who did not. Therefore based on these results working from home can be attributed to increased tension with work life balance than not.

As discussed, there is much disagreement in the literature regarding the effect of working from home on life outside work. This objective aims to clarify participant's perceptions on whether or not their personal lives are improved by working from home or it encroaches on their home life having the opposite effect.

The next chapter is the methodology chapter and will discuss how the objectives of this research are to be achieved.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology Chapter**

This chapter outlines the method chosen in order to carry out this piece of research in line with the aims and objectives. A qualitative method was chosen and this chapter also justifies the reason for this while noting the strengths and limitations of this method.

### **4.1. Research objectives**

#### **Overall research objective**

The objective of this study was to investigate employee's perceptions of working from home for part of the week and how this impacts on their work life balance. The study was conducted amongst traditionally office based workers. Four specific objectives were addressed:

#### **Research Objective 1**

To understand the characteristics of the work from home environment

#### **Research Objective 2**

To establish key positives and negatives of working from home according to the perceptions of employees who work from home

#### **Research Objective 3**

To understand how people who work from home perceive it to affect their career progression and relationships with Managers

#### **Research Objective 4**

To determine how working from home impacts life outside of work

## 4.2 Sample

Ten participants were interviewed for this research. All participants were employed by companies in Dublin and were working full time office based jobs. Full time is defined as 35-40 hours per week or more. The ten participants worked at six different companies across various industries. They were at different career levels from entry level up to senior management level. The participants worked from home with varying degrees of frequency with the majority doing so once or twice a week. The minimum time a participant had been working from home was one month while the maximum was 8 years. Each individual's home situation varied with some people living with a partner while others lived with housemates or family members.

Non probability sampling was used as, due to limited resources, probability sampling was beyond the scope of this research. Quinlan (2011) describes probability sampling as representing the population of the study. As the sampling was not random, the findings of this study will not be generalizable beyond the study participants. Non-probability sampling is described by Quinlan (2011, p: 213) as "the sample is selected to represent the population, but it cannot be said to be representative of the population, in any statistical sense." The sample in this study was selected based on their suitability in terms of how often they worked from home – twice a week or less was the criteria upon which they were deemed suitable. Age, gender or type of company did not matter to the research provided the participants were mainly office based employees. The aim was to get participants from various companies across different industries at different career levels in order to gain a deeper insight into the subject under investigation.

The participants were selected by both convenience sampling and snowball sampling. They were either known to the interviewer or introduced to the interviewer through other participants. Saunders et al., (2012, p:682) describe snowball sampling as "non-probability sampling procedure in which subsequent

respondents are obtained from information provided by initial respondents.” Purposive sampling was also adopted for this research. Saunders et al. (2012) note this is also known as judgement sampling and involves the interviewer using judgement to select cases which will most usefully lend themselves to answering the research question and meeting the objectives of the research. Horn (2009, p:113) notes that purposive sampling can be a fast and simple way to find the respondents needed however it “cannot be defined as representing any well-defined population.” In the case of this research participants were selected based on how often they worked from home. It was important that they were based at the office the majority of the time and only spent a minority of time working from home. Those who worked two days per week or less from home were deemed most suitable. The participants ranged in age from 28 to 45. The mean age of participants was 31.59. Eight out of the ten respondents were female while two were male.

#### **4.3 Research design**

The primary research of this report took the form of qualitative semi structured interviews conducted in person. This type of research lent itself more easily to the topic than quantitative research as it was perceived by the researcher that an individual’s feelings and opinions on this topic may be difficult to quantify. A qualitative design is a more appropriate method to uncover individual’s personal experiences than quantitative and will be more likely to satisfactorily answer the objectives of this research. The wide variety of participants in this research allowed the researcher to develop a rich picture of the different and varying experiences amongst individuals. Previous research projects with similar topics and research objectives also used qualitative methods (Nadin & Tietze, 2011; Tietze, 2005; Wheatley, 2012; Tietze & Musson, 2010; Marsh & Musson, 2008). Richardson (2010) noted interviews as the best method to understand personal experiences of flexible working on the part of employees and managers. While focus groups are another useful qualitative method of research, focus groups have too much potential to lose focus and may not produce the quality of data

required (Quinlan, 2011). It may also be more difficult for respondents to articulate feelings in a group setting. The necessary resources to run a fruitful focus group were lacking for this particular piece of research.

Each individual participant experiences things differently and holds different opinions based on their own personal experiences. This cannot be accurately recorded via the quantitative method which is numerically focused (Quinlan, 2011). Quinlan (2011) noted that it is the uniqueness of each person's answers that add to their complexity and that it would be difficult if not impossible for this complexity to be captured by quantitative data collection methods. Participants in this study each had differing personal situations outside the workplace in the home. They were also at different career levels working for different companies in different industries. Therefore it is safe to assume that they are going to have different thoughts, feelings and opinions on working from home which would not be captured via a quantitative method. "Quantitative research collects predominately numerical data and opinion, and often relies on deductive reasoning" (Horn, 2009, p: 179).

#### **4.4 Research instruments**

Interviews were semi-structured in nature; the interviewer used a set of standard questions and question probes as required. The reason semi-structured interviews were deemed most appropriate is that it allows the interviewer to add in questions to get more details on a particular answer (Collis and Hussey, 2009). This flexibility was found to be valuable in this type of research as some interviewees needed guidance with probing questions more so than others. The interview was divided into four themes along with an opening section on biographical questions. The themes were devised in line with the specific study objectives. Interviews were approximately 20-30 minutes in length.

#### **4.4.1 Interview Questions**

Themes and questions within those themes were grounded in the literature and in previous research. The questions asked were divided into four themes corresponding to the four main research objectives. Mostly the questions were open ended to encourage more elaboration and depth of discussion. Questions were phrased in such a way to avoid dichotomous or closed responses. Questions were developed based on the literature review completed at proposal stage and were linked back to the main themes which had emerged.

The first theme centred on the characteristics of the home environment. According to Tietze and Musson (2010), the levels of satisfaction experienced by employees attributable to working from home depended largely on the individuals adaptability to the home environment in a work capacity. While some in Tietze and Musson's study were unphased by this others found it a challenge. It was deemed worthwhile therefore investigating the home environments of the interview participants and what effect, if any, this had on their satisfaction with working from home.

Questions were asked about the home environment and how this differed to the office, the facilities at home, how the working day at home was monitored by the employer if at all and the individual's schedule whilst at home versus the office. The objective of these questions was to find out if the physical work environment had any effect on productivity and also to establish how the home environment contrasted to the office environment.

The second theme was grounded in employee satisfaction with working from home and was closely linked to the employees happiness with their overall work life balance. The purpose of this section was to ascertain whether working from home actually had any effect on employee's happiness or whether doing the work at home or at the office made no difference. There was also a question in this section centred on the employee's perceived benefits and disadvantages of working from home. This is an important question that has produced unintuitive

results in previous research. Eng et al. (2010) along with Voydanoff (2005) note similar results from their studies – that place nor type of work influence work life balance as much as hours of work and that little flexibility is provided by working from home and therefore it has little effect on improving work life balance.

The third theme focused on working from home and its impact on career. Many managers remain sceptical of the working from home arrangement according to Wheatley, (2012). This can result in constant pressure on the employee to prove themselves whilst working from home. Richardson (2010) also refers to employee's concerns of negative impacts on their career progression and relationships with managers due to working from home. Questions were asked regarding employee's thoughts on the impact working from home had on their careers.

Life outside work and how it was affected by working from home was explored in the fourth theme. This theme is built around previous research suggesting that work is constantly present in the home if individuals are working from home. Russell et al. (2009) asserted that this meant it was more difficult for people to switch off and therefore they were more inclined to work longer hours. Barron (2007) supported this point by noting that time that used to be spent on preparing for and commuting to work is now spent on work tasks by those employees working from home. These assertions necessitated some questions regarding the effect of working from home on the home life.

At the conclusion of the interview participants were asked if they would like to add anything further or if they would like to say anything that they felt had not been covered. Quinlan (2011) cautions not to underestimate the importance of this as it encourages participants to summarise their thoughts on the subject matter in a clear and useful manner and they may also remember to articulate something critical.

Interviewees were thanked for their participation in the study. The researcher expressed gratitude and appreciation for their time and input. Please see appendix A for a full list of interview questions.

#### **4.4.1 Pilot study**

Once the interview questions were finalised a pilot interview was conducted with two individuals who were not being interviewed as part of this research. The reason for this was to ensure that the interview questions were clear and participants understood what they were being asked. As a result of this pilot study some minor changes were made to the questions before the researcher proceeded to conduct the actual interviews. This also assisted the development of useful probing questions for the actual interviews. The interviewer was also able to practise interview techniques such as listening and probing during these pilot interviews.

#### **4.4.2 Procedure**

In advance of the research, the background and nature of the study was explained to participants and an overview of what the interview would involve was given. The participants provided informed written consent and it was explained to them that their information would be kept private and confidential and that their names or the names of their companies would not appear anywhere in the final dissertation. Participation was completely voluntary and participants were not compensated for their time.

In-depth interviews were conducted over a number of weeks in a quiet, private space with distractions and noise kept to a minimum. Drinking water was provided. These were face to face interviews which were recorded on an iPhone with the permission of the interviewees gained in advance. It was made clear to participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time and that continued participation was at their own discretion.

#### **4.4.3 Ethical considerations**

It is the duty of the researcher to do no harm and to treat participants with sensitivity (Quinlan, 2011). There were no serious ethical concerns for this research. The topic being researched was not of a sensitive nature and vulnerable groups were not interviewed. Some participants may not have wished to divulge much personal information based on their home lives. While respect was shown for participants' rights not to answer questions they were uncomfortable with, this situation did not arise.

Each participant was a consenting adult who could decide the amount of information they wished to share. Each participant signed a consent and non-disclosure form which the researcher kept for the duration of this research and thereafter should this need to be produced at a later stage in the process. All identifiable information was kept securely in a separate place to the data. In order to protect anonymity of both the participants and their employer their names are not used throughout the piece of work. Instead they are referred to by letters. Once data analysis was complete all recordings were deleted as promised to participants.

Assurances of remaining anonymous may encourage participants to give more honest answers (Quinlan, 2011). This in turn may have led to a piece of research which is richer in quality.

#### **4.5 Data Analysis**

As soon as possible after conducting each interview the researcher transcribed it into a word document. Doing this without delay ensured details remained clear to the researcher. The process of doing the transcripts personally increased the researcher's familiarity and engagement with the data.

Once the interviews were transcribed the researcher analysed the data by reading each one several times underlining and highlighting important or

insightful sections, words or sentences. The researcher then went back and read through each transcript particularly slowly noticing emergent themes and developing codes for these themes. Each code was given a different colour and initials based on its meaning. Each transcript was then scoured for similar codes. Codes were subsequently developed into themes. An independent rater then examined 10% of the data with a view of increasing inter-rated reliability. Key themes were put into a spreadsheet developed by the researcher where it was easier for the researcher to establish the commonality of certain themes and lack of others. Please see appendix C for complete spreadsheet.

## Chapter 5 – Findings

**Table 1 – Biography of research participants**

	PARTICIPANTS										
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female	
Age	30	40	32	28	28	40	33	30	30	25	
Company type	Management Consultancy MNC	US Technology and Consulting firm MNC	Employment Related Metasearch Engine	Management Consultancy MNC	Social Media Company – EMEA Headquarters	Irish telecommunications company	Irish telecommunications company	Management Consultancy MNC	Social Media Company – EMEA Headquarters	Knowledge brokerage and primary research firm	
Current job title	Manager – Management Consulting	Resource Manager	Lead Recruiter	Recruitment Lead	Operations Analyst	Chief Financial Officer	Business Development Manager	HR Intern	Team Lead Community Operations	HR Coordinator	
Years working from home	7.5 years	5/6 years	1 month	10 months	7 months	2 years	8 years	About a year now	1 year	1.5 years	
Frequency of working from home	Twice per month	Once a week	Once a week	Once a week	Twice per month	Once a week	Twice a week	Once a week	Two or three times a month	Twice a month	
Home situation	House share (House)	Husband & 4 year old child (House)	Fiancée & 2 children aged 1 & 3.5 (Apartment)	House share (Apartment)	House share (House)	Wife & 2 year old child (House)	Husband (3 bed duplex)	Lives with retired parents (House)	Boyfriend (Apartment)	Boyfriend (Apartment)	

## **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to organise the data collected during the course of this research. Once the interviews were transcribed, a transcript summary was created in an Excel spreadsheet (Please see appendix B). Saunders et al. (2012) note a transcript summary compresses longer accounts into briefer ones and what has been said during the course of the interviews may be rephrased to accommodate this. The purpose of this was not only to present data in a more organised way but also to reduce the amount of data transcribed. “Data reduction includes summarising and simplifying the data collected and or selectively focusing on some parts of this data” (Saunders et al., 2012, p: 564). After the data was inputted to a spreadsheet, it was analysed and cross referenced for common themes. Original quotes were also extracted and used throughout the findings where relevant. Despite questions being grouped into four themes there was some overlap in the responses to questions falling under different themes. Therefore responses were organised by theme rather than by question in order to consider the objectives of the dissertation.

## **5.2 Empirical findings**

### **5.2.1 Objective 1: To understand the working environment**

#### **5.2.1.1 Place of work**

All participants acknowledged key differences in their working environment while at home versus the office. Three of the ten respondents admitted that they moved work locations throughout the working day at home and worked out of various rooms at their houses. This differs from the office as all respondents sat at the same desk

throughout the day unless attending meetings. Respondent J mentioned that her location whilst working may be weather dependant:

*“If I’m at home I’ll be in the garden if it’s sunny or I’ll just move around because I get a bit bored in different rooms so just variety.”*

Four people spent the day at the kitchen or dining table, one person preferred to work on the couch and three others had a home office set up in their house.

Seven of the ten respondents were at home on their own during the working day. The other three were not. Participant F shared the home with his stay at home wife and two year old child, participant H lived with her parents who are both retired and are largely at home throughout the day while participant I had a boyfriend who also worked from home.

The majority of the interviewees - seven out of ten - did not have an ergonomic desk or chair at home. The three respondents who did were the three respondents who had a home office. Of those who had a home office set up only one of those worked more than one day a week from home – participant G.

Nine participants mentioned that the home environment was quieter than the office environment. Participant A acknowledged that there were noises at home but that these noises were different:

*“It is different at home in that I have a different kind of desk and chairs, different environment, different noises”*

Nine of the ten interviewees worked off a company laptop whilst at home. Participant J used her own personal laptop but mentioned that should she require a laptop she would be given one by the company. Participants A and G were both given extra equipment by the company to facilitate working from home. Participant A was given a riser, mouse and screen while participant G was given a screen and a printer.

Participant F mentioned that home was more comfortable than the office while participant I mentioned the lighting in her home was brighter than that of the office.

**Table 2: Working at home environment**

PARTICIPANTS										
Interviewee:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Gender:	F	F	F	F	M	M	F	F	F	F
At home place of work	Various places	Dining Table	Kitchen Table	Dining table	Couch	Home office	Home office	Home office/move around	Kitchen Table	Garden/Move around
Who is at home during working hours	Home alone	Home alone	Home alone	Home alone	Home alone	Wife & 2 year old child	Home alone	Retired parents	Boyfriend working from home	Home alone
Noise levels as compared with office	Different noises	Quieter	Quieter	Quieter	Quieter	Quieter but still noisy	Quieter lonely	Quieter	Quieter	Quieter
Home office	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Equipment	Work laptop/riser/mouse screen	Work laptop	Work laptop	Work laptop	Work laptop	Work laptop	Work laptop/printer/screen	Work laptop	Work laptop	Personal laptop

### 5.2.1.2 Schedule of work

Two participants reported that their work day schedule at home was largely the same as at the office. Two other interviewees referenced meetings at the office taking up the majority of the working day with very little desk time while the opposite was true of working from home. Participant A describes this as follows:

*“So usually if I was in the office I would probably have 80% of my time in meetings with people and 20% maybe working at my desk. If I was at home it would be the other way so I’d nearly have just 80% of my day working at my desk.”*

Participant I also describes a similar situation:

*“So a typical day in the office would have probably four to five hours of meetings minimum and a small amount of time at the desk doing actual work whereas at home its quite opposite. I might have one or two calls during the day and the rest of the time is spent doing actual work.”*

Three participants specifically mentioned that they work harder at home while three different participants stated that they worked later into the evening whilst at home than they would in the office. Two participants noted that they felt there was a need to work harder whilst at home as there was a point to prove to their employer. This may be a negative factor of the working from home arrangement and could result in extra pressure and stress being placed on the employee. Participant C had approached her employer to ask for the work from home arrangement and as a consequence she was grateful to the company for placing the necessary trust in her and wanted to ensure that she proves herself:

*“I think then you can be more effective when you’re actually working because obviously you have a point to prove that you are working and not taking advantage so I think I’m still really effective when I’m at home.”*

Participant J describes the same experience and a feeling of paranoia:

*“I think I’m paranoid thinking when I’m not there people don’t think I’m working” resulting in working harder over longer hours.”*

Five female interviewees mentioned that they will usually use some spare moments during the day to do some light housework or to put on a

laundry and as a result they feel more organised. Participant J felt working from home afforded the opportunity of using one's time better and minutes that would ordinarily be spent browsing the internet were now spent on household tasks:

*"I'm not on Facebook or Daily Mail or whatever it is I'm taking a minute away to do something."*

Only one participant reported that their breaks at home were the same as at the office. The remaining nine interviewees either took shorter breaks or breaks that were more sporadic throughout the day. Participant B reported having to force herself to take a lunch break while at home and participant G didn't take breaks at all at home. She would take breaks at the office as there were colleagues to go to lunch with but at home she felt no desire to take a lunch break and interrupt her work.

None of the respondents felt that their work was being monitored by their employer in any additional way when they worked from home. There was a general consensus that the employer trusted their employees to do the work at home and if they chose to not do much at home it would be to their own detriment. Participant B describes this as follows:

*"...if I'm working from home I'm not doing it then it means that I will have to do it in the evening because my Manger is going to expect that piece of work to be done regardless."*

The majority of participants at six mentioned the company's internal instant messenger service as a way to monitor employee's availability and online status. However this was used in the same way whether at home or at work.

### **5.2.1.3 Working facilities**

Six people also reported that their employer did not offer any assistance with working from home facilities. Most did not want or expect this as they felt that working from home was a benefit which they were grateful to have and did not feel it appropriate to ask their employer for anything more.

While the majority of interviewees stated they didn't think there was any way their home work environment could be improved, three people would be happy with a home office but knew it would not be practicable due to their own personal situation and was not the fault of their employer.

**Table 2: Working from home schedule versus office schedule**

<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>										
<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>J</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Schedule</b>	Office 80:20 Meetings:Desk Home opposite	More productive at home Housework Laundry on breaks	Same schedule Point to prove – more production Housework/ laundry on breaks	Same schedule No disruptions at home	Less distractions at home	Interrupted by son Spend time with son	More work done at home Less distractions	Save time – no commute, attend appointments during work from home day	No meetings more time for actual work	Paranoid need to prove self work harder More productive Laundry on breaks
<b>Start</b>	Same time – get up later	Start earlier	Same start time	Same sometimes earlier	Same start time	Not as strict of start time	Vary	Same start time	Same start time	Earlier start time
<b>Finish</b>	Earlier finish	Same finish time	Same finish time	Finish – sometimes later	Same finish time	Not as strict of routine	Vary	Later finish	Same finish time	Later finish
<b>Breaks</b>	Same breaks	Force self to take lunch	Sporadic breaks – include household tasks	Shorter lunch	Less breaks	Random breaks	Don't take breaks	Shorter breaks	Same breaks	More shorter breaks

## **5.2.2 Theme 2: Employee satisfaction with working from home**

All participants expressed happiness with their working from home arrangement. Respondents B and D stated that while they enjoyed working from home one day a week they would not like to do it full time.

### **5.2.2.1 Benefits of working from home**

Some of the reasons participants liked working from home were noted as less pressurised environment, more free time in the evenings, no commute, more sleep, more organised around the house. Employees also appreciated time away from the office, increased flexibility, increased levels of happiness and more time to spend with family and friends. Getting more work done with less distractions and saving bulkier administrative tasks for completing at home were also cited as reasons why working from home makes respondents happy. Participant H mentioned the autonomy over her day and the feeling of trust between her and the employer as contributing to her happiness with the working arrangement:

*“You feel a bit more in control of your own time so you get more of a feeling that you’re not owned by the company.....I feel like, you know, they trust me, they trust me enough to allow me to work from home so I think that that’s a good thing....”*

Participant J liked that she could fit appointments into her working day while at home and things were quieter than on the weekend so took up less time. However she also mentioned that she disliked the feeling of loneliness that came with being away from the office environment.

When most interviewees asked about the benefits of the working arrangement responded with similar answers to the previous question. Managing one’s own time along with running errands or attending

appointments during the working day are described by participant A as a benefit:

*“...if you’ve to run an errand or post a letter or you know fix your car or whatever you can do that and you can manage around that so it gives you a bit of time back into your day in that way.”*

Participant B noted that as a result of working from home there was more of a mutual trust between herself and her employer and by being afforded such a privilege it enabled her to build a stronger rapport with her Manager. This also feeds into the subsequent theme related to working from home’s impact on career and relationships with Managers.

Participant C explains that not only does she work harder when at home she also works harder at the office as a direct result of being granted permission to work from home once a week.

Half the respondents identified not having to commute as a benefit while four people claimed they were more productive or not as distracted at home.

The nature of participant E’s work was such that many people on his team were from other countries. The company allows these individuals to work from home when they go on a visit rather than taking annual leave days. Also when the weather is bad or over the Christmas holidays many people at the company work from home rather than making the commute.

Participant J spoke of the comfort she feels when working at home while participant I made a similar point by stating that she can wear her pyjamas at home and not do her hair or makeup which also saves considerable time.

The benefits of working from home can be divided into many different subsections – organisational benefits, schedule benefits, personal

benefits. Please see table 4. The disadvantages, however, were mostly related to the employee's working relationships.

#### **5.2.2.2 Disadvantages of working from home**

One interviewee reported no disadvantages to the working from home arrangement. Disadvantages pointed out by the other nine interviewees were lack of interaction, loneliness or isolation which were noted by eight of the participants. Missing out on the team bond, losing credibility with a client and feeling like you have to prove yourself were all cited as disadvantages although each was only mentioned once by different individuals. Disadvantages for the employer were mentioned by participants C and D. Participant C reported that colleagues were hesitant to contact her even though she made herself very available at home. She felt that colleagues still had the perception that they were disturbing you. While participant D noted that it is difficult for the company to monitor what employees are doing when they are working from home. Participants E and I both work for the same company which provides all meals to employees based on site. Both of these individuals regarded catering for themselves as a disadvantage when based at home.

Online meetings were deemed by participants D and G to be not as fruitful or beneficial as meeting someone in person when at the office. Participant I supported this point noting that communication was slower when working at home and one could not simply approach an individual at their desk but needed to wait for a response via email. Participant D describes this:

*"....you do your meetings online coz you're working from home you're not getting to see that person face to face and kind of discuss any of the issues of what you're meeting is about so it'd probably be easier sometimes if you're in the office to talk face to face....."*

Two participants were unhappy with the equipment or hardware that they have at home while participant J who works in Human Resources is concerned that she may miss things that go on in the office from a Human Resources point of view and she also was the only participant who mentioned that working from home costs her money:

*“...it probably costs me money so my lights are on my heating’s on I’m just spending more money that way...”*

**Table 4: Benefits and Disadvantages of working from home for employees**

Interviewee:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Gender	F	F	F	F	M	M	F	F	F	F
<b>BENEFITS</b>										
<b>PERSONAL BENEFITS</b>	Errands/ Appointments	Build up confidence		No commute	No commute	More family time, No commute	More productive, No commute	More family time, No commute	No commute, Can wear pyjamas while working	Comfortable
<b>ORGANISATIONAL BENEFITS</b>		Trust company more, Builds relationship with Manager	Work harder in work as well as at home	Concentrate a lot more	Snow days – can work from home	More productive, Less distractions			Less distractions	
<b>SCHEDULE BENEFITS</b>	More free time, Managing own time			Household tasks done	Work from home – whilst on annual leave			Flexibility	No makeup/hair on work from home days	Flexibility
<b>DISADVANTAGES</b>										
	Lack of interaction	Isolated	Colleagues sometimes hesitant to contact you	No interaction	No social contact	None	Lonely	No interaction	Cater oneself for	Flexibility
	May be difficult to feel part of a team	Detachment	Not guaranteed	No way for employer to monitor	Lack of hardware		Online meetings not as beneficial	Paranoid - work harder	Interaction	Costs money
	Bond		Have to prove yourself	Online meetings not as fruitful	Food provided by co			Prove yourself	Facilities	Lonely
	Client credibility				Sick days - expected to work from home			Work longer hours	Communication takes longer	Missing things in office (HR)
					Prove yourself					

### 5.2.3 Theme 3: Working from home and career

Two respondents felt there may be some impact on their career as a result of working from home. Eight people responded emphatically that there wouldn't be. These eight respondents had no doubt that this had no impact on their career as they do it so infrequently. All eight acknowledged that if they did it more often it may impact on career.

Participant A felt that working from home actually enhanced her career as it afforded her some recuperation time away from the office and hence she was more productive both at home and in the office. Participant D had similar feelings and noted that working from home enabled her to improve her quality of work therefore having a positive impact on her career.

Visibility and face time were mentioned as important by three respondents and there was a general feeling that not being seen by management could result in being forgotten about when it came to pay increases, bonuses or promotions. Participant J describes this as follows:

*"I think the more you see people the more they think something of you good or bad. I think you can get forgotten about at home."*

Participant D is flexible with the day she works from home. While it's normally a Thursday or a Friday she will adapt to suit the working week schedule. If things are particularly busy at the office or working from home is not suitable that week she won't do it or she will change the day

**Table 5: Working from home and impact on career**

<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>										
<b>Interviewee:</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>J</b>
<b>Gender:</b>	F	F	F	F	M	M	F	F	F	F
<b>Impact on career</b>	Positive impact – enhances through recuperation	No negative impact	No negative impact	No negative impact	Yes miss meetings & not as visible	Not much	No	No	No Not frequent enough	Yes Could be forgotten when it comes to promotion or raises
<b>Relationship with Manager &amp; colleagues</b>	Same – don't do it often enough	Same	Same	Same – only 1 day per week	Relationships with people not as good Loose contact with people	Affects positively as do better work at home	Same	Builds trust Visibility important	Same – not frequent enough	Same – Manager based in another country

#### 5.2.4 Theme 4: Working from home and life outside work

The majority of respondents found there was a positive impact on their home life due to working from home. Two participants did feel that working from home infringed on their home life while also finding it difficult to switch off in the evenings. Participant H described how home life becomes intertwined with work:

*“...in other instances it might infringe more on my home life so you know if I’m working at home its then becoming a bit, my home is becoming a bit more involved with my work so I might associate certain rooms or things at home with work so you know em it might not be as easy to switch off...”*

This participant felt there were also positive impacts on her home life due to working from home.

Participant A felt that she was nicer person on the days she worked from home and that she was less stressed and in turn probably more enjoyable company for others particularly those she lived with:

*“I’m probably more relaxed and you know I’m not working as long hours so I would say that I have less stresses and that probably impacts quite positively on the people around me.”*

Participant B regarded working from home as having a positive impact on her relationship with her husband. It forces them both to be more tidy and organised around the house as she needs her environment to be tidy in order to commence work which in turn leads to a less stressful home situation.

The two respondents who had children commented that it was nice to have extra time with them. There was a general feeling among participants that working from home allowed them to make better use of their time – how they then used that extra time varied. Most people were just generally happier, less tired and more productive when they were at home.

Participant J spoke about how she finds it difficult to switch off when working from home and the temptation to log back on after dinner often gets the better of her:

*“So I might take a break for dinner but I might go back to it because it’s hard to finish.”*

She also mentioned the feeling of paranoia over what her employer thinks she is doing at home as infringing on her ability to relax. Working from home makes her think about work a lot more even if she’s not actually doing it:

*“You’re just thinking....you’re not actually solving problems or fixing things or progressing anything in your head. You’re just thinking about the fact that work is in your head and that’s just a waste of energy.”*

Participant G also found it difficult to switch off and she tended to keep working into the evening particularly as her husband usually worked late and she doesn’t have children so she would be in the house on her own. She also referred to the fact that being childless meant that she didn’t feel working from home impacted her work life balance:

*“I suppose I don’t have children or anything so personally it doesn’t really make a difference to me in that regard for my personal life or my work life balance in that way.”*

Four participants noticed they were more organised in terms of house work as a result of working from home. This in turn reduced stress levels.

#### **5.2.4.1 Evenings when working from home versus working at the office**

There was significant variance in answers to the question relating to people’s downtime in the evenings. Six participants described being more inclined to work from home in the evenings on the day when they worked from home as mentioned above. These people found it more difficult to cut off from work as they didn’t have the physical separation they had when they left the office. Many

people logged off for dinner but logged back on afterwards, one person admitted to working through meals and eating “over the laptop” (Participant G).

Participant C noted how work situations begin to become associated with home:

*“...when you’re thinking of a situation in work you’re not necessarily thinking about the office. You could be thinking of your home and when you heard that at home or when that happened and I think it can kind of creep in a bit that way.”*

She regarded herself as lucky in that she was forced to log off as she has children. Participant E regarded the commute as helping with the physical and mental cut off of the working day. Without the commute switching off was made harder. For participant G it was walking past her home office which may trigger something which needs to be done or should have been done and will inspire her to log back on.

Participants F and I had a different experience and both regarded themselves as more likely to log back on and do extra work in the evenings on the days when they had worked in the office. The reason given for this by participant I was that so much of the office day was taken up with meetings that very little actual work gets done and evenings need to be spent catching up. Participant F felt that he had done enough on work from home days and was less likely to log on again in the evenings.

Participant J wants to be seen to be working later into the evenings when she works from home by her employer and she links this to her paranoia regarding her employer’s thoughts on her output when working at home.

**Table 6: Downtime in the evenings when working from home versus working at the office**

Interviewee:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Gender:	F	F	F	F	M	M	F	F	F	F
Adequate downtime in the evenings:	No	More time when at home	Hard to switch off at home	Hard to switch off at home	Work longer hours at home	Not too different	Harder to switch off	Yes	Late home when at office	No
Difference between downtime when working from home and working from the office:	No difference	No commute time	Kids help	Continue working into the evening	Better downtime after office	Home for dinner	Left office - easier to switch off	Disciplined in shutting off at home	Eat separately from partner	Emails to check
	Emails to be checked in evenings		Infringe on home life		Encroach on home life	Work from home on office evenings	Thinking of things to do next day on work from home days	Tendency to work longer at home	Working from home - eat together	More diligent when work from home
	Easier to switch off at home		Work situations become associated with home		No physical/mental cut off	Feel have done enough on home days	Walking past home office - trigger	You can see laptop	Less likely to log back on when working from home	More paranoid
			More likely to log back on when at home		Commute helps with cut off			Temptation to go back	Finish office work in evenings	Want to be seen to be working later
								Better downtime when work at office	Less productive day in office	

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This section has detailed how the participants responded to the questions in the interview. It is a description of what they actually said. The next chapter which is the discussion chapter aims to decipher the meanings behind the findings chapter and how the findings of this research links with previous research, differs or perhaps throws up new information. Individual differences were evident throughout this study. Those who were in more senior positions remarked how they worked longer hours whether at the office or at home and talked about constantly checking emails or being logged on. It seemed that they did the same amount of work regardless of the location of that work. Being at home resulted in less stress in that they didn't have to attend face to face meetings or have colleagues disturbing them on an impromptu basis. Other participants with positions below manager level were more inclined to have a shut down time that they stuck to and took regular albeit shorter breaks. Participants in this study worked business support roles. Therefore creativity and collaboration may not be as necessary as creative roles. Hence, some of the disadvantages related to work from home cited in previous literature may not be relevant to the individuals in this study, particularly information pertaining to inspirational hallway conversations or water cooler moments. Work from home was a more established part of routine for the individuals who worked for the American multinationals in this study. The individuals who worked for smaller companies or Irish companies in this study usually had work from home due to personal circumstances or had to ask their manager for it.

## **Chapter 6 – Discussion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter will compare and contrast the findings of this research with previous literature. Similarities and differences will be discussed under each sub objective. The aim of this chapter is to critically analyse the findings of this research and to clarify the impact of those findings both for this study and for future research on this topic.

The findings of this research showed that overall employees interviewed were happy with their working from home arrangement. However it was not without its disadvantages and these were identified by participants throughout the study. While there are four sub objectives the two main sub objectives centre around the effect of working from home on career and life outside of work. It is these two sub objectives which will give an indication of the effect of this type of work on work life balance which is the main objective of the research. Each sub objective will be discussed within the context of each theme and the relevant literature. While every attempt has been made to separate the content by sub objective there was much overlap in the findings as many participants linked varying themes together. This may be a cause for some repetition throughout this section.

### **6.2 Work environment**

The initial objective of the research was to get a more in-depth understanding of participants work environment when working from home. The working environment at home may be vastly different from that at the office, and this has the potential to impact productivity. This research sought an in-depth understanding of participant's work environment when working from home. By uncovering the differences between the environment while working at home and the environment

while working at the office the effect working from home had on productivity was examined.

All participants in this study were in a position where working at home was a voluntary choice. The participants were happy with their working arrangements at home; they had been doing it for some time and had an established routine with which they were comfortable. This supports the point made by Eng et al. (2010) that those who choose to work from home are more likely to have a structured environment at home in which to do the work and hence be more productive with it. The participants had a sense of personal responsibility and control; if their home-working environment needed improvement they felt the onus on themselves to rectify it. Therefore, it could be deduced that being more established at working from home would result in an environment at home in which it was easier to be more productive. This research is relevant to a specific group of people who were granted the privilege of working from home at their discretion by their employer. It may not be generalisable to people with less autonomy over the situation

The findings of this research have indicated that the individual's working environment does have an impact on their level of output. A majority of the participants mentioned they worked harder at home or longer hours, and all but one interviewee noted the home environment was quieter than the office environment. These findings support previous literature by Rogers (2011) which discussed how the home environment may be more conducive to getting work done than the office environment. The reason for people to work harder from home varied among participants. Among the reasons given were there were fewer distractions -; it was quieter, some were paranoid that their employer would presume they were not working at home while others found it hard to switch off from work whilst at home. Increased productivity at home, then, was attributed to both physical characteristics of the environment and the psychological

consequences of being away from the office. These psychological effects could be influenced by the frequency of working from home which is relatively low amongst this sample. Perhaps these effects become less with increased frequency of working from home or working from home on an infrequent basis but over a longer period of time.

The participants in this study did not appear to choose their work environment primarily in an attempt to escape the alternative. Many previous studies (Tietze et al., 2008, Crosbie and Moore, 2004, Tietze and Nadin, 2010) stated that employees want to work from home as it enables them to escape an office environment which is either stressful or unpleasant to be in. While the participants in this research did not express a desire to escape the work environment, it was noted several times that the working environment at home was less pressurised. On the other hand, Watson's (2001) research, discussed the opposite – employees who use the office as a form of escapism from home life. Most participants had a home environment free from children and general chaos and often described it as more relaxing than the office environment. As mentioned above, the participants in this study were happy working at home and it was their choice to do so; their employers were flexible in terms of the arrangement. Importantly, participants did report they would not like to work from home all the time. What this study has shown is that both the office and home environments have benefits for the participants. Balance between the two work environments resulted in the most productive satisfactory outcome for both the employees and the employers.

Motivations to work from home will impact on the participant's happiness with the arrangement. For example, one participant in this research had a child who was at home throughout the working day. He enjoyed the experience as he was able to combine work with spending time with the child. This arrangement worked well as the child is young and the

participant works longer hours and so would not get much time together otherwise. However, a thorough examination of the motivations of those choosing to work from home is beyond the scope of this study.

While working from home allowed participants to integrate chores in their working day, they did not report impaired productivity. Blurring of boundaries between work tasks and domestic tasks was identified by Tietze and Musson (2004) as something which may become an issue with this type of flexible working arrangement especially if the individual had others in the house at the time of doing the work. Many participants described doing some domestic duties throughout the working day such as putting on some laundry or doing a quick tidy up. This always occurred on breaks and did not interfere with work tasks according to the interviewees. Individuals spoke about making better use of spare moments with completing some domestic tasks and this did not appear to have any negative consequences for their work. While this may seem like a trivial point it was cited repeatedly throughout the interviews as something which assisted employee's with improving their work life balance. The ability to get even a small amount of housework done during the day meant individuals were less stressed in the evening and more organised generally. The male respondents did not mention doing housework whilst working from home. There were also less male participants in the study which could be the reason or it could mean that males are less inclined to think about domestic duties during the working days.

### **6.3 Employee satisfaction with working from home**

After gaining an understanding of the work environment at home the second sub objective was to establish the key positives and negatives of working from home according to the perceptions of employees who work from home. It was evident that all participants in the study enjoyed

working from home. There was a common believe, however, that this was because they did it so infrequently. Many participants were quick to point out that they would not like to work from home more than one or two days a week. The main reason given for this was that they would feel cut off and isolated from the work environment and their colleagues. While they enjoyed the flexibility to work from home once a week or twice a month it was not something that any participant expressed an interest to do on a more permanent basis.

The literature has suggested that the option to work from home can be linked to increased job satisfaction, employee engagement and attraction and retention of top talent (Foster 2012). The findings of this research would generally support this theory as most interviewees reported working harder when working at home along with being happier in general, less stressed and appreciative of this benefit. Attraction and retention were not investigated as themes for this research, therefore the effect working from home has on it could be an area of future study in order to build on Foster's (2012) research.

### **6.3.1 Benefits**

A benefit cited many times by various respondents of working from home was the lack of a commute. When working from home time ordinarily spent commuting could be put to better use such as catching up on sleep, doing a bit of extra work, doing domestic chores or attending personal appointments instead of doing so on the weekend. This supports previous literature where lack of a commute was described as a benefit (Emerald Group Publishing, 2008 & Rogers, 2011). Without a commute, participants had more time to spend how they chose and so this was closely linked with increased satisfaction with work life balance.

Working from home enabled employees to manage their own time. Participants in this study worked approximately the same hours as they

did at the office when based at home. The only real difference was what happened in the evening as some participants found it difficult to switch off and have time for a personal life in the evening while working at home. Managing your own time and attending appointments throughout the work day were cited by participants as benefits. Rodgers (2011) and Wheatley (2012) have pointed this out in previous research and noted the time saving benefits of this. Saving specific tasks for doing in the home environment was not mentioned in previous literature consulted. Numerous participants in this study regarded being able to save bulky administrative tasks which were difficult to get done at the office without being interrupted for doing at home as an advantage of the working arrangement. Perhaps more research would need to be conducted regarding variation in the work tasks employees completed at home versus the work tasks they completed at the office. It may be useful for employers to be aware that bulkier tasks are getting done in the home as opposed to the office.

Also mentioned in this study but not found in previous research was the feeling of increased trust a couple of participants described between themselves and their employers as a result of working from home. One participant noted she not only worked harder when working from home but also when at the office as she felt she had been granted a privilege by her employer. This was absent from previous literature consulted. Being granted this privilege by their employers made employees feel valued and trusted by their employer. There was a feeling that they had earned this right. It is likely that those who asked for working from home or whose employer did not offer this benefit to all employees would be more likely to feel like this than those whose employers had a working from home policy.

The circumstances presiding the opportunity to work from home would need to be researched in order to establish the individual differences

influencing the perceived benefits of working from home. One female participant spoke of approaching her Manager in order to request working from home. It was not a common benefit throughout her company and so when her employer granted her the benefit due to her personal situation she felt an increased level of responsibility to do a good job at home and also at the office.

The family situation is likely to influence the perceived benefits of working from home along with the length of the commute and the individual's personal life. There are a lot of personal factors that contribute to employee's feelings regarding benefits of working from home.

### **6.3.2 Disadvantages**

Lack of interaction, isolation and loneliness were all noted by participants in this study as disadvantages of working from home. This resonates with Wheatley (2012) and Cooper (2005) who had noted isolation as a negative of this type of working arrangement.

There is much previous literature which discusses the blurring of boundaries between work and home (Wheatley, 2012, Marsh and Musson, 2008 and Barron, 2007). Three participants did mention that they now associated certain areas of their house with work and they found it difficult to escape work in the evenings. This is a blurring of boundaries. Should work encroach too much on home life working from home may result in a distinct dissatisfaction with work life balance. It would therefore have the opposite effect to the one intended.

There was a feeling among a few participants in this study that they needed to prove themselves whilst working at home so that their employer was at ease that they were working. This was described by one participant as a feeling of paranoia. While a desire to prove oneself can encourage productivity, it reflects real or imagined career costs if the

manager perceives working from home as slacking. Furthermore, psychological distress such as paranoia could cut into the benefits of a more relaxing work environment. Only a couple of participants mentioned paranoia. The reason they felt this way and other participants didn't could be related to their own personal attributes. They may be less suited to working from home than others who did not experience this.

Communication problems while based at home were also stated as an issue – lack of face to face meetings produced less beneficial results. This was not something that was referred to in previous research. Lack of visibility by colleagues and managers may become a concern for those working from home particularly if relationships at work begin to suffer due to this working environment.

Only one participant mentioned that working from home costs her money in terms of heating and lighting. Previous literature notes that the costs involved with working from home can be difficult to quantify as one cost offsets another. So while there may be a cost to flexible workers there is also a savings in that they are not paying for the commute (Rogers, 2011). The other nine participants did not mention the costs involved for them. What could be inferred from this is that they already realised that one cost offset another or that costs were not as much of a priority to them as improving their work life balance – that they were prepared to pay to have this privilege such was its importance to them.

#### **6.4 Working from home and career**

The majority of respondents in this study felt that there was no impact on their career resulting from working from home. Most felt this was because they didn't do it often enough. Wheatley (2012) notes lack of career progression as a negative associated with working from home. Johns and Gratton (2013) made a similar point noting that an employee's career progression along with leadership development may suffer as a result of

working from home. These points do not resonate with the participants of this research as they found no negative impact on their career based on this type of working and significantly a couple of respondents felt it had a positive impact on their career. These participants felt working from home gave them a chance to catch up on sleep due to not commuting, they were also more relaxed at home and were more productive due to less distractions. They felt this in turn would have a positive impact on their career as it enabled them to catch up on work which did not get done at the office. However, consideration must be given to the fact that many of the respondent's in this study had been working from home for a short time, namely under two years. This may not be long enough to notice a negative impact on career. Only two respondent's had worked from home longer than two years and they did not report a negative impact on their career either.

Richardson (2010) reported on employee's concerns of negative impacts on their career from working at home and also relationships with Management. While three respondents expressed concern that not being visible to management may result in them being more likely to be forgotten about when it came time for promotions or pay rises, the majority of respondents in this study did not feel working from home had any impact on their relationship with their manager. Roger (2011) suggested in his work that those working from home could avoid such career issues by being extra helpful towards management and colleagues when working from home. Many respondents did report that they worked harder while at home. Many were keen to impress their employer and stated that they felt the need to prove themselves when working from home as mentioned previously.

## **6.5 Working from home and life outside work**

The final objective was to understand how working from home impacts life outside work. Life outside work may be positively or negatively affected by working from home and the intention of this objective was to decipher the perceived effects of working from home on the participant's personal lives. This will also lead to an understanding of the effect of working from home on work life balance.

Some participants did speak about the arrival of work in the home as infringing on their personal life. Two participants spoke about how they now associate parts of their house where they do the work with work and walking past the area can trigger a work related memory such as something that hasn't been done or something that needs to be done. They also spoke about how it can be more difficult to switch off in the evenings and they would have a longer, higher quality evening when they come home after a day working at the office. Pyoria (2003) noted that the infringing of work on home life can cancel out any benefits on work-life balance. There was a divide between this group of participants with some suggesting that they accomplished more work done during the day when working from home so therefore did not need to work in the evenings as opposed to at the office where the day was mostly taken up with meetings and it was necessary to work more in the evenings

Major and Germano (2006) and Kreiner (2009) have spoken in the literature of the blurring of boundaries between work and home and the subsequent stresses this causes. Many of the respondents in this study identified with this point as they noted the difficulties with switching off from work in the evenings no matter where they worked although the majority of participants were more likely to work in the evenings on days they worked at home. Without the physical separation they found it difficult to switch off from work. Two participants were more likely to log

back on in the evening on the days when they worked from the office. The reason given for this was the working day at the office being taken up with meetings and not enough 'actual work' being done. Tietze and Musson (2005) cited in the literature individuals using distinguishing markers between work and personal time whilst at home such as a change of clothes. None of the participants in this research stated that they did anything similar. Perhaps if they did it would assist with switching off in the evenings.

There were two participants who noted that they felt working from home could infringe on home life and they found it more difficult to switch off in the evenings when based at home. Both participants described how home becomes more involved with work and, as mentioned previously, areas of the home can trigger work memories. In previous literature, Rogers (2011) warned against allowing work to become entwined with home life. Should this be allowed to happen any benefits of working from home on work life balance may quickly become negatives.

Eng et al. (2010) maintained in previous research that it is the hours of work and not the place of work that affect work life balance. This research would not support nor discount this theory. There were those in the study who found themselves more organised as a result of working from home which directly affected their stress levels and satisfaction with work life balance. There were also those who still worked as many hours at home, didn't get any housework or errands done while working from home and felt that it generally didn't matter whether they were at the office or at home. Based on this evidence, the success or otherwise of working from home depends largely on the individual and their personal attributes and situation. One participant mentioned that being childless meant that working from home had little to no effect on her work life balance. Whether or not the participant has children could influence directly how working from home affects work life balance. As mentioned

previously, one male participant clearly felt his work life balance was improved by combining work with time with his son whilst working from home.

## **6.6 Strengths and Limitations**

While the study was designed to produce insights into the impact of working from home on participants' work-life balance, there were a number of limitations. The primary limitation was that the results cannot be generalised to a larger population due to the use of non-probability sampling. The larger population is defined as those who work from home twice a week or less in Ireland but are traditionally office based workers and continue to be for the majority of the week. Furthermore, the sample size of ten was small and each interview lasted a maximum of thirty minutes, limiting the scope of the research. While this could be deemed a limitation of the research, interviewing a small sample but on a more in depth basis may be deemed a strength of the study also.

The subject selection may have affected the results in a number of ways. The majority of the participants were female. Only two males were interviewed for this research. Interviewing more males may have produced different findings. The majority of participants were known to the researcher. Having a personal rapport with interviewees or interviewing work colleagues may influence or bias the answers which they provide the researcher. Participants came from six companies. While these organisations vary in size and sector it would not be possible to generalise the findings to other organisations and sectors.

A further limitation of the study was the lack of a control group against which to compare the results. Many of those interviewed chose to work from home. In order to make the research more valid, individuals who had the option to work from home but chose not to would need to be interviewed also.

While care and consideration was taken to avoid interviewer bias, bias is still something that must be viewed as a potential limitation. According to Quinlan (2011) bias can enter at any stage of the research. Participants were given limited knowledge about the research and the researcher tried to talk as little as possible during interviews in order to not lead the participants in any direction and so that all opinions expressed would be the participant's own and not influenced by anyone else.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

This chapter's aim was to compare the findings of this research with previous research on a similar topic. Comparisons were made on a based on each sub objective of the research.

Working environment at home is generally more relaxed and while most participants did not have an ergonomic home office set up they were content with working at their kitchen table or on the couch. All felt comfortable and relaxed at home and less stressed in terms of preparing for the day or commuting. Schedules were largely the same albeit without face to face meetings. There was more time at the computer getting actual work done whilst at home.

Similarities were highlighted as well as differences between this research and previous work. In the next chapter conclusions and recommendation will be made based on this.

## **Chapter 7 - Conclusion**

### **7.1 Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of working from home on a partial basis on employee satisfaction with work life balance. As outlined previously employers desiring to attract and retain an engaged workforce must take the issue of work life balance seriously. As mentioned previously, flexible working has been hailed in the existing literature and in the media of late as a way to increase satisfaction with work life balance amongst employees (Briscoe, Wardell & Sawyer, 2011; Marsh & Musson, 2008).

This study aimed to investigate levels of satisfaction with work life balance by interviewing individuals who were already working from home on a partial basis and gaining their insights in to how this mode of working affected their life outside work. By ascertaining employee's feelings on working from home the study is better placed to decipher its effect on work life balance. As working from home increases in popularity and is also a topic of some debate, research aimed at understanding its significance can only be valuable. This study is unique in that there is not currently a lot of research available on those working from home on a partial basis. Much of the research focuses on teleworking or working from home on a more permanent basis.

### **7.2 Implications**

Employers who may potentially look to establish working from home in their organisations in the future may be interested in the finding that all participants reported working harder while at home and getting more work done due to less distractions. This is in stark contrast to the opinions of managers in previous research that they need to be concerned about employees being unsupervised at home. While Marissa

Meyer at Yahoo had some concerns regarding collaboration between teams, this was not so apparent as an issue amongst the participants in this research. However, the participants in this study did not hold positions where creativity was of paramount importance. Therefore perhaps collaboration is not so important in these cases. This study has shown that those working from home respect the arrangement and don't want to lose the privilege hence work to prove themselves to management. It can also build trust between management and the employee and generally result in a more contented workforce. What must be noted, however, is that these individuals chose to work from home and also were assessing themselves in terms of output. Therefore the results may be somewhat biased. Nevertheless findings revealed some interesting observations and trends which may enhance overall understanding of how working from home is perceived by employees. A summary of the key findings follows.

### **7.3 Summary of main findings and discussion**

While participants in the study all expressed enjoyment with working from home it was not without identifying its negatives also. It was unclear at times whether or not working from home really had a positive effect on work life balance as many participants noted its encroaching on home life as something they disliked. Most participants were also more inclined to work later into the evenings when working from home than when they worked at the office. However many positives were cited throughout the study associated with working from home and all participants continued to choose to work from home. This study addressed each sub objective individually and found the following:

### **7.3.1 To understand characteristics of the work from home environment**

It was clear that the working environment plays a strong role in the level of output. Productivity was increased among all participants when they worked at home. Individuals were more relaxed and less stressed in the home environment. Not having a home office or ergonomic chair at home did not seem to affect productivity as those who had this did not seem to report higher productivity than those who did not.

**Table 7 – Summary of key findings: work from home environment**

<b>Summary of key findings: work from home environment</b>
<b>Working environment does have a positive effect on level of output</b>
<b>The home environment was generally found to be quieter and less pressurised than the office environment and therefore more conducive to getting work done</b>
<b>A minority of respondents had a home office, most individuals either work in the kitchen at home or move locations</b>

### **7.3.2 To establish key positives and negatives of working from home according to the perceptions of employees who work from home**

All participants were happy with their working from home environment. However there were many negatives identified throughout the interviews. Positives are cited here along with negatives. The positives of this arrangement outweighed the negatives for participants. The negatives did not encourage participants to give up this working arrangement and it was clear they were manageable due to the amount of working from home participants were doing. It can be drawn from this that the positives would lead to a more increased satisfaction with work life balance.

**Table 8 – Summary of key findings: positives and negatives of working from home**

Summary of key findings: positives and negatives of working from home
<b>All participants enjoyed working from home because they did so infrequently</b>
Positives cited as managing one’s own time, being able to run errands/attend appointments during the work day, having more free time, building up trust with company/Management, builds confidence, work harder in work as well as at home, concentrate more, no commute, opportunity to do some household tasks, work from home on snow days, work from home instead of annual leave, less distractions, more productive, more family time, flexibility, don’t need to get ready in the morning, more comfortable
Negatives cited as lack of interaction, difficulty bonding with colleagues/feeling part of a team, may lose credibility with clients, isolated, detached, colleagues hesitant to contact you, have to prove yourself, working from home not guaranteed to continue, online meetings not as fruitful, no way for company to monitor employees at home, lack of hardware, paranoid, work longer hours, communication takes longer, flexibility, costs employee money, missing things in office

**7.3.3 To understand how people who work from home perceive it to affect their career progression and relationships with managers**

Some participants expressed concern that there may be a negative impact on their careers should they work from home more regularly. The general consensus was that none of these participants do it often enough to warrant concern. None of them noticed any negative effect on relationships with management. Some participants felt working from home may influence their career positively as they were more effective at home and less tired the rest of the week in the office. A few participants mentioned it was important to be visible in order to avoid being forgotten about for promotions and pay rises.

**Table 9 – Summary of key findings: career progression and relationship with manager**

<b>Summary of key findings: career progression and relationship with manager</b>
<b>Majority reported no impact on career due to not working from home frequently enough</b>
<b>Concerns were being forgotten and missing meetings</b>
<b>Same relationship with Manager reported by majority</b>
<b>Positive affect on relationship reported due to getting more work done at home</b>

### **7.3.4 The effect of working from home on life outside of work**

Working from home sometimes resulted in a blurring of boundaries between work and home life according to literature. Mostly the impacts were perceived as positive although participants in this study did note working more into the evenings on the days they worked from home and finding it more difficult to switch off. This is something employers would need to watch for in its employees who work from home as it may result in employees working too many hours from home and negatively impacting work life balance.

**Table 10 – Summary of key findings: working from home and life outside work**

<b>Summary of key findings: working from home and life outside work</b>
<b>Most respondents reported positive impact on their homes lives due to working from home – less stressed, positive impact on personal relationships, more time with children, utilise time better, happier, less tired, more productive, more organised</b>
<b>Majority reported not enough downtime in evenings and more inclined to work later into the evening when working from home as they found it more difficult to switch off</b>
<b>Presence of work in the home led to a blurring of boundaries between work and personal life for some</b>

#### **7.4 Recommendations for future research**

As discussed in the limitations section in chapter six, the sample size in this study was too small to offer generalisable findings across other industries and companies. There is scope for further research to investigate further the generalisability of the results of this research to other industries and companies.

The participants in this study were mainly female. Eight females were interviewed versus two males. About half the females mentioned a benefit of working from home as being able to get a small bit of housework done throughout the day. Neither of the males mentioned this as a benefit. Facts regarding number of females versus number of males who work from home were elusive in the existing literature. A beneficial study for the future would be a study which differentiates between males and female's opinions on working from home and investigates the reasons why men see working from home as a benefit and how these differ from females.

The participants in this research reported that they worked harder in the home than they did at the office. Further research around this would be beneficial for employers especially those who may be introducing working from home in the future. Previous research has shown scepticism from Managers around working from home. As reported by respondents in this research, this puts extra pressure on those working from home as they feel the need to prove themselves and a sense of paranoia at how they are perceived by management when working from home. Many employers may benefit from further research regarding output at home versus output at the office as the participants in this research reported themselves that they worked harder at home but there was no measure of output by their employers.

As mentioned above the participants interviewed for this research held business support roles. Future research concerned with interviewing those in creative roles would prove to support or discount Marissa Meyer's concerns regarding lack of inspiration in the home environment. The importance of collaborating with team members on a daily basis may be more relevant to these types of roles.

The findings of this research have shown that working from home influences work life balance in a positive way. As work life balance remains a key issue nowadays, employers who wish to retain their employees need to facilitate improved work life balance. Flexible working offers an easy cost effective way to do this and even saves the employer money. This research has shown some of the employer concerns regarding level of output are unfounded as employees tend to be more productive at home and waste less time. There are less distractions and the employees feel they have more to prove. As mentioned earlier the UK have introduced legislation so that all employees are entitled to request flexible working. This would indicate that flexible working is expected to grow in popularity over the coming years and in particular working from home on a partial basis.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

#### **General**

1. Biography questions
  - a) Can you tell me what age group are you in?
  - b) What position do you currently hold in your organisation?
  - c) How long have you been working from home?
  - d) How often do you work from home?
  - e) What is your home situation?
2. Do you know what proportion approximately of employees at your company work from home regularly?
3. How did you come to work from home?

#### **Theme 1: Characteristics of environment**

1. Can you describe how your work environment at home differs from your office environment?
2. How does your working schedule vary at home versus a typical day at the office?
3. How is your working from home monitored?
4. Does your employer offer any assistance with working from home facilities? If so can you give details on this?
5. Is there any way you feel your work environment could be improved?

#### **Theme 2: Employee satisfaction with working from home**

1. Do you like working from home? Can you tell me why/why not?
2. What would you say are the benefits and the disadvantages of working from home?

#### **Theme 3: Working from home and career**

1. Do you feel working from home impacts on your career? How do you feel this might impact your career?

#### **Theme 4: Working from home and life outside work**

1. Can you tell me about how working from home impacts your home life?
2. Do you feel you have adequate downtime in the evenings? Is there any difference in this when you work from home and when you work at the office?

## Appendix B: Data Analysis

### Theme 1: Characteristics of environment

1. Can you describe how your work environment at home differs from your office environment?								
Interviewee	Gender							
A	F	Sit in different places	Home alone	No ergonomic desk / chair	Different noises	Work laptop riser mouse screen	No home office	
B	F	Dining table	Home alone	No ergonomic desk / chair	Quieter	Work laptop	No home office	
C	F	Kitchen table	Home alone	No ergonomic desk / chair	Quieter	Work laptop	No home office	
D	F	Dining table	Home alone	No ergonomic desk / chair	Quieter	Work laptop	No home office	
E	M	Couch	Home alone	No ergonomic desk / chair	Quieter	Work laptop	No home office	
F	M	Home office	Wife & Child at home	Ergonomic desk/chair	Quieter but still noisy	Work laptop	More comfortable	
G	F	Home office	Home alone	Ergonomic desk / chair	Quieter / lonely	Work laptop / printer / screen		
H	F	Move around / home office	Two parents at home	Ergonomic desk / chair	Quieter	Work laptop		
I	F	Kitchen table	Boyfriend wfh	No ergonomic desk / chair	Quieter	Work laptop	No home office	Brighter
J	F	Garden / move around	Home alone	No ergonomic desk / chair	Quieter	Personal laptop	No home office	

2. How does your working schedule vary at home versus a typical day at the office?

Interviewee	Gender											
A	F	No interaction	No meetings	Office 80:20 meetings: desk	Home opposite	More administrative tasks/emails at home	More calibration tools	Start time same get up later	Breaks broadly similar	Finish time earlier than work at office	Easier to finish at reasonable hour	
B	F	More productive less distractions	Work harder prove yourself	Messenger - checking status says available	Force myself to take lunch							
C	F	Same schedule	Wouldn't work during commute time	Get some housework/ laundry done	Point to prove	Meetings via conference calls	More administrative tasks	Breaks - sporadic	Pyjamas			
D	F	Same schedule	No face to face meetings	No disruptions	Online mtgs/calls	Start sometimes earlier	Finish sometimes later	Shorter lunch	Getting more work done	Pyjamas	No people coming over	
E	M	Less breaks	Less distractions	No meetings	No people coming over	Same start & finish	Finish later sometimes					
F	M	Start same time	Can be interrupted by son	Spend time with son	Not as strict of a routine	Breaks more random						
G	F	More work from home	Don't take breaks	No distractions	Vary start & finish times	Start earlier	Meetings with clients	More work in evenings	Get up later if not meeting clients	Tracksuit	Save time	
H	F	Start same time	Get up later	Pyjamas	Shower lunch time	Shorter lunch break	Work later in the evening					
I	F	Office: 4-5 hours of meetings	Home opposite	Start & finish - same	Same breaks	Save admin tasks for home						
J	F	Starts earlier	Pyjamas	Paranoid	Need to prove self	Work harder	More productive	Choose days	Save harder tasks	More short breaks	Put laundry on	Utilise time better

3. How is your working from home monitored?					
Interview	Gender				
A	F	Nothing extra	Company equipment	Instant messenger	Calls
B	F	Not monitored	Results		
C	F	Instant messenger	Attend meetings virtually	Same contact with Manager	
D	F	Not monitored	Instant messenger		
E	M	Not really monitored	Weekly targets	Instant messenger	No extra Manager contact
F	M	Not that kind of role	Flexible	Senior Manager	Ensure objectives achieved
G	F	Instant messenger			
H	F	Company laptop	Instant messenger	Same contact with Manager	
I	F	Not monitored	Trust	Same contact with Manager	
J	F	The same way it is in office	Feedback from others	Output	

4. Does your employer offer any assistance with working from home facilities? If so can you give details on this?					
Interview	Gender				
A	F	Ergonomic assessments of workstation	Equipment	Broadband	
B	F	In the past - expense policy	Advantage - people do not ask	Phone	
C	F	No	Favour by company		
D	F	Yes	Equipment		
E	M	No	Hardware		
F	M	Equipment	Phone & internet	Home office - self	
G	F	Equipment	Broadband	Home office - self	
H	F	No	Benefit - wouldn't ask for more	Certain jobs	Home office - self
I	F	No			
J	F	No	Personal laptop	Internet & phone	

<b>5. Is there any way you feel your work environment could be improved?</b>				
<b>Interview</b>	<b>Gender</b>			
A	F	No, up to yourself	Could request assistance if needed	Don't do it that often
B	F	No, own situation	Home office - no room	
C	F	Home office - no room	Monitor/Screen	Ergonomic chair
D	F	No		
E	M	Second monitor		
F	M	No		
G	F	No	Faster broadband	
H	F	Second screen	Paid internet	Home alone - better
I	F	Ergonomic desk/chair		
J	F	Home office	Prefer moving around	

Theme 2: Employee satisfaction with working from home

1. Do you like working from home? Can you tell me why/why not?										
Interview	Gender									
A	F	Overall yes	Less pressurised environment	No commute	More time in evenings	Benefit				
B	F	Yes	Wouldn't do it full time	More sleep/no commute	More time in evenings	More organised around house				
C	F	Love it	Time away from office	No commute	Bit of distance	Get more work done	Flexibility	Happier	More organised around house	More time with family
D	F	Yes	More time to focus	Wouldn't do it full time		Get more work done				
E	M	Yes	Freedom / flexibility	No meetings						
F	M	Yes	More time with family							
G	F	Yes				Get more work done	No distractions	Save administrative tasks		
H	F	Yes	flexibility	Autonomy over time	Feeling of being trusted	No commute	More sleep	More organised around house		
I	F	Yes				More productive	Less distractions			
J	F	Yes	Appointments / chores	Would work much more	Lonely					

**2. What would you say are the benefits and the disadvantages of working from home?**

Interview	Gender	Benefits:				Disadvantages:				
A	F	Managing own time	Errands / Appointments	More free time		Lack of interaction	May be difficult to feel part of a team	Bond	Client credibility	
B	F	Trust company more	Build up confidence	Builds relationship with Manager		Isolated	Detachment			
C	F	Work harder in work as well				Colleagues sometimes hesitant to contact you	Not guaranteed	Have to prove yourself		
D	F	Concentrate a lot more	No commute	Household tasks done		No interaction	Company can't monitor employees progress	Online meetings not as fruitful		
E	M	No commute	Snow days	Work from home - away		No social contact	Lack of hardware	Food provided by co	Sick days - expected to work from home	Prove yourself
F	M	Less distractions	More productive	More family time	No commute					
G	F	More productive	No commute			Lonely	Online meetings not as beneficial			
H	F	Flexibility	No commute	More family time		No interaction	Paranoid - work harder	Prove yourself	Work longer hours	
I	F	Less distractions	No commute	Pyjamas	No makeup / hair	Cater for oneself	Interaction	Facilities	Communication takes longer	
J	F	Flexibility	Comfortable			Flexibility	Costs money	Lonely	Missing things in office (HR)	

Theme 3: Working from home and career

1. Do you feel working from home impacts on your career? How do you feel this might impact your career?							
Interview	Gender						
A	F	No	Don't do it often	Enhances through recuperation	More frequently - hinder relationships	Visibility	
B	F	No					
C	F	No	Same rapport with Manager				
D	F	No	Same rapport with Manager	Only one day a week	If it was 3/4 day/week	Adapt to schedule of the week	
E	M	Yes	Visibility	Loose contact with people	Relationships not as good	Wouldn't do it too much	Miss meetings
F	M	Not much	Same standard of work	Good relationship with Mgmt.	Positively - better work at home		
G	F	No	Good balance				
H	F	No	Good relationship with Supervisor	Trust	Colleagues might forget about you	Visibility	
I	F	No	Only do it when needed	Not frequent enough	Could loose touch with team	Same rapport with Manager	
J	F	Face time important	Promotions / raises	Could be forgotten			

Theme 4: Working from home and life outside work

1. Can you tell me about how working from home impacts your home life?								
Interview	Gender							
A	F	More recuperated	Probably a nicer person	More relaxed	Shorter hours	Less stress	Positive impact on housemates	
B	F	Much better	Positive impact on relationship	House not as untidy	Force self to clean & husband	Need tidy work environment	No commuting - 3 hours/day	
C	F	More organised at home	Cleaning / laundry	More time with kids	Generally happier			
D	F	Easier	No commute	Not as tired	Cleaning done	More productive	Better use of time	
E	M	Not moving about as much	Work longer hours	Work into evenings				
F	M	More face time with family	Less stress					
G	F	Difficult to switch off	Tend to just keep working	No house work done - noise	Appointments if on road anyway			
H	F	More time to spend with people	No commute	Infringe on home life	Home a bit more involved with work	Not as easy to switch off	Associate certain rooms with work	No cut off
I	F	Extra hour working	Finish at dinner time	No impact on evenings	Better use of time	Take lunches	Positive impact	Laundry / housework
J	F	Paranoid	Start much earlier	Annoying for people around me	Work later	Hard to finish	Easy to log back on	

**2. Do you feel you have adequate downtime in the evenings? Is there any difference in this when you work from home and when you work at the office?**

Interview	Gender						
A	F	No	No difference	Emails to be checked in evenings	Easier to switch off at home		
B	F	More time when at home	No commute time				
C	F	Hard to switch off at home	Kids help	Infringe on home life	Work situations become associated with home	More likely to log back on when at home	
D	F	Hard to switch off at home	Continue working into the evening				
E	M	Work longer hours at home	Better downtime after office	Encroach on home life	No physical / mental cut off	Commute helps with cut off	
F	M	Not too different	Home for dinner	Work from home on office evenings	Feel have done enough on home days		
G	F	Harder to switch off	Left office - easier to switch off	Thinking of things to do next day (wfh)	Walking past home office - trigger		
H	F	Yes	Disciplined in shutting off at home	Tendency to work longer at home	You can see laptop	Temptation to go back	Better downtime when work at office
I	F	Late home when at office	Eat separately from partner	Working from home - eat together	Less likely to log back on (wfh)	Finish office work in evenings	Less productive day in office
J	F	No	Emails to check	More diligent when work from home	More paranoid	Want to be seen to be working later	

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