WORKING HARD OR HARDLY WORKING?

A STUDY OF IRISH EMPLOYEES TELEWORKING EXPERIENCES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Claire McCallion

Master of Arts in Human Resource Management

School of Business

National College of Ireland

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Name: Claire McCallion

Student Number: x19140266

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore and investigate the experiences of teleworkers in Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to gain a significant insight into this ongoing experience, specific aspects of E-Work Life Balance, Productivity and Organisational Support were examined.

This research adopted a quantitative approach and involved administering an online questionnaire to 224 participants. Convenience and snowball approach were adopted when distributing the survey, with the researcher advertising it on various online social media platforms. The data collected from the survey was analysed on SPSS and Cronbach's alpha testing and linear regression analyses were conducted. These tests were applied to confirm reliability and test the hypothesis.

The main findings of the research were that organisational support had a positive influence on E-Work Life Balance, both Organisational Support and E-Work Life Balance positively impacted on Productivity and finally that having caring responsibilities for children or elderly people did not impact on the Productivity of our sample. No significant results were identified when these areas were reviewed with a focus on gender differences. However, there were significant differences when survey participants were asked on their preferences of remote working in a post pandemic environment. Females reported wanting a higher frequency of remote work post pandemic that their male counterparts.

This study will have implications for both employers and government legislative officials as it is evident that a significant number of employees do not wish to return to normal office based working arrangements post the Covid-19 pandemic. It is critical that employers prepare for this in advance and that governmental bodies begin to support employers to make this change. This research also adds to the existing body of research on this topic with a specific focus on the Irish employee experience during Covid-19 and supports the existing data on this topic.

Keywords: Covid-19, Ireland, Productivity, Organisational Support, Work Life Balance, Human Resources

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1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic is one of the most disruptive events to occur in recent times, with the World Health Organisation declaring the outbreak a pandemic in March 2020. The implications of the virus have been cataclysmic and far reaching, with no organisation, country or person escaping its impact. Government ordered lockdowns resulted in organisations and businesses globally having to enact teleworking protocols, in accordance with recommendations from the World Health Organisation (2020) to ensure business continuity and the safety of their staff. This has resulted in millions of employees having to quickly adapt to teleworking. The enforced situation of teleworking quickly resulted in an unprecedented encroachment of work into an employee's home life with an overlap of private time and work commitments. Many have begun to recognise that this elongated teleworking experience may have long lasting impacts on employees globally (Baert, et al., 2020) (Matli, 2020) (Tavares, et al., 2020) (Zhang, et al., 2020).

This study will aim to answer the research question of 'How has teleworking during the Covid-19 pandemic impacted Irish employees work life balance and productivity?".

This study seeks to analyse the experiences of teleworkers workers in Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic and assess how their work life balance, productivity and level of organisational support has been impacted.

Ireland had at one point during the Covid-19 crisis the highest rate of teleworking in Europe (Eurofound, 2020). Therefore, it is clear that this topic is one that deserves and requires study and research. Whilst there are a number of studies examining the impacts on teleworkers working remotely during the pandemic that will be discussed in this report, there is a significant lack of understanding the situation from an Irish context.

Teleworking, which throughout the literature is interchangeably referred to as ‘working from home’, ‘remote working’, ‘home based teleworking’, ‘e-working’, ‘agile working’ and ‘telecommuting’ generally refers to the practice of working flexibly outside of the employers premises through the use of technology solutions on a regular basis (Eurofound and the International Labour Office, 2017) (Welz & Wolf, 2010). Whilst the practice of teleworking has existed in theory since the early 1970’s with the advances in ICT, it has gained increased prominence in the field of Human Resources as workplace technologies continue to advance.

The area of teleworking, along with its positives and negatives, has long been popular topics, with researchers examining their influence on employees globally. The literature is not consistent in agreeing the impacts of teleworking on employees. It has been argued that teleworking is a work arrangement that can enhance an employee’s work life balance (Kelliher, et al., 2018) but also that it can lead to increased work intensification which would negatively impact one’s work life balance (Kelliher & Anderson, 2008).

The impact of teleworking on an employee cannot be investigated without taking into consideration work life balance. There is agreement in current literature that having a well-balanced relationship between work and home life is crucial for the success of an employee. Much of the current literature on Work Life Balance agrees that the lack of balance between ones work life, family and personal life is a main source of conflict for employees (Emslie & Hunt, 2009) (Gálvez, et al., 2011) (Gragnano, et al., 2020). This research will analyse the impact that teleworking during the Covid-19 pandemic has had on individual employees Work Life Balance.

The research will be undertaken with a non-experimental quantitative approach. In order to gain as wide of a perspective as possible of experiences during the pandemic, this study will

utilise the research instrument of a quantitative online survey. It will include elements of the National Survey conducted by McCarthy, et al., (2020) as well as the E-Work Life Balance measurement (Grant, et al., 2019) in addition to demographic information. It is hoped that this will allow us a greater insight into the experiences of Irish employees during this period and add to the literature in this topic.

It is hypothesised that work life balance and organisational support will be positively associated, that productivity will be impacted by organisational support and work life balance and finally that the work life balance of those with caring responsibilities will be impacted. In gathering information relating to demographics this research could also offer insight into how teleworking impacts various groups of society including gender and socio-economic status. The aim is for this research to address various gaps within the literature as well as add to the ongoing research surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. These include the lack of Irish ground research, the lack of studies utilising the E-Work Life Balance scale (Grant, et al., 2019). This study will also have implications for both employers and government policy makers as Irish employees are requesting the right to work remotely (Jacobs, 2021).

The case for an Irish perspective

There is such a significant lack of detailed data in Ireland, regarding the attitudes towards remote working, that the Government commissioned a Remote Work in Ireland Employee Survey at the end of 2019 (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 2019). As part of this, the Central Statistics Office in Ireland agreed to include a question measuring the frequency of teleworking in the upcoming 2021 National Census and included it in is 2020 Pilot Survey.

Interestingly, the uptake of teleworking in 2019 across Europe remained at 11% (Fana, et al., 2020) whilst the 2020 Census pilot survey undertaken by the Irish Central Statistics Office

reported 18% of respondents teleworked (Central Statistics Office, 2019). This pilot survey also found that remote working was a common arrangement across all sectors surveyed. During the Covid-19 pandemic, it was found that of those surveyed in Ireland, 53.4% worked exclusively from home in comparison to the average EU 27 of 44.6% (Eurofound, 2020) (Eurofound, 2020). Therefore, it is clear that this area of research with a focus on Irish Employees is worthy of research.

Structure of the study

This research is divided into seven separate chapters. They are are as follows:

Chapter 1 - Introduction

In this section, the motivation behind his research is outlined and the case is made as to why it is needed in the context of the Irish experience.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This chapter consists of a review of the current literature and concepts surrounding teleworking. It provides a broad base in which the research is centred offering definitions to assist the study. Further to this, is also examines gaps and shortcomings in the body of research.

Chapter 3- Research Question and Aims

In this chapter the purpose and aims of the dissertation are defined. The hypothesis for this research is outlined in detail.

Chapter 4 – Methodology

Included in this chapter is the detailed justification for this research methodology and consists of an in-depth discussion into the various aspects of conducting this research.

Chapter 5 – Analysis and Findings

The findings of the research are presented in this chapter, in full. The hypotheses are tested, and results are shared.

Chapter 6 – Discussion

In this chapter the findings and limitations of the study and discussed in depth.

Chapter 7 Conclusion and Recommendations

This concluding chapter of the study presents a summary of the current field of study in additional to areas of concern for future research. Financial and Resource implications are also discussed.

2. Literature Review

COVID-19 has placed a new focus on the employee experience of teleworking. As the situation is constantly developing, the literature being published on the topic is evolving and learning from its predecessors. It is however essential, when examining this area during the pandemic, that one has a firm grip as to the field of research pre-Covid-19. It is crucial that data gathered during the pandemic is not assessed in a 'bubble' but reviewed under the wider scope of the body of research. Research on telework has been multidisciplinary, addressing concerns ranging from business continuation, management, IT systems, environmental impacts, and work life balance.

The literature is generally in agreement when it comes to defining teleworking. The 2002 European Framework Agreement on Telework defined telework as "a form of organising and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employer's premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis (European Union, 2002) (Commission Of The European Communities, 2008). This practical definition echoes that defined earlier from theorists in the field. However, in the current situation where Covid-19 has resulted in many workers in Ireland being forced to telework, this definition needs to be reviewed. The nearest comparable event to the current pandemic is that of a natural disaster. In the forced teleworking situation, it is important to be aware that assumptions that:

"the voluntary nature of home based teleworking for workers, adequate planning, supportive policy and resources, and appropriate management practices cannot be presumed to exist" (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015). It is not only simply a way of working but is now a new organisational form concerned with ensuring business continuation and survival (Mahler, 2012).

Teleworking as a form of flexible working, is often heralded as a solution to many problems faced by employers including employee commitment, retention and a tool that can be used to bolster performance and work life balance. This chapter will examine the research in these areas in detail.

For the purposes of examining the literature in this field, this chapter shall review the subject under a number of main areas in order to establish a firm foundation for our research.

The history of remote working in Ireland

Whilst COVID-19 firmly thrust the practice of remote working on to the majority of Irish working citizens, there has been a growing movement within the State to bring the practice into regular use. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in late 2019, launched a research paper on the practice of remote work in Ireland. The document whilst proclaiming the positives around remote working, highlighted that there is a lack of reliable data around the remote working practices of Irish employees. As a result of the research paper, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment launched its 'Making Remote Work - National Remote Work Strategy' (2021). This strategy outlines three pillars upon which it is built. Namely, creating a conducive environment, developing and leveraging remote work infrastructure and building a policy and guidance framework around remote work all with an overarching objective of ensuring that remote work is a permanent feature in the Irish workplace. The government has also committed to mandating that 20% of public sector employees should be remote working by the end of 2021.

One of the earliest mentions of teleworking one can find in an Irish context is a mention of it in the Irish Times in 1996 entitled 'Death of the Office'. Cunningham, (1996) attempted to unravel the new American theory of teleworking for Irish audiences. He explained that it would

result in work being moved to the workers, rather than the other way around. His article included comments from prominent real estate advisors who reassured readers and assumedly Landlords that telecommuting had not yet made a noticeable impact in Ireland. It is interesting and noteworthy that academics quoted within Cunningham's article, refers to the benefits remote working could have on rural Ireland and issues surrounding internet accessibility. It is notable that the Government in 1998 established The National Advisory Council on Teleworking which included experts from in telecommunications and IT which went on to produce several reports, codes of practice and a report entitled *New Ways of Living and Working: Teleworking in Ireland* which formed the basis on future reports in the field.

At the turn of the millennium the Government committed to developing Ireland as a "telework friendly" location (Department Of The Taoiseach, 2000). However, it is important to note that the aims in the 2000 document are still evident in the Governments 2021 strategy (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment , 2021). Despite Ireland having a long-documented history of espousing the benefits of remote working, it is telling that it has taken over 20 years for legislation to be introduced. The Covid-19 pandemic has compelled the Irish Government to expand its views on teleworking as not only are employers requiring guidance, but employees are demanding it.

Teleworking during a global pandemic

It is important when discussing the merits and weaknesses of teleworking, it is crucial that consideration is given to the global circumstances in which this study is based. Covid-19 has resulted in Irish employees overnight having to begin working remotely in their homes. Despite this being the most catastrophic event in living memory, there is precedence. Various national disasters have resulted in employees being required to work remotely within a very short time

frame. There have been a number of studies conducted following such scenarios and all have discussed the merit of teleworking as a business continuity procedure (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2013) (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015) (Gill, 2006) (Savage, 2002) (Sturgeon, 1996). One such event occurred in 2011, when a devastating earthquake struct Christchurch New Zealand resulting in the deaths of many citizens as well as significant loss of work sites and infrastructure. Research found that whilst employees had mixed experiences working remotely, the majority stated a strong desire, upon return to the work site, of a hybrid of flexible working arrangements going forward within the organisation (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2013). The research collected data on the nature of the dwelling the employee was working from along with if they had caring responsibilities. Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson also found that an employee's experiences of teleworking during the crisis were in part shaped by their level within the organisation, living circumstances and caring responsibilities. Research following the catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina shown that depression and stress for those exposed were well above baseline for more than a year after the event (Obradovich, et al., 2018). It is clear that employers will have to deal with long lasting effects of the pandemic on their workforce far longer than the pandemic itself.

It is important to acknowledge that the above scenarios were in post-disaster environments whereas the current Covid-19 situation is ongoing. Although, they were disasters that resulted in employees having to deal with business continuity and unprecedented levels of remote working. They provide an intriguing body of research upon which to build our study on the current ongoing situation.

For many employees, in a pre-Covid-19 world, if you wanted to work remotely you could request this from your employer and you would have the opportunity to arrange appropriate IT equipment, office furniture etc. However, due to the unseen nature of Covid-19, people had to adapt their homes to telework spaces very quickly.

Adapting work for a modern workforce

With the increased feminisation and globalisation of the workforce it has been essential for employers to modernise themselves to survive in the new environment. Organisational adaption theory theorises that employers are forced by their workforce to modify their practices to match the demographic of their workforce thus creating a more equal workforce (Goodstein, 1994) (Ingram & Simons, 1995). Women have been seen to statistical benefit from teleworking as it allows a balance between home commitments and work, as women in certain circumstances remain the main caregiver in homes (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020).

However, in the current climate of Covid-19 it is possible that women feel under greater strain and pressure and thus loose the benefits previously gained from remote working (Deloitte, 2020). Covid-19 has shown a global pattern of disproportionately affecting female employees by making up 39% of global employment but accounting for over 50% of overall job losses (Madgavkar, et al., 2020). Parents with children are consistently regarded as those who both need and benefit the most from work-life balance initiatives. The pandemic has negatively impacted their work life balance with a high proportion reporting that they were struggling to balance their home and work responsibilities (Eurofound, 2020). The question must be asked then has this effect replicated in an Irish context? These employees with caring responsibilities for children have also had to manage and deal with the added pressures of remote schooling during the pandemic (Department of Education, 2020) and may have lost access to benefits that may have been offered by their employer.

Despite the evidence that embraces the positive aspects of introducing teleworking procedures, Irish employers have been slow to embrace the change. There are a number of documented concerns with regards to remote working and it is crucial to not ignore these.

One of which is career progression. As often it is the connections that you make within an office environment that can lead to promotions or added responsibilities, losing this may be extremely concerning for teleworkers (Mann & Holdsworth, 2003). Adding this stress, on top of the volatile employment situation during the pandemic which saw Ireland having its largest monthly increase in unemployment since the foundation of the state, could have negatively influenced one's experience (Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, 2020). Recent studies have even suggested that women face long-term consequences due to utilising flexible working practices in the form of being overlooked promotion and even reduced earnings (Collins, et al., 2020).

Teleworking as a Flexible Working Solution

Flexible working is an all-encompassing term for a variety of working arrangements that include an element of flexibility (CIPD, 2021). Such arrangements can include part time working, flexitime, job sharing, career breaks, zero hours contracts and possibly the one which is most common - teleworking. The idea of telework was born out of the oil crisis in America in the mid-1970's, but the concept of working from one's home thus not travelling to an office, was seen as a solution to not only to this crisis, but a variety of individual, social, and organisational problems (Gálvez, et al., 2011). It was given as a solution to issues such as traffic in cities, allowing disabled persons the ability to work, reduction in employment costs and improvements in quality of life (Bailey & Kurland, 2002).

Since its introduction and application, organisations have seen that by having and promoting flexible working practices within their organisations, they gain a competitive edge. This is due to them being able to tap into a wider recruitment pool for new employees (de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011) (ManpowerGroup Solutions, 2017). The introduction and facilitation of various flexible working practices such as teleworking have also been shown to help and encourage

retention of skilled employees who would otherwise have left, and their specific knowledge would have been lost to the organisation (Choi, 2020).

Despite the abundance of research into the benefits and negatives of remote working, it was not until 2019 that a measurable tool was developed in order to assess the quality and complexity of an employee's remote e-working experience. The E-Work Life Scale developed by Grant, et al. (2019) measures the remote e-working experience under four main areas that they have identified as being crucial elements of achieving e-work life balance: Job Effectiveness, Relationship with the Organisation, E-well-being and work life balance. This scale was chosen for inclusion in this research as it was the most recent and appropriate scale to assess work life balance whilst an employee is remote working and reported itself to be a valid scale with high reliability.

The scale itself involves asking a number of questions in order to gain an insight into self-reported levels which in turn take into consideration Job Effectiveness, Relationship with the Organisation, E-well-being and work life balance. These theoretically relevant aspects, enable organisations to provide a scale in which employees can self-assess their experience of working remotely. This scale was chosen in order to determine how Irish employees are reporting their current work life balance during the pandemic. A review of one of the national newspapers shows that in the Irish Times since the 27th of March 2020, the date of Ireland's first lockdown, to the date of writing (April 2021), work-life balance was mentioned 120 times in the newspaper and in their online website it was mentioned 1,162 times. Therefore, it can be argued that Irish employees are more aware than ever of the implications work is having on their work-life balance. Thus, it was decided that measuring this aspect of the remote working experience was crucial to our research. As the E-Work Life scale is being utilised in this research, it is important to fully understand how the aspects identified by Grant et al, impact on teleworking.

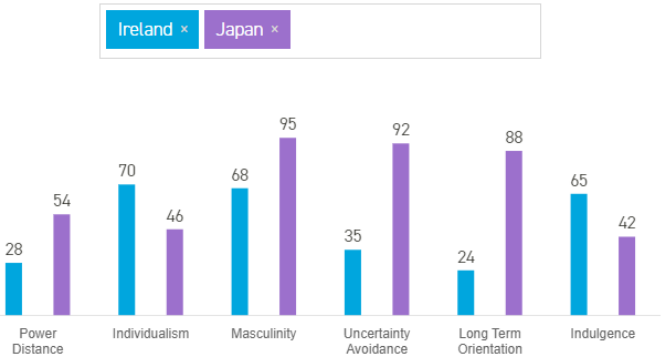
Job Effectiveness & Productivity

Jex, (1998) defined job effectiveness as "the evaluation of the results of an employee's job performance". There are multiple benefits to both employer and employee when both pursue improving job effectiveness whilst working remotely (Felstead & Henseke, 2017) (Wheatley, 2012). These range from greater productivity, reduced absenteeism, greater work life balance and a higher level of commitment from employees (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021). In order for an employee to be effective in their role whilst working remotely, it is crucial that there are clear and achievable expectations established between the employee and line manager (Kowalski & Swanson, 2005). It is crucial that organisations support their people managers with appropriate training and resources in order to give them the required tools to best serve their employees. Ineffective communication with one's organisation is repeatedly found within the literature as a concern for remote workers productivity even before the circumstances of the pandemic (Wang, et al., 2021). As previously stated, the impact of the pandemic cannot be underestimated in every aspect of life including work. It would be remiss not to discuss the mental health implications of working remotely during the pandemic and it is important to recognise that this may also play a role in lowering productivity (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

The research differs on whether or not working from home during the pandemic has influenced positively or negatively on employee productivity. A recent study carried out by McCarthy, et al., (2020) measured productivity of Irish workers who teleworked during the pandemic. This research found that employees generally perceived that their productivity had increased during lockdown. This study has provided a base for the measurement of productivity included in the survey utilised by this research. Contrary to this, a study conducted on Japanese employees found that 82% reported that their productivity was lower while working from home than if they were based in their usual workplace (Morikawa, 2020). It is important that when reviewing

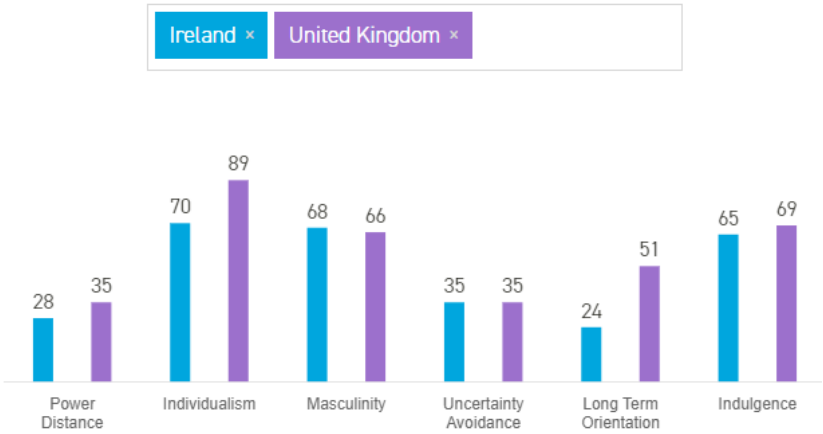
research based in specific countries to be aware of the influence of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory (Hofstede, 1983). Essentially, it theorises that the culture of one's society impacts and effects its members causing them to act and behave in certain ways. The cultural differences between Japan and Ireland are quite significant. Using Hofstede's country comparison tool indicates a series of striking differences across all aspects of the Hofstede cultural dimensions.

Figure 1 - Country Comparison Ireland & Japan *(Hofstede Insights, 2021)*



In comparison to the research conducted in Japan, a study conducted in the UK found that productivity in employees remote working due to the pandemic has had little negative impact on productivity and the majority of respondents reported modest improvements in productivity (CIPD, 2020). When comparing the UK and Ireland on a Hofstede scale, it is evident that levels are more in aligned with each other in comparison to Japan.

Figure 2 - Country Comparison Ireland & The United Kingdom *(Hofstede Insights, 2021)*



This is why the research being conducting in this study will be vital as it will add to the limited body of Irish focused research.

Women have reported lower productivity levels during the pandemic than their male counterparts despite not having productivity issues before the pandemic when working remotely (Feng & Savani, 2020). Having discussed gender issues in the workplace previously in this chapter, it is crucial under the umbrella of the pandemic to review the literature further. In the post pandemic world, were telework will most likely become a permanent aspect of many employees' roles, it is suggested that productivity levels may improve. This may be due to organisations learning from their mistakes during the pandemic and providing essential services and adopting smarter and more effective business practices (OECD, 2020).

Relationship with the Organisation

How an employee perceives their relationship with their line manager and organisation as a whole is a crucial aspect of the experience of working remotely (Grant, et al., 2019). The culture that develops through the effective or ineffective use of technology is one that should be afforded attention by management within an organisation (Kowalski & Swanson, 2005).

Studies have shown that encouraging and maintaining trust between line managers and employees can be an area of difficulty between those working remotely and those in an office

environment (van der Meulen, 2017). Employers have often been reluctant to introduce remote working practices due to this perceived lack of trust in their employees (Dimitrova, 2003). Kniffin, et al., (2021) suggests that that employers may look to introduce new methods of surveillance of their employees while working remotely. However, this may have significant privacy and legal implications that would need to be considered. It is also concerning that increased supervisory procedures and monitoring may damage the employees experience of working remotely (Blumenfeld, et al., 2020) (Lautsch, et al., 2009).

Organisational Support was a key measurable element in recent Irish research undertaken by McCarthy, et al., (2020) . This national survey found that the majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their organisation is providing them with adequate support. As this survey was carried out in October 2020 it would be interesting to see if this trend continues as the pandemic does.

Wellbeing

During the pandemic, the primary goal of mandating teleworking was for the health and wellbeing of employees. Outside of this reactive benefit, teleworking also has multiple benefits for both employees and employers.

There are differing views within the literature as to the impacts teleworking has on an employee's wellbeing (de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011). On the one hand it has been shown to increase one's wellbeing due to the increase in flexibility especially for women and care givers but can also have negative impacts on caregivers due to decreased productivity and lack of career opportunities (Neal & Wagner, 2002). But on the other hand, it has been known to increase one's willingness to overwork and continue working out of contracted hours (Raastrup-Kristensen & Penderson, 2017). However, this may be due to an employee feeling required to overwork due to reciprocate the flexibility allowed by their employers (Chesley,

2009). Pre-covid, it was clear that employees with flexible working arrangements did have lower levels of stress and generally a lower level of emotional exhaustion that their counterparts (Dreike Almer & Kaplan, 2002).

In the current climate of the Covid-19 pandemic, one must take into consideration how outside pressures may impact on employee's well-being. Continuous overwork while teleworking has been shown to lead to employee exhaustion (Sardeshmukh, et al., 2012). This burnout coupled with the outside pressures and strain of the global pandemic could lead to employees experiencing long lasting feelings of exhaustion and a distant attitude toward work (Demerouti, et al., 2010). This could have implications for employers who want to retain their staff and may result in severe retention issues with employees once the pandemic is over. This could not only result in poor health outcomes for employees but also result in losses for organisations who may have to finance health supports, paid time off and possibly hire additional staff. It is therefore clear that there is a genuine business case to be made for not rewarding, encouraging, or expecting continuous employee over-work. If organisations want to show they value their employees they will need to invest in appropriate resources to encourage and promote employee's well-being.

Despite the negative pressures brought about by remote working due to Covid-19, it would be unwise to ignore the impacts of the elimination of a daily commute.

A removal of a daily commute to work has been shown to reduce stress and demands on one's day (Legrain, et al., 2015) (Lucas & Heady, 2002). A study done by Caulfield, (2015) found that workers in the greater Dublin area simply working from home could result in an economic benefit of over €42 million. Therefore, showing that this international trend is replicable in Ireland.

There are also significant benefits to the planet by the uptake in remote working. Ireland has a significantly high dependency on cars as a mode of transportation and air pollution accounts

for over 1,100 deaths ever year (Enviromental Protection Agency, 2018). The lack of commuters during the pandemic has resulted in a significant increase in air quality in urban areas (Enviromental Protections Agency, 2020). There are limitations to these studies as the pandemic restrictions, at the time of writing, are still active in Ireland and therefore it remains to be seen if the environmental benefits will reflect in people's health.

Work Life Balance

There can be no doubt that during the Covid-19 pandemic, work has had an unprecedented encroachment into employees' homes. A definition of Work Life Balance that is common throughout the literature refers to it as defining the relationship between work/family conflict and work/family facilitation (Brough, et al., 2014). Telework often seen as a solution to lessening the conflicts between one's work life and home life (Kelliher, et al., 2018) and many companies have introduced various schemes and benefits to assist their employees (McCarthy, et al., 2013). Reviews of the literature show that many organisations have made calculated and crucial changes in their business plans to ensure and promote a healthy work life balance for their employees. These are not done completely for the benefit of the employee but are regarded as a strategic strategy to retain and attract talent (Gálvez, et al., 2020) (Dilmaghani & Tabvuma, 2019).

Whilst it is true that theorists agree that teleworking reduces the conflict between work and home life, it has also been shown to result in greater contamination of work life balance (Kelliher & Anderson, 2008). This is due to the encroachment of work into the home environment (Tietze & Musson, 2005). Working remotely is associated with work related fatigue, which then worsens an employee's perceived work life balance which in turn creates a vicious circle for the employee (Palumbo, 2020). This work-related fatigue can damage an employee's ability to manage the delicate balance of the work-life relationship and could result

in them having to take a leave of absence or reduce the quality of their work (Gander, et al., 2010).

Although it is important to not reduce work life balance mainly as a women's issue, the fact remains that the majority of the literature shows that the issue of work life balance is gendered, and differences remain rooted in how men and women tackle conflicts between home and work (Padavic, et al., 2020). However, as society is becoming increasingly diverse it would be beneficial for future studies to broaden the scope and examine single father and families from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

The majority of research into work life balance has been conducted in a environment that working remotely has been chosen by the employee. This research then reflects how this choice impacts on an employee work life balance. However, in the circumstances of Covid-19, Irish employees did not have the benefit of making the choice of remote working. It was mandated for them therefore taking away the perception of choice which forms part of the employee benefit. This psychological aspect of choice has been shown to increase Work life balance, employee motivation and productivity due to the employee wanting the new way of working to succeed (Dubrin, 1991). The research is therefore limited in that it is done primarily on employees voluntarily working from home who as was discussed previously, will for the most part have higher levels of willingness to succeed working remotely. Longitudinal studies should be undertaken in order to further our understanding of how the pandemic has impacted work life balance and should take into consideration working single parents and those from a lower economic pay bracket as this group has been worse affected by the pandemic (Deloitte, 2020).

An element of achieving work life balance that has received attention recently is the Right to Disconnect. The Right to Disconnect is a fairly new area that is beginning to receive attention in the literature and in the public realm, with many governments developing legislation to protect it . The added intrusion of employees work into their homes during the pandemic has led the government to instruct the Workplace Relations Committee to develop a Code of Practice of employers and employees on the Right to Disconnect (Workplace Relations Commission, 2021). This document provides guidance to ensure workers' rights are not diluted when working primarily outside of their usual place of work. Fundamentally ensuring that an employee has a right to disengage from their work and to not engage in work-related communications outside of normal working hours. Therefore, encouraging a positive work life balance.

Employee Engagement

A strong employee engagement is crucial for ensuring organisation commitment, job satisfaction and organisational success (Malinowski & Jia Lim , 2015) (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). Employee engagement is a state in which the employee is committed, enthusiastic and passionate for their work and is regarded at the opposite of burnout (Schaufeli & Bakker , 2004). As this is such a crucial element to successful teleworking, our research will ask people various questions to measure their engagement levels.

Due to the physical separation from managers and co-workers' challenges around communication can arise. These challenges in communication may have adverse impacts on the feedback employees receive as the loss of the casual interactions with managers results in more formal communications (Rice & Gattiker, 2001). This lack of regular feedback has been shown to directly relate to conflict in the workplace resulting in higher reported levels of exhaustion and lower levels of employee engagement (Sardeshmukh, et al., 2012). Mutual

investment relationship is a theory first coined by Tsui, et al (1997) which theorised that the relationship between employee and employer is strengthened when benefits are exchanged. From a telework perspective, this means when an employee works remotely, they may feel the need to work harder, do longer hours and feel pressured to dispel the feeling of possible distrust that they are actually working whilst not in the office.

How then do organisations manage this delicate balance between exhaustion and work life balance? Strong levels of employer engagement have been seen to have a considerable impact on employee's attitudes to work which as a result lowered their perception of work-related fatigue (Zheng, et al., 2015) (Kim, et al., 2018).

Considerations

Whilst is it evident that the business gains and performance outcomes are a positive aspect of teleworking, it is important not to ignore possible social costs that may come about because of teleworking. Especially in the elongated time of Covid-19. Teleworking, especially during the pandemic has been an ambiguous time for many people, with companies having to establish polices within a matter of days. Many have never teleworked before and as such do not have the perceived benefit of choice.

Some of the potential side-effects of teleworking include isolation, both professionally and personally and with the added isolation of the pandemic, could increase one's negative experience of teleworking (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015).

Despite the agreed benefits of teleworking on employees there are also benefits to employers. Having teleworking as an option can act as a point of difference when trying to attract new talent in addition to simply reducing simple costs of having an employee permanently in an office (Daniels, et al., 2001)

It is important to note, that all of the literature surrounding Covid-19 has only estimated projections on how the world of work will develop following the pandemic. An element of this research will be to question if employees wish to revert to the pre-pandemic office environment. It is clear that organisations will have to forward plan towards a safe return to an office environment and how they will manage employees' expectations.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has created huge challenges for Human Resources Departments globally. Overnight organisations have had to establish working from home protocols and ensure business continuity. People managers, who have never managed employees teleworking, are having to telework themselves and quickly adapt. Once personal boundaries of people's homes have now become their offices, their childcare and schools. It is logical to assume that there will be multiple issues arising from this unforeseen situation, but with over 37% of job roles being able to be performed entirely from home, organisations will have to realise that teleworking will form a integral part of the future of work. It is a solution organisations should invest effort in, especially due to the necessity now of social distancing in the workplace (Dingel & Neiman, 2020).

It is important to acknowledge that the bulk of the current research in this area does not take into consideration the new environmental challenges of mandated teleworking and how an employee's work life balance has been impacted. Employees are the one unique advantage that organisations can have and therefore it is crucial that organisations find and implement policies and practices which will, in turn, encourage and compel workers to provide a higher job performance.

A systematic understanding of how the Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to feelings on teleworking is still lacking. There has been little quantitative analysis of employee's

experiences and particularly in an Irish context. It is therefore crucial that the benefits and disadvantages of this situation are assessed as soon as possible.

3. Chapter - Research Question and Aims

This research aims to add to the body of literature of the experiences of teleworkers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Following a review of the existing literature in the previous chapter, it is clear that room exists for further study into the experiences of teleworkers during the Covid-19 pandemic in Ireland. Furthermore, it is evident that Irish employees have long had a vested interest in teleworking before the pandemic and therefore any changes in the field will be greatly impactful. This study aims to critically examine and assess Irish employees' experiences of teleworking during the Covid 19 pandemic. In order to assess this fully, this research will examine the e-work life balance and productivity of employees. It shall also investigate the impact of organisation support and the experiences of those who provide caring responsibilities to children and elders.

The following is the research question that this study will aim to answer:

"How has teleworking during the Covid-19 pandemic impacted Irish employees' e-work life balance and productivity?"

In forming the hypothesis for this study, regard was had to the definition offered by (Saunders, et al., 2016) which defines a hypothesis as a testable statement where there is an association, difference , or relationship between two or more variables. The hypothesis that this study will investigate are -

H1 – To investigate if a positive relationship exists between e-work life balance and organisational support.

H2 – To investigate if organisational support and e-work life balance has a positive impact on productivity.

H3 – To investigate if a statistical difference exists in reported levels of productivity in those with caring responsibilities for adults and children.

Research Aims

The objective of this research is to gain an insight into the experiences of Irish works who have been obliged to work remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The aims of this study are as follows:

- To provide recommendations for how teleworking may be adapted to suit the new circumstances of the pandemic.
- To identify gaps in the current research and offer suggestions for further research following study of the data.
- To examine any trends that appear in the data.
- To find and highlight areas that agree and disagree with the current literature.

In gathering information relating to demographics this research will also offer insight into how teleworking impacts various groups of society including gender and socio-economic status. This research will aim to address gaps in the current knowledge base that do not include research grounded in an Irish context.

4. Chapter Methodology

Introduction

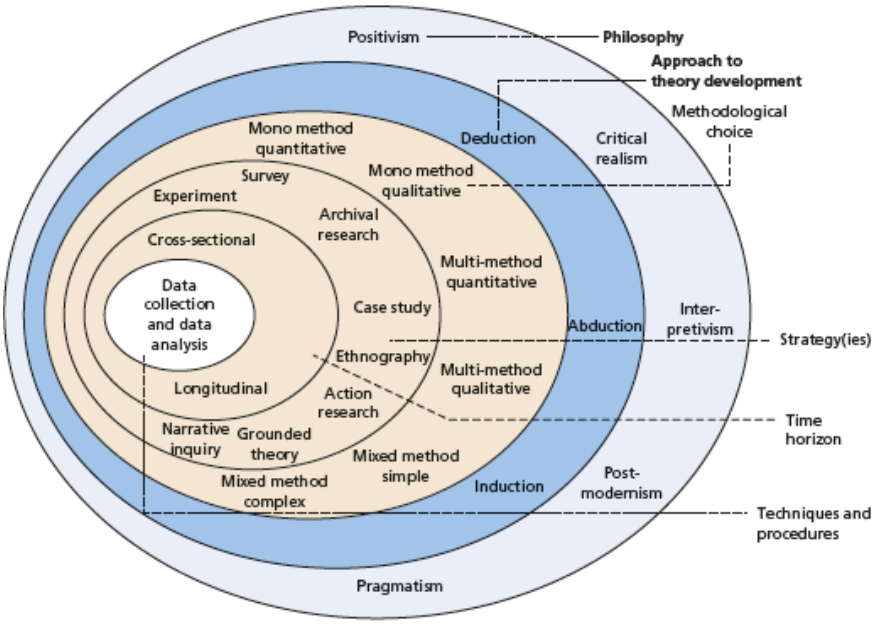
The chapter will discuss the method and approach that was implemented in undertaking this research. This includes an explanation of the research philosophy that was used as a base for the research, the argument for the research method used, the design and implementation for the research and how the data was collected and analysed.

As this research is using an online survey as its primary source of data, this will be discussed in depth with both its negatives and positives considered. Due to the current ongoing nature of the Covid-19 crisis, the research also discusses the practical limitations of the research.

Research Framework

There are a wide variety of ways this research could have been undertaken. In deciding the appropriate method for this research, the researcher had regard to the Research Onion conceptualised by Saunders, et al., (2015). This image (Figure 3) provides a comprehensive way for research to be approached and will be followed in this chapter. Firstly, regard must be had to the research philosophy then the approach to theory development followed by methodological choice, strategy, and time horizon. The final elements being data collection and ultimately data analysis.

Figure 3 - The research 'onion' Source Saunders, et al., (2015)



Research Philosophy

It is important when one is developing knowledge through research that they are aware that they will be influenced by your own beliefs and assumptions. Whilst not a necessarily a negative, it is important to be aware that the researchers own biases may unduly influence the research. The epistemological assumptions, ontological assumptions and axiological assumptions are all influencing factors on the way in which people work (Saunders, et al., 2016). This research adopts the philosophy of critical realism which holds reality as external and independent but not direct accessed through our own observation and knowledge. Bhaskar, (1989) argued that in order to make observations on an event one must be aware of underlying mechanisms and causes in our social structure that influence our day-to-day life. It is only through understanding these structures that one will fully comprehend the actual world we live in. For example, one cannot fully understand the issues faced by women in the workplace without having a firm grasp in the issues surrounding the patriarchal hierarchy in society. Therefore, for the purposes of this research critical realism is the logical choice.

Research Approach

There are three main research approaches that Saunders, et al., (2016) suggests could be undertaken when partaking in research. Namely deduction, abduction, and induction. After reviewing the literature on the topic, it was decided that for our investigation, into the experiences of remote workers in Ireland during the pandemic, a deductive approach would be utilised. As the field of research in the topic of remote working is quite comprehensive, it is theoretically possible for the researcher to deduce a number of hypothesis and subject them to empirical scrutiny through our device of a survey that includes gathering data (Bryman, 2004). As Ireland is still in the midst of the pandemic, the research is having to adapt around it to ensure the health and safety of both the participants and researcher. A number of studies have been done using existing countrywide research and data gathered without the focus being on the remote working experiences, but researchers have adapted the data in order to come to conclusions (Delaporte & Peña, 2020) (Parker, 2020). Others have conducted qualitative interviews (Cook, et al., 2020) (Fana, et al., 2020), but the vast majority have been conducted through online surveys (Carillo, et al., 2020) (Davidescu, et al., 2020) (Zhang, et al., 2020).

Methodological Choice

Upon reviewing the literature and deciding the hypotheses this research will explore, it was decided that a non-experimental quantitative approach was the most appropriate and logical choice for this research. This methodology is crucial to this body of research as it adopts a deductive approach. This choice was made as the research being undertaken does not involve manipulating variables but is only concerned with gathering data on various phenomena to identify if various relationships exist (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). This approach was also carried out by similar studies that have also investigated the experiences of remote workers during the Covid-19 pandemic (Baert, et al., 2020) (McCarthy, et al., 2020). Other studies in

the area of exploring the area of teleworking during the Covid-19 pandemic used a mixed method approach to their investigation. Wang, et al., (2021) conducted both quantitative survey research in conjunction with qualitative interviews with employees teleworking. This method was decided against in the context of this study due to time constraints and availability of subject to interview. A number of other studies conducted thorough critical reviews of already existing literature in the field of remote working during the pandemic (Aguinis, et al., 2020). This method was also decided against as the aim of the research was to add to the field of research rather than review and analysis existing research.

Research Strategy

The research strategy that this research proposes to use is that of an online survey (Fowler, 2009) to get as diverse and broad response as possible (Callegaro, et al., 2015). Due to the restrictions in the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, this is the safest and most feasible way in which to reach as wide of a population sample as possible. Utilising a survey to collect our quantitative data, will also allow the researcher to analysis and investigate relationships using descriptive and inferential statistics (Saunders, et al., 2016).

Although a survey was found to be the most suitable tool for this body of research, it is important that when it is utilised to be aware of its strengths and weakness.

The use of online surveying has many benefits especially during Covid-19, as it allows for more expansive data as it can reach people outside of the researcher's social circle. Although there are risks with online surveys in that they may exclude members of the population without internet access, however teleworkers who are the subject of the survey, must by their definition have access to the internet. So that issue is of much less concern in this research.

Data Collection & Questionnaire Design

This study used a quantitative methodological approach utilising a questionnaire as the primary instrument for gathering data. The survey comprised of closed questions with multiple choice answers or a Likert Scale. In designing this survey, the researcher had consideration of various national surveys that have been produced over the pandemic. For the purpose of this research have used elements of the survey produced by McCarthy, et al., (2020). This survey was conducted in the midst of the pandemic its aim was to report experiences of Irish employees working remotely six months into the initial governmental ordered lockdown. While this survey offered interesting insights into the opinions of Irish employees, it did not in tandem utilise any measurable scales in order to attain insight into work life balance.

In order to gain insight into the E-Work Life balance of our participants, this research has used the E-Work Life Scale (Grant, et al., 2019) which is one of the only scales, at the time of writing, that has been shown to offer measurable insight into the experiences of those working remotely. This scale takes into consideration the four main areas of the teleworking experience: job effectiveness/productivity, relationship with one's organisation, work life balance and well-being.

The survey, which is included in Appendix 1, consists of 6 main sections. The first section contains a series of demographic questions in which participants were asked, in addition to standard demographic questions of gender and age, questions regarding their employment and their previous experience of working remotely. There questions were asked in order for the researcher to gain insight as to the participant sample.

The second section focused on work life balance and predominantly consisted of the original E-work Life Scale designed by Grant, et al., (2019). The E-Work Life Scale internally measures organisational trust, work life interference, effectiveness, and flexibility in order to gain a broad understanding of the respondents E-Work Life Balance. This was included as it

functioned as one of the primary data collection devices for our hypotheses. Thirdly the questionnaire included questions used to measure the respondent's productivity. These questions were taken from the survey conducted by McCarthy, et al., (2020). The next two sections were used to question respondents work life balance and to measure organisational support. These questions were also adapted from the research conducted by McCarthy, et al., (2020). Finally, and to conclude the questionnaire, respondents were asked their opinion on continuing to remote work after the pandemic. In order to partake in the survey, the employee needed to be working remotely in Ireland, so in order to ensure this the initial question of the survey asked them to confirm and if they did not work remotely, they were directed to the end of the survey and not included in the final data.

It was decided that the most accessible and accurate way in which to gather the data would be utilising the Google Forms tool and sharing a direct link to the survey there.

Data collection occurred between the 16th of March 2021 until the 4th of April 2021 when the survey was closed. It was presented to the participants with a brief explanation as to the aim of the survey and guaranteed them confidentiality and anonymity of the responses received. A copy of the survey is attached at Appendix 1.

Sampling Method

Due to the limited avenues open to the researcher due to the pandemic, it was decided that the best method in which to get as large a population sample as possible was to engage in self-selection sampling. Ideally, a probability sample would offer increased representation and insight however, it would not be feasible to complete in the current circumstances. This was done by the researcher advertising the online survey on various social media platforms and requesting people share with their friends and colleagues. Therefore, creating a snowball effect to expand data collection (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). This methodology has been used in many

other studies and has provided suitable results for study (Baert, et al., 2020) (Grant, et al., 2019). The use of elements of these surveys will allow us to gain a broad scope of respondent's self-reported views of teleworking during the pandemic and allow us to gain a wider view of their experience.

Time Horizon

This research will be cross sectional meaning that it will only focus on a particular event at a particular time period (Saunders, et al., 2016). It would be extremely interesting and beneficial to the body of research if studies into the experiences of teleworkers during the pandemic was studied in a longitudinal manner however due to the nature of this study, time is restricted (Matli, 2020). However, due to the limitations of this research this was not possible.

Pilot Study

Once the survey questions were finalised, a pilot study was conducted on the survey. Pilot studies are crucial to informing the feasibility and identifying any modifications that may be required in the design of the survey (Ismail, et al., 2017). The pilot study for this research was given to 10 friends and colleagues of the researcher in order to ensure the respondents found the questions structured in clear and understandable manner. Pilot participants were asked to advise if area was lacking representation and their responses were used to confirm the data returned from the responses is measurable.

Feedback was received from the respondents that included certain questions not applying to their circumstances, questions not being structured in a clear matter, repetition on a number of questions and issues with the layout. As a result of the pilot study, a number of sections were unmerged and made into separate questions in order to make them easier to comprehend. Questions such as one on educational attainment was condensed to the main education awards

rather than on a granular level. The researcher also removed 40 questions from the survey as it was found that upon analysing the initial results received, these questions offered little assistance to the research question and had no value to the research being undertaken.

Participants

In order to participate in this study, respondents were required to self-verify that they were working remotely in Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic. These participants were both fulltime and parttime and worked in various in Ireland. Unlike the majority of the literature on remote working, these participants were forced to work remotely due to the Government order lock-down protocol and not through choice. Participants also consisted of individuals with and without caring obligations unlike some studies that solely focus on parents (Kurowska, 2020). The final response rate to the survey was 234 respondents with 10 of those not qualifying to participate as they advised they did not currently work remotely in Ireland. Therefore, leaving us with a sample size of 224 respondents. Of these respondents, 149 (66.5%) identified as female, 73 (32.6%) as male and 2 (0.9%) identified as non-binary. A broad age range was also gathered across the respondents.

Table 1 - Respondents Age Brackets

	Age Bracket	Count	Percent
Valid Values	18 - 30	71	31.7%
	31 - 40	106	47.3%
	41 - 50	37	16.5%
	51 - 60	9	4.0%
	Over 60	1	0.4%
Total		224	100%

Participants also identified as being from a wide range of industries as detailed in the table below –

Table 2 - Respondents Industries

	Value	Count	Percent
Label	Industry		
1	Administrative and support services including travel agents	12	5.4%
2	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	0	0.0%
3	Arts, entertainment and recreation including sport	0	0.0%
4	Construction	6	2.7%
5	Charity	3	1.3%
6	Non-Profit	7	3.1%
7	Education	14	6.3%
8	Financial, banking and insurance activities	45	20.1%
9	Health and social work activities	16	7.1%
10	Hospitality (accommodation, hotels, restaurants and food service)	3	1.3%
11	IT, communication and telecommunications	41	18.3%
12	Manufacturing	2	0.9%
13	Mining and quarrying	0	0.0%
14	Professional, scientific and technical activities including consulting	15	6.7%
15	Public and civil service administration and defence	12	5.4%
16	Real estate activities	31	13.8%
17	Retail and wholesale (clothes, goods, motor etc.)	2	0.9%
18	Transportation, postage, courier and storage	2	0.9%
19	:Utilities (electricity, gas, water supply; sewerage, waste management)	2	0.9%
20	Other	11	4.9%
	Total	**224**	100.00%

Data Analysis Validity and Reliability

Data gathered from this research was converted and input into the statistical tool IBM SPSS (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences) for a comprehensive analysis. The reason for utilising SPSS, is that it was specifically designed to analyse and process large amounts of data (Ozgur, et al., 2015). Using an online survey tool also allows for greater ease in extracting results. As stated, this research used the Google Forms tool which allowed , upon completion, for the responses to be downloaded to an excel file. The data was then transposed by the researcher to the format used by SPSS which resulted in the researcher converting the responses to a recognisable numerical output.

The consistency was then measured on SPSS of the various scales within the results using Cronbach's Alpha which is the most reliable and well-known technique to measure internal consistency in surveys (Hoekstra, et al., 2019).

For the purposes of this research three scales were utilised; The E-Work Life Scale (Grant, et al., 2019) and the productivity and organisational support elements of the National Survey 'Remote Working during Covid-19' conducted by McCarthy, et al., (2020). Each scale was initially analysed using the Cronbach's Alpha to ensure a high level of internal consistency and to allow us to ensure the scale is fit for purpose (Taber, 2018). The E-Work Life Scale when analysed in SPSS returned a Cronbach's Alpha of .810 for the scale.

Table 3- E-Work Life Scale Cronbach's Alpha

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	**N of Items**
.810	**28**

The 8-question measurement of productivity returned a Cronbach's Alpha of .888.

Table 4- Cronbach's Alpha - Productivity Scale

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	**N of Items**
.888	**8**

And the final scale that measured organisational support consisting of 17 questions, returned a Cronbach's Alpha of .925.

Table 5- Cronbach's Alpha Organisational Support Scale

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	**N of Items**
.925	**17**

All of the scales used in this research achieved an acceptable Cronbach's alpha level which should be above 0.7 to ensure an acceptable level of internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

The research will also utilise scatterplot and multiple linear regression analysis to test our hypothesis. These will be discussed in depth in Chapter 6.

Ethical Considerations

Although the use of online surveys with non-members of at-risk populations, is associated with minimal ethical concerns (Fowler, 2009) it is important that all the data retrieved from the respondents is retained in a secure manner and that participants are aware of this. All respondents were advised upon taking the survey that the data gathered was anonymise and that they could stop the survey at any point.

Limitations of The Research Design

As with all research, it is important to acknowledge the limitations and issues encountered. This body of this research was entirely quantitative and did not investigate the issues through detailed interviews which can allow for an insightful and richer understanding of the issues being investigated. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, it is crucial to the body of research to capture the insights of the respondents at the time of the survey. However, due to the long nature of the pandemic, this study was limited in the time of gathering the data. It was not feasible to collect a longitudinal sample pre or post pandemic which would also offer insight into the situation.

Another critical issue that should be considered is survey fatigue. As the survey instrument used for this research was lengthy it is important to recognise that the quality of some of the responses maybe impacted by survey fatigue otherwise known as respondent fatigue. Measures were implemented to address this by not including any open-ended questions and only using closed format questions in order to make responding as convenient as possible (Story, 2019).

By conducting a pilot study which is strongly recommended within the literature, it also allowed us to identify any questions that caused confusion or that participants had trouble with.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that respondents self-reported on all of the variables in this research and therefore could be influenced by their own biases on the topics they were questioned on. However, this has been accounted for in that our internal reliability scales have met the threshold for reporting.

5. Analysis and Findings

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings from the questionnaire and the various tests that were used to analyse the collected data. In order to extract findings from the survey results, multiple linear regression analyses were conducted on the variables in order to test the hypothesis. Our results will comprise of both descriptive and exploratory statistics that were analysed as a result of the survey. An introductory overview will be presented which will consist of demographics, social economic information and living situation. Then this chapter will discuss respondents' responses to work life balance questions and their desire for working remotely after the Covid-19 pandemic. This will be followed by a detailed discussion on the linear regression analysis that was conducted on the data in order test the hypothesis of this research. It shall also show that the methodology as described in the previous chapter, was conducted in full.

Descriptive Statistics

The objectives of this study were to ascertain the experiences of individuals working remotely in Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to examine these experiences, it was decided to examine their experiences focusing on e-work life balance, productivity and organisational support using the E work Life Scale developed by Grant, et al., (2019) and elements of the National Survey conducted by McCarthy, et al., (2020) respectively. Data was also gathered around demographics, working environment and other related factors which will be discussed further in this chapter.

234 individuals responded to the survey from a wide age profile and demographic with 224 ultimately being deemed eligible for entry into this research as they confirmed they worked

remotely in Ireland during the pandemic. The majority of respondents identified as female (66.5%) followed by male (32.6%) and finally non-binary (0.9%).

Table 6 - Demographics

Gender	Options	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Male	73.00	32.59	32.59
	Female	149.00	66.52	99.11
	Non-binary	2.00	0.89	100.00
	Total	**224.00**	**100.00**	
Age	**Options**	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
	18 - 30	71	31.70	31.70
	31 - 40	106	47.32	79.02
	41 - 50	37	16.52	95.54
	51 - 60	9	4.02	99.55
	Over 60	1	0.45	100.00
	Total	**224**	**100**	
Child Caring Responsibilities	**Options**	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
	No	157	70.09	70.09
	Yes	67	29.91	100.00
	Total	**224**	**100.00**	
Elder Care Responsibilities	**Options**	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
	No	206	91.96	91.96
	Yes	18	8.04	100.00
	Total	**224**	**100.00**	

The participants in the study also came from a variety of living arrangements with the majority reporting living in their owned house or apartment alone or with their partner (42.4%) and the majority also reporting that their workspace was a Home Office in their home only used to work (30.8%).

Table 7 - Home Description & Workspace Description

Options	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Live in my owned house or apartment alone or with my partner	95	42.41	42.41
Live in my owned house or apartment and have roommates	23	10.27	52.68
Live in a rented house or apartment alone or with my partner	34	15.18	67.86
Live in a rented house or apartment with roommates	22	9.82	77.68
I live in my family home with parents and/or siblings	48	21.43	99.11
Temporarily staying with a relative or friend	2	0.89	100.00
Total	**224**	**100.00**	
Options	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
A Home Office in my home only used by me solely for work.	69	30.80	30.80
A Home Office in my home used by me and multiple people solely for work	16	7.14	37.95
A shared space in my home only used by me to work	43	19.20	57.14
A shared space in my home used by multiple people to work at the same time	46	20.54	77.68
Your Bedroom	37	16.52	94.20
An external space where you work alone - Granny flat, log cabin etc.	2	0.89	95.09
An external space where you work with multiple people- Granny flat, log cabin etc.	1	0.45	95.54
Other	10	4.46	100.00
Total	**224**	**100.00**	

The respondents in this survey also come from a wide social economic background, as detailed in Table 8, which shows the majority of participants are currently in fulltime employment (94.2%) and have obtained a Master's level of education (53.1%). 71.8% of the participants in the research worked in the private sector with 20.09% working in Financial, banking and insurance activities closely followed by IT, communication, and telecommunications at 18.30%. Our respondents also reported varying levels of length of service in their current organisation with 83% working in their current role for over 1 year, therefore it can be surmised that they had been working with their current company before the pandemic began.

Respondents were also asked questions around their current employment including their level and the size of their organisation. This information is also detailed in Table 8 below.

Table 8 - Socio Economic and Work Descriptors

Education		**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
	Primary education	1	0.45	0.45
	Secondary Education	14	6.25	6.70
	Undergraduate	86	38.39	45.09
	Postgraduate	119	53.13	98.21
	Doctorate (Ph.D.)	4	1.79	100.00
	Total	**224**	**100.00**	
Sector		**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
	Public	63	28.13	28.13
	Private	161	71.88	100.00
	Total	**224**	**100.00**	
Industry		**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
	Administrative and support services including travel agents	12	5.36	5.36
	Construction	6	2.68	8.04
	Charity	3	1.34	9.38
	Non-Profit	7	3.13	12.50
	Education	14	6.25	18.75
	Financial, banking and insurance activities	45	20.09	38.84
	Health and social work activities	16	7.14	45.98
	Hospitality (accommodation, hotels, restaurants and food service)	3	1.34	47.32
	IT, communication and telecommunications	41	18.30	65.63
	Manufacturing	2	0.89	66.52
	Professional, scientific and technical activities including consulting	15	6.70	73.21
	Public and civil service administration and defence	12	5.36	78.57
	Real estate activities	31	13.84	92.41
	Retail and wholesale (clothes, goods, motor etc.)	2	0.89	93.30
	Transportation, postage, courier and storage	2	0.89	94.20
	Utilities (electricity, gas, water supply; sewerage, waste management)	2	0.89	95.09

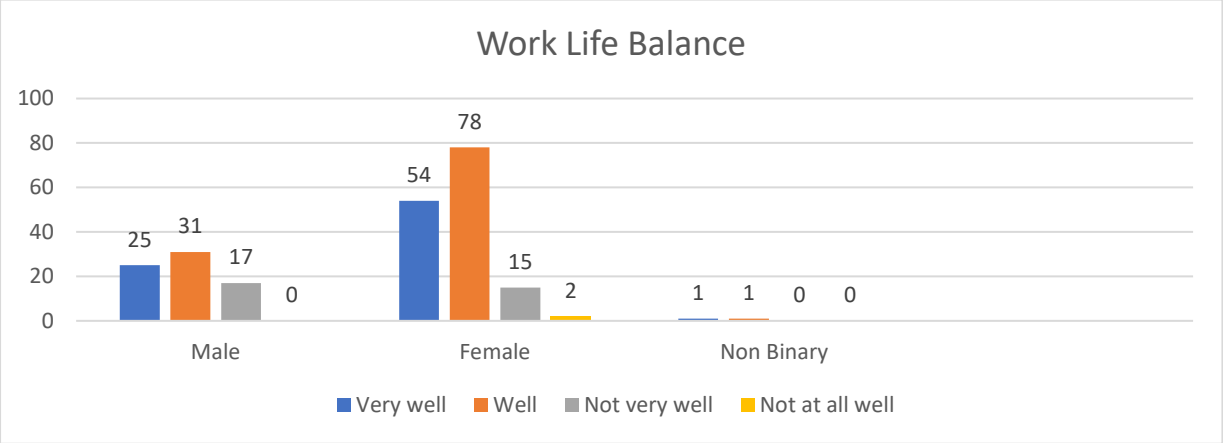
	Other	11	4.91	100.00
	Total	**224**	**100.00**	
Organisation		**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
	Less than 6 months	16	7.14	7.14
	6 months - 1 year	22	9.82	16.96
	1 year - 2 years	33	14.73	31.70
	2 years - 5 years	80	35.71	67.41
	5 - 10 years	42	18.75	86.16
	10+ years	31	13.84	100.00
	Total	**224**	**100.00**	
Worker		**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
	Full-time	211	94.20	94.20
	Part-time	13	5.80	100.00
	Total	**224**	**100.00**	
Level		**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
	Senior Management	12	5.36	5.36
	Middle Management	41	18.30	23.66
	Junior Management	36	16.07	39.73
	Administrative Staff	43	19.20	58.93
	Support Staff	9	4.02	62.95
	Graduate	17	7.59	70.54
	Professional	50	22.32	92.86
	Skilled Labourer	1	0.45	93.30
	Consultant	5	2.23	95.54
	Temporary Employee	1	0.45	95.98
	Researcher	4	1.79	97.77
	Self-employed	3	1.34	99.11
	Other	2	0.89	100.00
	Total	**224**	**100.00**	
Size of Organisation		**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
	More than 250 employees	121	54.02	54.02
	250 employees or less	67	29.91	83.93
	50 employees or less	25	11.16	95.09
	10 employees or less	11	4.91	100.00
	Total	**224**	**100.00**	

Our survey instrument also contained other questions in areas that are quite current in the research. As the area of the Right to Disconnect is quite topical at the moment respondents were asked if their organisation gave them the right to disconnect outside of working hours. 75.1% of respondents either Strongly Agreed or Agreed that their organisation gave them the

right to disconnect. This question was included as a factor of the Organisation Support Scale taken from McCarthy, et al., (2020)

In addition to the E-Work Life balance scale that was used in this study, participants were asked various questions around work life balance in order to gain an understanding of the sample. When asked if they were contacted by their organisation out of hours 45.5% of respondents stated Never or Less Often with 19.2% stating they were contacted every day by their organisation outside of their scheduled work hours. A generic Work Life balance question was posed in addition to the scale which asked 'In general, do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work? Interestingly, as can be seen in Figure 4, the majority of respondents reported that their work fitted Very Well or Well.

Figure 4- Work Life Balance



To conclude our research, participants were asked if they would like to continue working remotely after the pandemic. 92.4% of respondents advised they would like to work remotely in some capacity, after the Covid-19 pandemic. 79.2% of female respondents reported that they wished to work remotely daily or several times a week after the pandemic. However, only 57.5% of male respondents wished to do the same. This is in comparison to the 54.9% of our sample who before the pandemic had never worked remotely.

Table 9 - Crosstab Analysis - Working Remotely after the pandemic

Gender	Options	Yes Daily	Yes Several times a week	Yes Several times a month	Yes Occasionally	No, I do not want to work remotely	Total
Male	Count	12	30	5	16	10	73
	% within Gender	16.4%	41.1%	6.8%	21.9%	13.7%	100.0%
	% of option	26.1%	26.1%	29.4%	55.2%	58.8%	32.6%
	% of Total	5.4%	13.4%	2.2%	7.1%	4.5%	32.6%
Female	Count	34	84	12	12	7	149
	% within Gender	22.8%	56.4%	8.1%	8.1%	4.7%	100.0%
	% of option	73.9%	73.0%	70.6%	41.4%	41.2%	66.5%
	% of Total	15.2%	37.5%	5.4%	5.4%	3.1%	66.5%
Non-binary	Count	0	1	0	1	0	2
	% within Gender	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% of option	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	3.4%	0.0%	0.9%
	% of Total	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.9%
Total	Count	46	115	17	29	17	224
	% within Gender	20.5%	51.3%	7.6%	12.9%	7.6%	100.0%
	% of option	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	20.5%	51.3%	7.6%	12.9%	7.6%	100.0%

Table 10 - Survey Question Response - Before the Covid-19 pandemic, did you ever work remotely?

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, did you ever work remotely?		% of total
Never - Didn't have the option to work remotely	104	46.43%
Occasionally	58	25.89%
Several times a month	29	12.95%
Never - The option was there but I didn't want to work remotely	19	8.48%
Several times a week	11	4.91%
Daily	3	1.34%
Grand Total	**224**	**100.00%**

Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted on our 3 hypotheses to ascertain a relationship between them. This analysis is used in order to explore the relationship between a continuous dependent variable and other independent variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). This test is used to explore the relationship between variables and advises how well a set of variables may predict associated outcomes (Pallant, 2016). In order to conduct the regression analysis our three scales were calculated in SPSS to give an individual value which was then used to run our calculations.

Hypothesis 1 - To investigate if a positive relationship exists between e-work life balance and organisational support.

For Hypothesis 1, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was initially calculated to evaluate the relationship between organisational support and E- work life balance variables. As can be seen in Table 11 there was a positive correlation between the variables r = .376, n = 224, p = .000.

Table 11 - Correlation - Hypothesis 1 Organisational

Correlation - Hypothesis 1		Organisational Support	E-Work Life Balance
Organisational Support	Pearson Correlation	1	.376**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	224	224
E-Work Life Balance	Pearson Correlation	.376**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	224	224
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Scatterplots were created to visualise the result of the first hypotheses. Trendlines showing a line of best fit were also added to assist in this analysis. All of these are upward sloping with the exception of the non-binary respondents. A scatterplot was produced mapping all the data, which indicated a positive correlation between the variables (Figure 5). In addition, three further scatterplots were produced to investigate if gender was a differentiator within the data. In Figure 6 and 7, males and females respectively reported that the positive correlation is similar but with the female respondents having a slightly higher level of correlation. In Figure 8, of respondents who identified as non-binary, the trend appears negative. However, due to the low number of respondents this data is not representative.

Figure 5 - Hypothesis 1 - Scatterplot Entire Sample

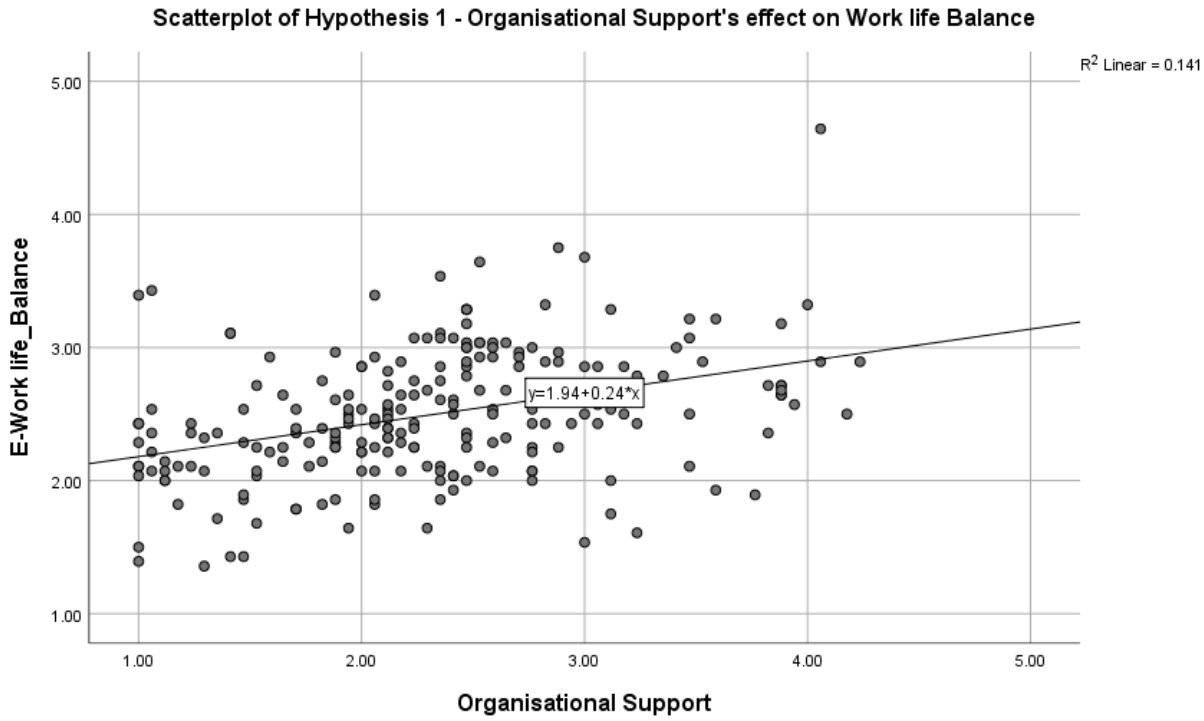


Figure 6 - Hypothesis 1 - Scatterplot Male Sample

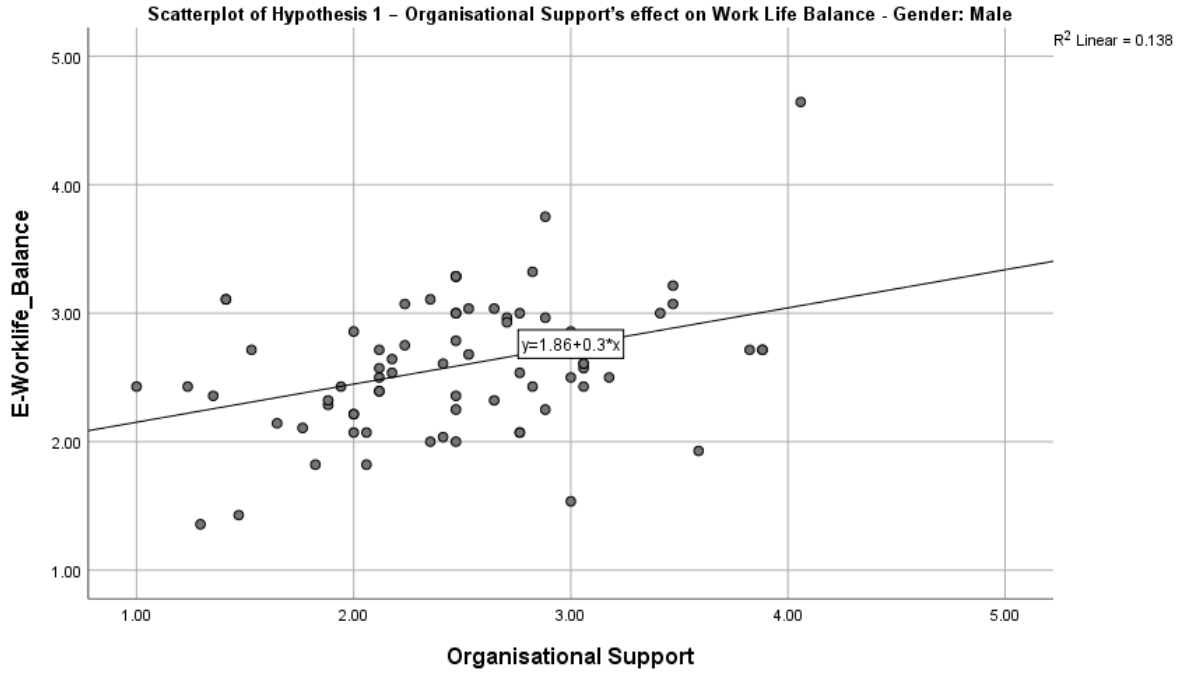


Figure 7 - Hypothesis 1 - Scatterplot Female Sample

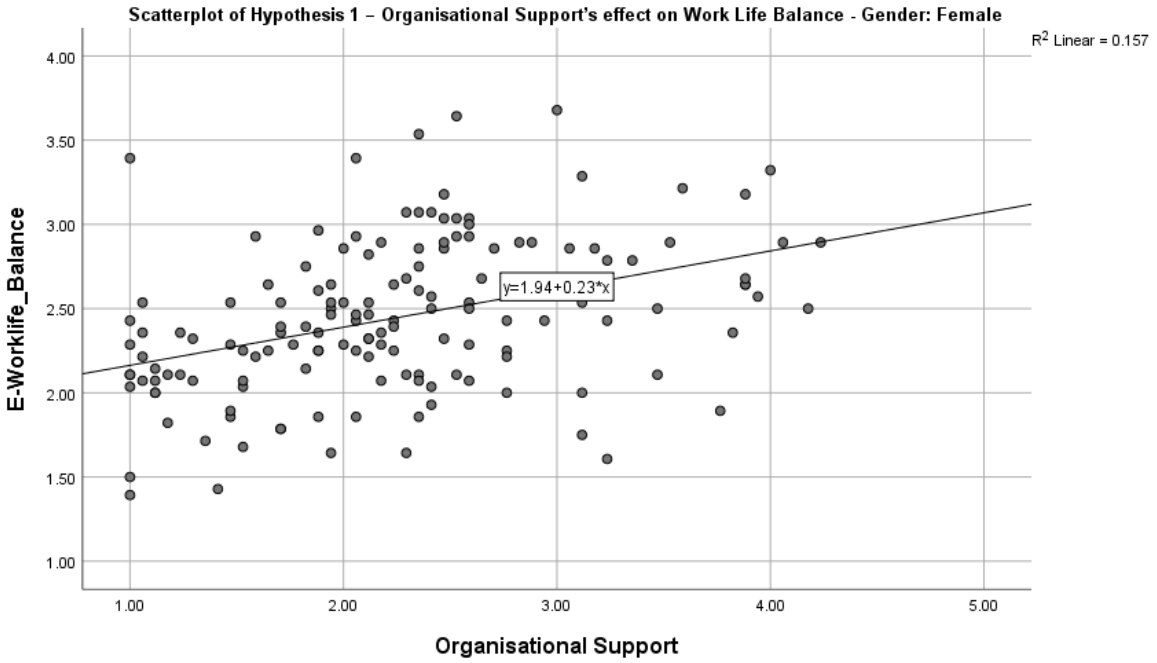
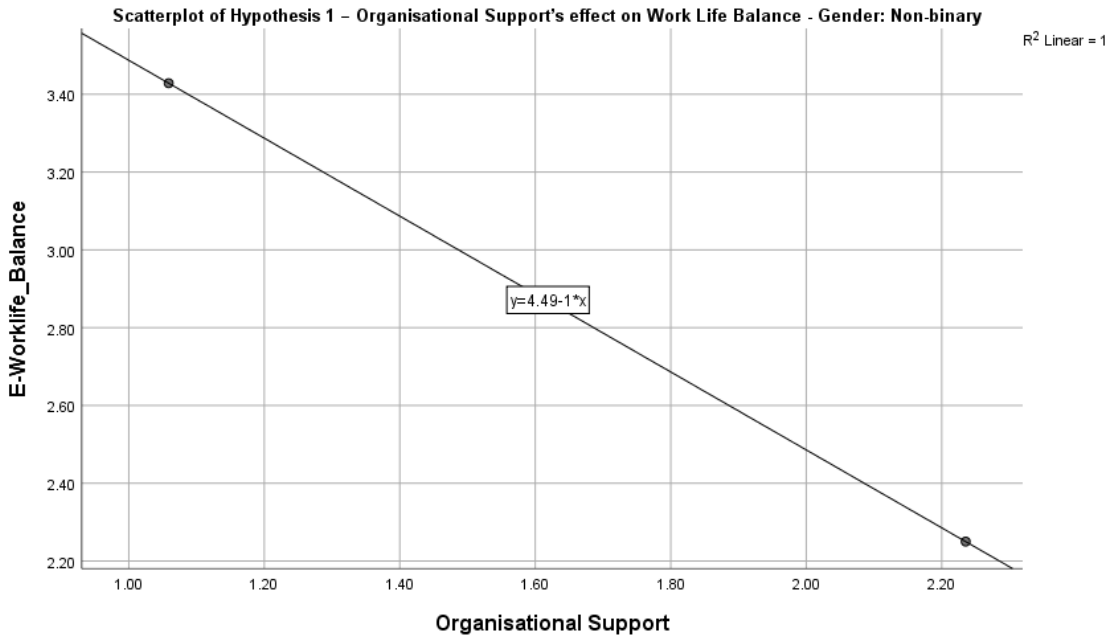


Figure 8- Hypothesis 1 - Scatterplot Non-Binary Sample



A linear regression analysis was also conducted on the variables to confirm the positive correlations identified in the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. For these tests, the dependent variables were work life balance and the independent was organisational support. The result indicated that there was a significant relationship between organisational support and E-work life balance in our sample, F(1,222) = 36.45, P=.000. As the Sig number is less

than 0.05 it can be said that the relationship between organisational support and work life balance is significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 12- Hypothesis 1 Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	.376[a]	.141	.137	.45185
a. Predictors: (Constant), Organisation Support				

The ANOVA test below further advises that the organisational support is a significant predictor of E-Work Life Balance. The results indicated that the model was a significant predictor of E-Work Life balance , F(1,222)=36.445, P<.000.

Table 13- Hypothesis 1 ANOVA

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7.441	1	7.441	36.445	.000[b]
	Residual	45.326	222	.204		
	Total	52.767	223			
a. Dependent Variable: E-Worklife_Balance						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Organisational Support						

The below coefficient analysis indicated how the organisational support variable contributes to our variable of organisational support. Therefore, in this sample a predictive model can be developed that E-Work Life Balance = 1.941 + (.239* Organisational Support). As the Sig is showing .000 it can be confirmed that the model is significant.

Table 14 - Hypothesis 1 Coefficients

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.941	.097		20.099	.000
	Organisational Support	.239	.040	.376	6.037	.000
a. Dependent Variable: E-Worklife_Balance						

Overall, it is clear that there is a significant positive correlation between organisational support and E-work life balance within the sample. Increased organisational support was associated with increased E-work life balance in this sample. These findings are in line with the literature in that organisational support has been shown to positively influence work life balance (Kelliher, et al., 2018). However, due to the recent innovation of the E-Work Life scale (Grant, et al., 2019) that was utilised in this study, there is no data to compare the findings to. This study shall add to the literature on this scale and may act as a reference for future research.

Hypothesis 2 - To investigate if organisational support and e-work life balance has a positive impact on productivity.

In analysing the second hypothesis of this study which was to explore if organisational support and E-work life balance (Independent Variables) has a positive impact on productivity (Dependent Variable), a number of tests were carried out.

Firstly, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was initially calculated to evaluate the relationship between organisational support & E- work life balance and productivity. As can be seen in the tables below there was a positive correlation between the variables r = .609, n = 224, p = .000.

Table 15 - Hypothesis 2 Correlation

Correlation – Hypothesis 2			
		Productivity_ Mean Variable	Organisational support & E- work life balance
Productivity	Pearson Correlation	1	.609**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	224	224
Organisational support & E- work life balance	Pearson Correlation	.609**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	224	224
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Scatterplots were created to view the data and are included in Figure 9. Similarly, to the first hypothesis, lines of best fit have been included to assist in analysis. All of the scatterplots produced for this hypothesis indicated a positive correlation as can be identified by the upward sloping trend. The trendline indicates that males have a higher R^2 value of 0.546 than females who had a value of 0.270. Due to the lack of non-binary participants, it would not be accurate to draw conclusions from this graph.

Figure 9 - Hypothesis 2 Scatterplot Entire Sample

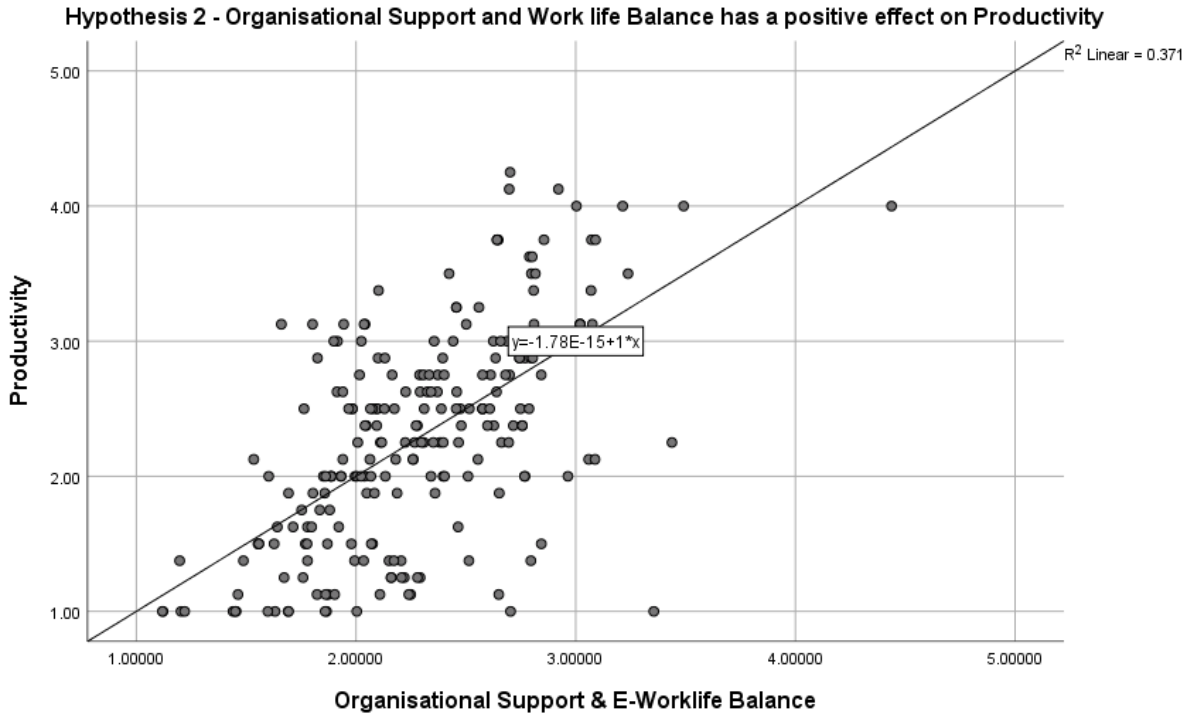


Figure 10 - Hypothesis 2 Scatterplot Male Sample

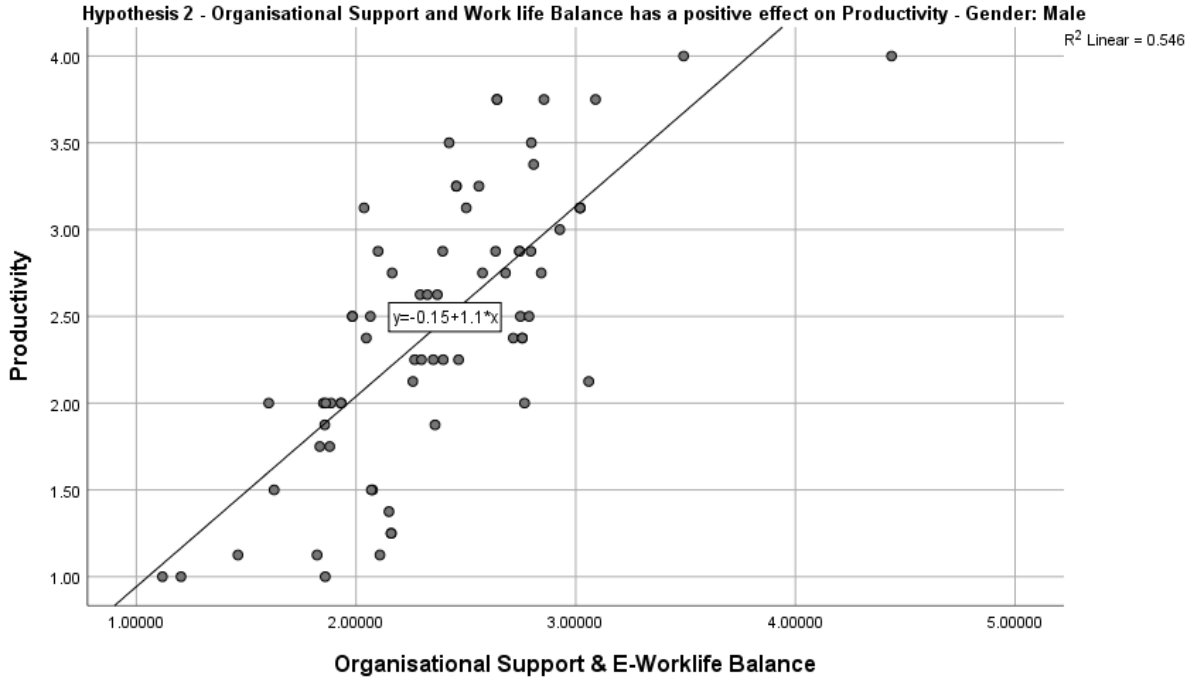


Figure 11 - Hypothesis 2 Scatterplot Female Sample

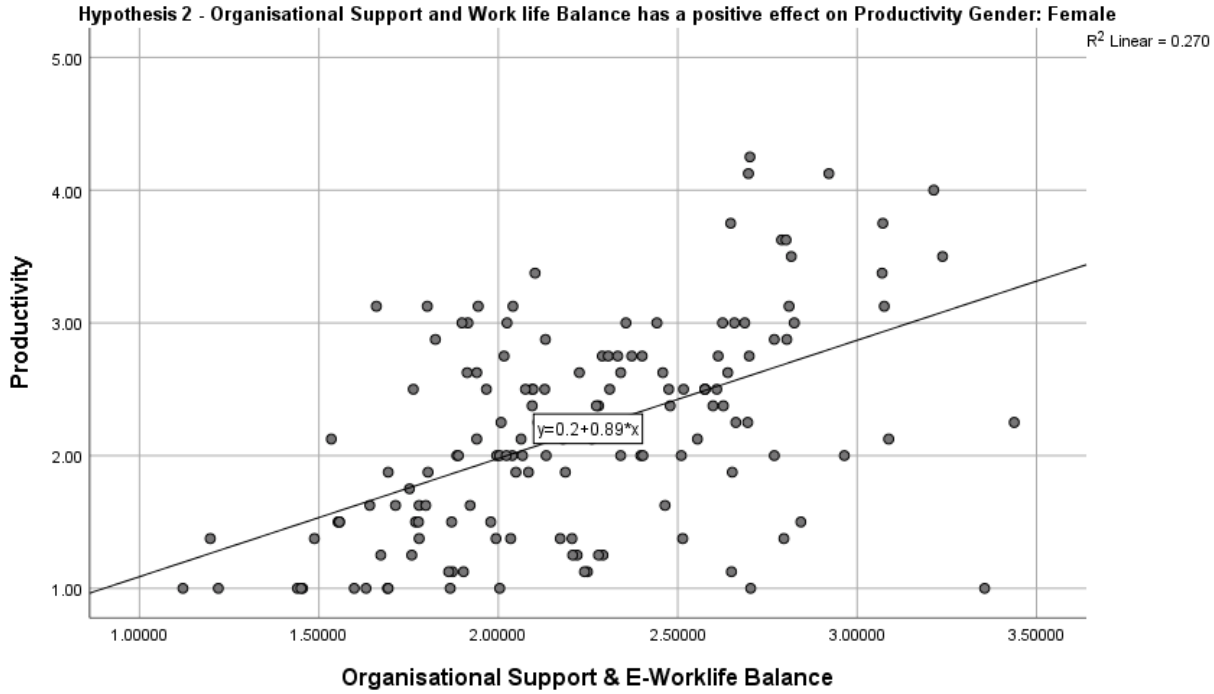
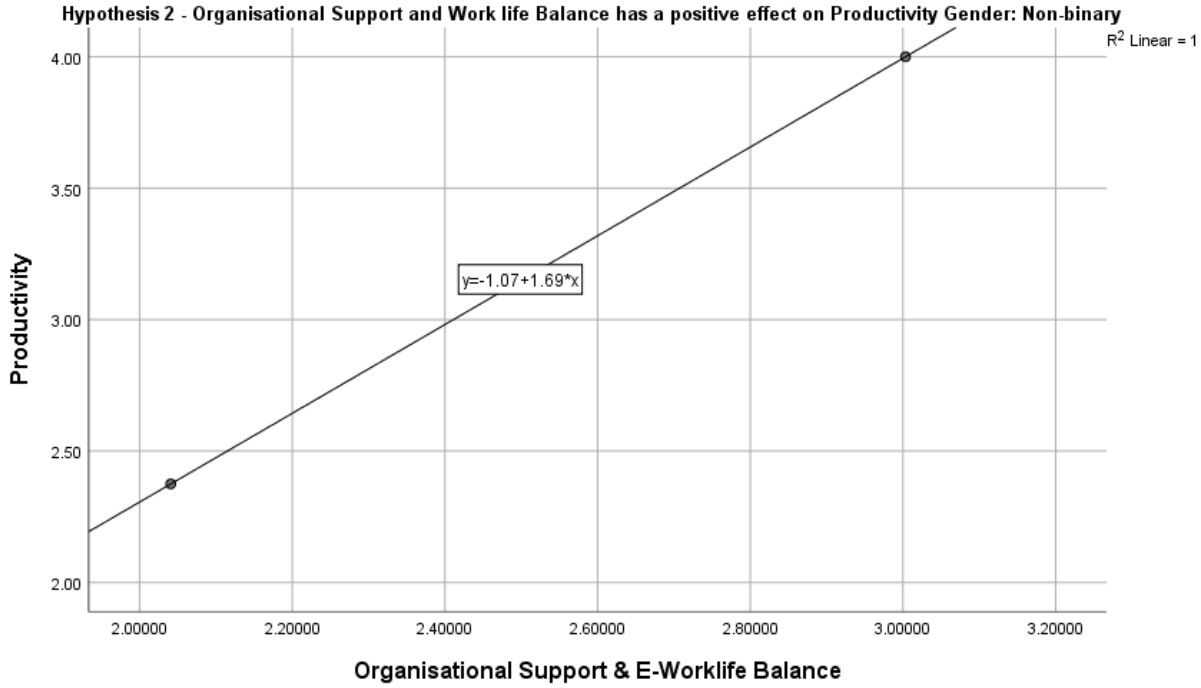


Figure 12 - Hypothesis 2 Scatterplot Non-binary Sample



To further test the relationship as to whether organisational support and e-work life balance impacts on productivity, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The results of the multiple linear regression analysis revealed Organisational Support and E-Work Life Balance to be a statistically significant predictor to the model (p<.000). The analysis advised that an R^2 value of 37.1% was identified in our research sample. The linear regression also showed a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.609 and therefore a significant relationship between Productivity & Organisational Support and E-Work Life Balance in this sample was confirmed (p<.000).

Table 16 - Hypothesis 2 Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	.609[a]	.371	.365	.63392
a. Predictors: (Constant), Organisational Support & E-Work Life Balance				

The ANOVA output in Table 17 adds to the findings in that it confirms the relationship between the variables. The results indicated that the model was a significant predictor of productivity, F(2,221)=65.041, P<.000 .

Table 17 - Hypothesis 2 ANOVA

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	52.274	2	26.137	65.041	.000[b]
	Residual	88.810	221	.402		
	Total	141.084	223			
a. Dependent Variable: Productivity						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Organisational Support & E-Work Life Balance						

The co-efficient analysis for this hypothesis also supports that the relationships between the variables. The sig value is .000, therefore indicating that the model is significant.

In this sample a predictive model can be developed that Productivity = -0.268 + 0.922 + E-Work Life Balance + 0.105 = Organisational Support. As the Sig is showing .000 it can be confirmed that the model is significant.

Table 18- Hypothesis 2 Coefficients

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.268	.228		-1.177	.240
	E-Work Life Balance	.922	.094	.564	9.789	.000
	Organisational Support	.105	.060	.101	1.749	.082
a. Dependent Variable: Productivity						

Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The findings in this hypothesis correlate with that found in the literature and therefore will add to the body of knowledge in this area (Khanh Giao, et al., 2020) (McCarthy, et al., 2013).

Hypothesis 3 – To investigate if a statistical difference exists in reported levels of productivity of those with caring responsibilities for adults and children.

For the final hypothesis, a crosstab analysis, a Chi-Square test and a regression analysis was conducted on the data to investigate the relationship between those with caring responsibilities for elderly people & children and productivity. The crosstab analysis detailed at Table 19 outlines that 67 of our respondents reported child caring responsibilities and 18 reported elder care responsibilities.

Table 19- Hypothesis 3 Crosstab & Chi Square Test

Crosstab Analysis

		Gender			Total
		Male	Female	Non-binary	
Children	Yes	25	41	1	67
	No	48	108	1	157
Total		73	149	2	224

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.447[a]	2	.485
Likelihood Ratio	1.404	2	.496
Linear-by-Linear Association	.691	1	.406
N of Valid Cases	224		

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .60.

Crosstab

		Gender			Total
		Male	Female	Non-binary	
Elder	Yes	4	13	1	18
	No	69	136	1	206
Total		73	149	2	224

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.507[a]	2	.064
Likelihood Ratio	3.251	2	.197
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.878	1	.171
N of Valid Cases	224		

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .16.

As indicated in Table 19, the data for the childcare variable achieved a Pearson Chi-Square value of 1.447 with a p value of .485. For those with elder care responsibilities, a Pearson Chi-Square value of 5.507 with a p value of .064 was achieved. These results would indicate no significant relationship between the variables.

A multiple linear regression analysis was also conducted to verify the null hypothesis predicted in the Chi-Square Test. The results of the multiple linear regression analysis confirmed that in our data set childcare and elder care responsibilities were not a statistically significant predictor to the impact of productivity (p = .910). The analysis advised that an R^2 value of 0.1% was identified in our research sample which suggests this model is a poor predictor of behaviour.
We confirmed the null hypothesis in this case by conducting ANOVA and Coefficient analysis (Table 20). In the ANOVA output, the results indicated that the model was not a significant predictor of productivity, F(2,221) = .094, p =.910. As the significance value is greater than p=0.05, this regression model does not in this sample predict productivity.
In the coefficient analysis the model was examined to investigate if it acted as a significant predictor of the variable which in this test was productivity. The following predictive model was created from this analysis:
Productivity = 2.286 + (-.018*Childcare responsibilities) + (-.079*Eldercare Responsibilities).
Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. It would be wise to review these cautious observations of the data with a critical eye. There could be multiple reasons for this poor predictor including that the sample size reported in this survey included a small percentage of respondents that had either child caring responsibilities or elderly caring responsibilities. Therefore, our results could be skewed. These results contradict recent studies undertaken during the pandemic and therefore this area could benefit from further study (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020) (Rodrigues, et al., 2021) .

Table 20 - Hypothesis 3 Model Summary, ANOVA & Coefficients

Model Summary[b]				
Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	.029[a]	.001	-.008	.79865

a. Predictors: (Constant), Elder, Children

b. Dependent Variable: Productivity

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.120	2	.060	.094	.910[b]
	Residual	140.964	221	.638		
	Total	141.084	223			

a. Dependent Variable: Productivity

b. Predictors: (Constant), Elder, Children

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.286	.065		34.915	.000
	Children	-.018	.117	-.010	-.155	.877
	Elder	-.079	.196	-.027	-.402	.688

a. Dependent Variable: Productivity

Statistics[a]

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	2.1894	2.2863	2.2746	.02320	224
Residual	-1.28628	1.96372	.00000	.79506	224
Std. Predicted Value	-3.672	.506	.000	1.000	224
Std. Residual	-1.611	2.459	.000	.996	224

a. Dependent Variable: Productivity

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has attempted to quantify various aspects of the telework experience in order to assist both employers and government policy makers to strategically plan for future remote work. By exploring how E-Work Life balance is impacted by organisational support provides a compelling business case for organisations to continue and improve on how they assist their employees. Through examining how productivity is influenced by both E-work life

balance and organisational support gives further insight into the employee experiences of remote working. Finally, by finding that in this sample, no productivity declines were reported in those with caring responsibilities for elders or children can add to the ever-growing body of research in this area. However, due to the small sample size in this area, further research should be undertaken. By systematically analysing these variables within this research, this study can provide a piece to the evolving body of research on the experiences of employees in Ireland working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic.

6. Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter, key findings from this research are analysed in addition to discussing its contribution to the current body of research and its limitations. The objective of this study was to investigate the experiences of Irish teleworkers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Using three different scales, the three variables were measured: E-Work Life Balance, Productivity, and Organisational support. In addition to these variables, demographical information was also gathered in order to create as large a profile of respondents as possible. These variables shall be discussed separately and compared with research already in the area.

Key Findings

As discussed in the literature review chapter, maintaining a healthy work life balance is a crucial element to a healthy and productive employee. There has been significant research conducted on this topic. However, the literature since mandated telework has been enacted due to Covid-19 is limited, especially in an Irish context. Using the newly developed E-Work Life Balance Scale developed by Grant, et al., (2019) the researcher was able to hypothesis a variety of outcomes from our sample. The first hypothesis was supported in that the findings advised that Organisational Support positively impacted on E-Work Life Balance (Suranji & Thalgaspitiya, 2016). The findings from our research showed us that Organisational Support is a crucial aspect of a successful, happy and productive remote worker in Ireland. Our review of the literature confirms this finding and will be crucial for employers to quickly take this on board.

The results from this research are consistent with the body of research which reports a positive correlation between Work Life Balance and Organisation Support. A study conducted by

Jiang, et al., (2020) found that employees with higher work engagement experienced a higher reported work life balance. Similar results were also found in studies conducted in an Irish context by McCarthy, et al., (2013) which found that employees reported positive Work Life Balance when they perceived their supervisor as being supportive.

There were also a number of limitations to this aspect of our research which are important to discuss. As this study is utilising a new scale, it is important that this is taken into consideration. Due to the lack of data on the E-Work Life experience of an employee, this study is limited to the findings reported by the Grant, et al., (2019) research. For the purposes of our study, the original 28 item E-Work Life Balance scale in order to gain as much information as possible from our participants. There is a significant gap in the research in relation to this scale and this research will add to this.

For the second hypothesis, the correlations between organisational support, work life balance and its impact on productivity was examined. The sample supported the hypothesis and returned a positive correlation. There has been substantial commentary in the public discourse around productivity during the Covid-19 pandemic and how organisations will be impacted. Research is beginning to emerge with varying opinions on the topic but not in an Irish context so this research will add to the limited body of work. Our findings mirrored that found by Jackson & Fransman, (2018) who reported that there was a statistically significant relationship between Work Life Balance, Organisational Support and Productivity. This was also emulated by Leitão , et al., (2019) who found in their study that productivity was impacted by work life balance and organisational support. A Taiwanese study also replicated the findings of identifying positive correlations between organisational support and productivity in their sample, although they did not measure for work life balance (Huang, et al., 2020).

This finding is important in that not only does it build on existing evidence, but it also confirms that this theory is replicable in an Irish context.

For the final hypothesis, it was theorised that respondents who have caring responsibilities for Children or Elders would have a lower reported Productivity. The data returned a negative correlation for this data and the hypothesis was not supported and the null hypothesis was accepted. The results from the sample conclude that those with caring responsibilities towards elders and children do not have reduced productivity.

However, similar studies that have been conducted have found the opposite to be true. Etheridge, et al., (2020) found that productivity over the course of the pandemic was on average the same as before the pandemic. Bu they did see significant declines in productivity in people with childcare responsibilities, especially women. This finding is also in line with research conducted by Andrew, et al., (2020) showing that childcare responsibilities are associated with declines in productivity. Similarly contradictory findings were reported in studies conducted by Giovannetti, et al., (2009) who found significant declines in productivity for individuals who provided caregiving for older relatives. Calvano, (2013) went as far as to describe eldercare as a "silent productivity killer" in her thorough review of the existing literature. Despite the abundance of attention given to the struggles of parents during the pandemic and their observance in many studies, there appears to have been little attention given to the struggles experienced by individuals caring for elderly relatives whilst working remotely. One study that recognised the lack of attention being given to this cohort, has found that carers psychological well-being has deteriorated significantly more than non-carers since onset of the Covid-19 pandemic (Rodrigues, et al., 2021). This issue should be one of concern to employers as there may be high levels of employee burnout upon return to the office post pandemic. A plausible explanation for the contradictory findings reported in our study, could be the limited

size of our sample. Our sample size only consisted of 29.9% with child caring responsibilities and 8% with elder care responsibilities. Therefore, this hypothesis would significantly benefit from further study with an enlarged sample.

Limitations

As with any research, this study had a number of limitations. It is important to acknowledge these limitations in order for future research to avoid encountering them.

The E-Work Life Scale used is very new and had replicated in other research that the researcher could locate. Therefore, this study is limited to what data can be used to compare its findings to. The research consisted of a limited data size and therefore our results may not be representative. This is evident in the final hypothesis where the sample of those with elder care responsibilities was quite narrow. Due to this limited size, it cannot be said with certainty that these findings will be replicable or applicable to the Irish workforce as a whole.

The findings also only consisted of quantitative survey responses. Perhaps a mixture of both qualitative interviews in addition to a wider survey instrument may have produced a more in-depth analysis with individuals' insights. As this study solely utilised a questionnaire instrument in the research, there is a possibility that results may be impacted by response bias. This bias could skew our results and result in an overestimation or underestimation of the data (Lavrakas, 2008). However, the study utilised closed questions and a Cronbach's Alpha test to reduce this (Peer & Gamliel, 2011) .

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings in our research have considerable implications for both organisations and governmental legislators. It is clear that the ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic will last long after the virus does. Industries and ways of working will be forever

changed and will have to adapt to ensure their longevity. From our research, it is evident that the sample of employees are, for the most part, not satisfied to revert to pre-covid way of working i.e., fully from the employer's workspace. With employers now being forced to utilise technology in order to survive, Covid-19 may well be the pre-cursor to the fourth industrial revolution for many industries (Marr, 2020). Consideration needs to be given to the impact that long-term forced remote working will have on employees. Employers will need to introduce substantial wellness packages to ensure their employees are safe in their work be they in their homes or upon return to the office. Employees who may have contracted Covid-19 may have long-lasting health implications that employers will need to make reasonable accommodations for.

7. Conclusion & Recommendations

In conclusion, it is clear that a substantial number of employees will no longer be satisfied with a return to fulltime office working with 92.4% of our 224 survey respondents advising that they would like to work remotely in some capacity after the pandemic. This is contrast to the 54.91% of the sample who never worked remotely before the Covid-19 pandemic. Organisations must, if they wish to retain and attract valuable personnel, develop and promote teleworking practices within their organisations (Gálvez, et al., 2020) (Dilmaghani & Tabvuma, 2019). In a post-Covid-19 world, employees may drift towards organisations who promote and encourage flexible working practices. This could result in the languishing of organisations who do not adapt to ensure their survival (Deloitte, 2020).

The two of the three hypotheses that were investigated by this research were supported. Firstly, that organisational support has a positive effect on our participants work life balance. Organisations must therefore ensure that they provide training for their people managers in order to support their employees whilst they work remotely. Managing employees remotely is a new experience for many managers who pre-Covid-19 never teleworked. It is clear that having a high level of organisational support is a crucial element to a successful teleworker and Human Resource professionals must provide resources and support for managers and employees who may be struggling to get to grips with this new way of working in order to ensure business continuity. HR professionals and managers must also work to ensure that employees maintain a healthy E-work life balance and not encroach on employee's time outside of normal working hours. This can create a strain on manager-employee relationships and result in employee exhaustion and subsequently poor work life balance and low productivity.

The second hypothesis put forward by this study found that organisational support and E-work life balance had a positive effect on productivity. This is a crucial finding in that is essential for organisations to address in order to adapt and survive in the new Covid-19 work environment. As discussed previously we have seen that the research differs on whether or not productivity has suffered as a result of remote working during the pandemic. (McCarthy, et al., 2020) (Morikawa, 2020).

The final hypothesis of this research was respondents with Caring responsibilities for Children and Elders would have a lower reported Productivity. This was not true for our sample but was found in a study undertaken by Feng & Savani, (2020). This study found that pre-Covid-19, no differences in productivity were reported in the respondents but during lockdown, found that females reported lower work productivity than their male counterparts. Working from home had often before Covid-19 been heralded as a positive solution especially for women due to their increased responsibility for household obligations (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018) (Chung & van der Horst, 2017). However, as there is beginning to be evidence published highlighting growing issues with remote working with childcare and elder responsibilities, it should be an area that receives further attention.

The post Covid-19 landscape will be a very interesting time for academics in the field of flexible working in Ireland. As the Irish Government continues to introduce and legislate for various remote working practices it is very possible that the once assumed implications and benefits will change. As the Irish labour force becomes more used to teleworking and various other flexible working practices, it will be important for this area to have a thorough examination to assess employees' experiences.

It will be crucial for organisations and the Government to ensure that with the introduction of teleworking, employees do not lose various rights and entitlements that they would have received whilst working in an office environment. Organisations should also consider

reviewing their benefit and reward packages for teleworkers as to ensure they are not being inadvertently penalised for their work choices.

Future Research

The hypotheses developed for this study was based upon the growing body of literature regarding the remote working experiences of employees globally during the Covid-19 pandemic. Future research would greatly benefit from further review of the current research on this topic as it is constantly changing and adapting with employees being regularly faced with new experiences.

Whilst it was beyond the scope of this study to conduct and implement a longitudinal approach to the research, it would be greatly beneficial to the subject matter if this were undertaken. This approach would be of interest as it could be used to review reported levels over a period of time rather than a snapshot of when a survey is undertaken. These further studies could also be used to establish cause and effect and to determine the negatives and positives of the employee experience of mandatory teleworking for long periods of time.

One such survey is the ongoing Remote working during COVID-19: Ireland's national survey (McCarthy, et al., 2020) which is considerably robust survey that was conducted on three separate occasions since the beginning of the pandemic. These findings would benefit from longitudinal analysis to assess changing opinions throughout the course of the pandemic.

Due to the small sample size of those with elder care responses the findings in this study may not be representative of the Irish population. Therefore, the area of elder care responsibilities while remote working should be an area of further consideration. Just under 200,000 people in Ireland provide unpaid care to relatives and with a steadily aging population it is likely that this number will increase in the coming years (Central Statistics Office, 2016). It is crucial that

organisations and government bodies establish supports for these employees who provide this essential care.

Financial & Resource Implications

It is clear from the research that it would be highly beneficial for organisations to ensure their employees feel supported. Rather than training being offered to the C-Suite, organisations should consider offering training to people managers, so they have required skills and supports in place to best support their employees. There are a number of organisations such as The Irish Institute of Training and Development and IBEC training who have designed tailored courses on managing, coaching, and supporting employees during the pandemic. One such course entitled Remote Coaching (IBEC Management Training, 2021) offers managers a programme in which they can learn specific techniques to support their direct employees. This course is offered at the cost of €385 for a IBEC member of €425 for a non-member. If an organisation has 10 low level, mid-level, and senior level managers, that would be a cost of €4,250.

If you lay that cost against the financial implications of losing a valuable employee who resigns from their role as they do not feel supported they could be a substantial saving to the organisation. The financial cost of employee turnover can be in excess of 100% of their annual wage without considering the loss of implicit organisational knowledge (Skelton, et al., 2020). Therefore, there is a strong business case for organisations to support their employees and adopt a variation of teleworking practices.

There are a number of other recommendations that the researcher can recommend and has offered a detailed plan and time scale below.

Table 21- Financial & Resource Implications Table

Recommendation	Audience	Business Reason	Duration and Cost	Timescale/Priority
Have all managers trained in Remote Coaching Techniques	People Managers	To support employees and reduce employee turnover.	1 Day €425 per participant	As soon as possible as it takes place online.
Develop a coaching plan for all employees following training	Entire Workforce	To benefit from the training and to facilitate the development of staff.	Staff cost of L&D practitioner to develop the coaching plan.	By mid-year review. Conducting and engaging with the process will be a KPI for all staff.
Internal quarterly staff surveys to be conducted to get an insight into the feelings in the organisation around the continuing teleworking.	Entire Workforce	To get a confidential insight into the feelings within the organisation to adapt strategy to meet the needs of the staff and business.	A Team Advantage Survey Monkey account costs €360 per year and will allow surveys to be designed and conducted quickly and easily.	To be open for 1 week every quarter.
Introduce teleworking practices within the organisation	Entire Workforce	To improve employee retention and attract new talent.	Employees will be given the option to teleworking for a number of days per week. Will be introduced as soon as possible with feedback from the business. As employees already have their technology in place and by having reduced overhead costs due to less people physically in the office there will be minimal cost barriers.	High Priority.

8. Personal Learning Statement

Upon completing this dissertation, I believe it is important to reflect on my experience and consider what I may have done differently were I to undertake this task again. Having never completed a body of work as comprehensive as a dissertation I was not prepared for the amount of work and time it has taken me. In hindsight, I would have utilised a more established scale in my survey to compare my findings with. I would also have liked to expand my data collection to include more respondents with caring responsibilities as I believe this would have added to my findings.

Covid-19 has taken a lot from us all. Be it time with family, missing out on important celebrations like weddings or the great Irish tradition of wakes and funerals. Work, be it positively or negatively, has become a constant aspect in our homes and for me has served as a welcome distraction for the daily onslaught of pandemic related news. This study was done to assess the experiences of those working remotely all over Ireland, who have quietly and dedicatedly kept business afloat while at the same time managing home schooling, health risks and the general anxiety around the pandemic.

I am enormously grateful for the distraction this Masters has provided me with over this time and am extremely proud of myself for accomplishing this mammoth project. Writing this dissertation was perhaps one of the hardest things I have ever set myself to complete and I have learned so much by undertaking it. Not only in the field of Human Resources and on my topic of research, but also about my style of learning and how much I enjoy developing my skills. I look forward to celebrating my achievement with my fellow classmates some of whom I regard as firm friends.

9. References

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10. Appendix 1 - Survey

Working Remotely during the Covid-19 Pandemic

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

My name is Claire McCallion and I am a student on the MA programme in Human Resource Management in the National College of Ireland.

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of people's experiences working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic in Ireland.

This survey should take you around 15 minutes to complete.

WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?
The following questionnaire will ask you questions on demographics, your home life, your work, remote working, work life balance, productivity, organisational support and working from home in the future.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART?
Participation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw from the survey at any time.

WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL?
The survey will be completely confidential as no identifying information will be gathered.

HOW WILL INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED AND PROTECTED?
'The results of the survey will be retained electronically with only the researcher having access until after my degree has been conferred. The data will be retained for a further two years after this. Under freedom of information legalisation, you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.'

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?
This research will be published as part of my dissertation.

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?
Should you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me:
Claire McCallion
x19140266@student.ncirl.ie

or my Supervisor
Michelle Ahern
Michelle.Ahern@ncirl.ie

*Required

Consent to take part in research

Please confirm you have read and understood the following -

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves answering questions for the researcher to gain an understanding of people's experiences working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my answer will remain anonymous. This will be done by no identifying information being collected during the survey.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that the data collected will be retained until the exam board confirms the results of their dissertation.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

1. Do you understand and agree to the above? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Do you currently work remotely in Ireland?

In order to participate in this study you must be currently working remotely/teleworking/working from home in Ireland.

2. Do you currently work remotely in Ireland? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

3. What gender do you identify as? *

Mark only one oval.

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Other: _____

4. What is your age? *

Mark only one oval.

- 18 - 30
- 31 - 40
- 41 - 50
- 51 - 60
- Over 60

5. Do you have dependent children living with you? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

6. Do you have elder care responsibilities? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

7. What is the highest level of education/training (full-time or part-time)which you have completed to date? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ No formal education/training
- ◯ Primary education
- ◯ Secondary Education
- ◯ Undergraduate
- ◯ Postgraduate
- ◯ Doctorate (Ph.D)

8. How best describes your home? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Live in my owned house or apartment alone or with my partner
- ◯ Live in my owned house or apartment and have roommates
- ◯ Live in a rented house or apartment alone or with my partner
- ◯ Live in a rented house or apartment with roommates
- ◯ I live in my family home with parents and/or siblings
- ◯ Temporarily staying with a relative or friend
- ◯ Temporarily staying in emergency accommodation or are currently homeless

9. How best describes your workspace at home? *

Mark only one oval.

- A Home Office in my home only used by me solely for work.
- A Home Office in my home used by me and multiple people solely for work
- A shared space in my home only used by me to work
- A shared space in my home used by multiple people to work at the same time
- Your Bedroom
- An external space where you work alone - Granny flat, log cabin etc.
- An external space where you work with multiple people- Granny flat, log cabin etc.
- Other

10. What sector do you work in? *

Mark only one oval.

- Public Sector
- Private Sector

11. What Industry do you work in? *

Mark only one oval.

- Administrative and support services including travel agents
- Agriculture, forestry and fishing
- Arts, entertainment and recreation including sport
- Construction
- Charity
- Non-Profit
- Education
- Financial, banking and insurance activities
- Health and social work activities
- Hospitality (accommodation, hotels, restaurants and food service)
- IT, communication and telecommunications
- Manufacturing
- Mining and quarrying
- Professional, scientific and technical activities including consulting
- Public and civil service administration and defence
- Real estate activities
- Retail and wholesale (clothes, goods, motor etc.)
- Transportation, postage, courier and storage
- Utilities (electricity, gas, water supply; sewerage, waste management)
- Other

12. How long have you been with your current organisation? *

Mark only one oval.

- Less that 6 months
- 6 months - 1 year
- 1 year - 2 years
- 2 years - 5 years
- 5 - 10 years
- 10+ years

13. What type of worker are you? *

Mark only one oval.

- Full-time
- Part-time

14. What level are you at within your organisation? *

Mark only one oval.

- Senior Management
- Middle Management
- Junior Management
- Administrative Staff
- Support Staff
- Graduate
- Professional
- Skilled Laborer
- Consultant
- Temporary Employee
- Researcher
- Self-employed
- Other

15. How many employees does your organisation have? *

Mark only one oval.

- More than 250 employees
- 250 employees or less
- 50 employees or less
- 10 employees or less

16. What best describes your current working situation? *

Mark only one oval.

- I work completely remote due to Covid-19
- I work both remotely and am also onsite

17. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, did you ever work remotely? *

Mark only one oval.

- Daily
- Occasionally
- Several times a week
- Several times a month
- Never - Didn't have the option to work remotely
- Never - The option was there but I didn't want to work remotely

18. Does your employer have a written Work From Home/Flexible Work Policy *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

19. In general, do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work? *

Mark only one oval.

- 1 - Very well
- 2 - Well
- 3 - Not very well
- 4 - Not at all well

20. In the past twelve months, have you been contacted, e.g. by email or telephone, in matters concerning your main paid job outside your normal working hours? *

Mark only one oval.

- 1 - Every day
- 2 - At least once a week
- 3 - A couple of times a month
- 4 - Less often
- 5 - Never

21. Please rate the below statements - *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disgree	Strongly Disagree	Not applicable
I know what it takes to be an effective remote worker						
My organisation provides training in remote working skills and behaviours						
Having flexible hours when remote working allows me to integrate my work and non-work life						
My remote working takes up time that I would like to spend with my family/friends or on other non-work activities						
When I work remotely, I often think about work-related problems outside of my normal working hours						
I am happy with my work life balance when remote working						
Constant access to work through remote working is very tiring						

When remote working I can concentrate better on my work tasks						
I can manage my time well when remote working						
My supervisor gives me total control over when and how I get my work completed when remote working						

22. Please rate the below statements - *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disgree	Strongly Disagree	Not applicable
I trust my line manager to advise me if I am not effectively performing whilst remote working	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My organisation trusts me to be effective in my role when I e-work remotely	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I trust my organisation to provide good remote working facilities to allow me to e-work effectively	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Remote working makes me more effective to deliver against my key objectives and deliverables	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
If I am interrupted by family/other responsibilities whilst remote working from home, I still meet my line manager's quality expectations	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
When remote working from home I do know when to switch off/put work down so that I can rest	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My children/family/friends understand that when I am remote working from home I should	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

not usually be interrupted						
My work is so flexible I could easily take time off remote working , if and when I want to						
Remote working has a positive effect on other roles in my non-working life						
When remote working I often think about family related and/or non-work-related problems						

23. Please rate the below statements - *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disgree	Strongly Disagree	Not applicable
My line manager allows me to flex my hours to meet my needs, providing all the work is completed						
My line manager is a good role model for me in terms of managing my remote working and work-life balance						
I feel that work demands are much higher when I am remote working						
I am highly motivated to work past normal work hours when remote working						
My overall job productivity has increased by my ability to e-work remotely from home						
I have adapted to remote working by developing suitable skills and behaviours						
My social life is poor when remote working						

I know how to socialise using technology						

24. Please rate the below statements - *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disgree	Strongly Disagree
It is easy to work effectively when working remotely					
It is easy to use the technology required to work remotely					
It is easy to adjust to working remotely					
It is easy to develop the skills to work remotely					
Working remotely makes my job easier					
Working remotely increases my productivity					
Working remotely reduces my work related stress levels					
Working remotely gives me greater flexibility					
Working remotely limits my scope for promotion					
Working remotely has increased my chances of a promotion					
Working remotely limits my career options					
Working remotely has improved my work experience					

25. Has remote working during the pandemic impacted your hours of work? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	I work more hours	I work the same hours	I work less hours
Has remote working during the pandemic impacted your hours of work?	◯	◯	◯

26. Do you read work emails outside of hours? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	No	Yes, I choose to	Yes, because of my workload	Yes, because it is expected by my organisation	Yes, because I feel I might miss out on something.
Do you read work emails outside of hours?	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

27. Do you respond to work emails and communications such as phone calls outside of hours? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	No	Yes, I choose to	Yes, because of my workload	Yes, because it is expected by my organisation	Yes, because if I don't respond, I will not be taken seriously by my organisation	Yes, because I feel I might miss out on something.
Do you respond to work emails and communications such as phone calls outside of hours?	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

28. For each of the following statements, please rate the response which best describes your situation. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disgree	Strongly Disagree
My organisation is doing its best in the circumstances					
My organisation is providing me with well-being supports					
My organisation is providing me with ergonomic and health & safety advice for working remotely					
My organisation provided financial support for me to purchase IT and Ergonomic equipment					
My organisation provided me with IT equipment					
My organisation provided me with Ergonomic equipment					
My organisation gives me the right to disconnect outside of working hours					
My organisation encourages me to disconnect outside of working hours					
My organisation encourages me to take lunch breaks					
My organisation is regularly communicating with me					

My organisation keeps me informed					
My organisation supports me					
My organisation makes me feel part of the team					
My manager cares for my wellbeing					
My manager supports me					
My manager has asked me how I am managing working remotely					
It is easy for me to access IT support from home					

29. Would you like to continue working remotely after the pandemic? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes - Daily
- Yes - Several times a week
- Yes - Several times a month
- Yes - Occasionally
- No - I do not want to work remotely.