

**What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and
mandatory WFH on the work-life balance, productivity,
and social isolation of Civil Servants in Ireland?**

by

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i. Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on Civil Servants Working From Home (WFH) in Ireland. The Covid-19 pandemic changed the way employees live and work, and how organisations operate into the future. For the Civil Service of Ireland, mandatory WFH measures were required to curb the spread of Covid-19 and to continue delivering essential services to the citizens of Ireland.

This study focuses on the productivity impacts and challenges experienced by employees and managers that were shifted to mandatory WFH arrangements with no prior training or experience. Managers were also faced with additional challenges of managing virtual teams' using information communication technologies in new ways. This research sought to establish if managers were impacted more so than that of employees.

This research reviews the impact that WFH had in terms of improving and/or deteriorating Civil Servants work-life balance. Another focus which was established during the review of literature is the impact of social isolation due to physical distancing measures, WFH arrangements and lack of interface with colleagues, work friends and management. Social isolation can impact employees mental and physical wellbeing.

The research process used to gather and collate information is a quantitative technique in the form of a survey issued to current Civil Servants across several Government Departments. Using professional connections, this research was made possible, and afforded an opportunity to explore the struggles and triumphs of 129 Civil Servants WFH during the Covid-19 pandemic. As there is a gap in current literature regarding the impact of mandatory WFH arrangements during the pandemic, this research is most opportune to examine the impacts it had on respondents fifteen months following the implementation of lockdown measures. The research survey focuses on producing objective and rational results without biases, as quantitative data can be verified and is less open to ambiguities or misinterpretation. The survey allowed this research to quantify the attitudes and experiences of the sample of Civil Servants to make generalisations and reveal patterns. Once the data was captured, the researcher used data analysis techniques and statistical analysis using SPSS software. The most appropriate analysis techniques, as suggested by Pallant (2005) were used to create findings and establish conclusions and recommendations.

The study revealed that WFH was new for 89% of respondents, and 98% were mandatorily WFH as it was compulsory due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The research revealed that managers

performance did not significantly differ from that of employees, and the ability of respondents to deliver goals and objectives, effectively manage work performance, and the quality of work was unscathed. Overall, 64% identified that WFH had a positive impact on work-life balance, and 71% acknowledged that having flexible hours when WFH allowed them to better integrate work and non-work life. The research examined the impact of social isolation on home workers. Although the results were not indicative of social isolation and alienation being prevalent across the respondent group, a pattern of social isolation amongst respondents emerged. Considering the results, this is an area that requires further research to examine the impact it may have on the physical and mental wellbeing of remote workers.

ii. Declaration Form

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland

Research Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This dissertation could not be more opportune, as at present, Ireland is still battling the Covid-19 pandemic. The economy is in the process of a phased reopening, and restrictions are still in place fifteen months since the inception of lockdown measures began. Covid-19 was declared a global health emergency by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on the 31 January 2020, (World Health Organisation, 2020). Governments across the globe have imposed and re-imposed lockdowns to curb the spread of Covid-19. With the prospect of returning business and societal norms, Governments across the globe have begun lifting lockdowns, however the Irish Government is still in the midst of battling with a public health crisis and economic threat. Restrictions include air travel, social distancing, restrictions in movement, closure of non-essential businesses and an embargo on non-essential gatherings of people.

The aim of this research is to explore the impacts that Covid-19 had on the Civil Service of Ireland and if performance management, work-life balance and social isolation were impacted due to mandatory Working From Home (WFH). The Civil Service serves the State and the people of Ireland by delivering public services to the citizens of Ireland. There are approximately 40,000 Civil Servants working across a range of Government Departments and offices. Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, employers and workers experienced significant challenges in responding to the pandemic, and were required to alter their working conditions, such as WFH. The Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (CSEES) conducted a Covid Report in September 2020, which received a 65% participation rate, and 75% of those respondents were WFH.

Working From Home (WFH) and work-life balance

There is no universally agreed definition of WFH, and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines WFH as the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) including smartphones, tablets, laptops, or desktop computers for work that is performed outside the employer's premises, (Oakman et al., 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed how organisations conduct business. On an individual level, overnight employed citizens in lockdown affected areas were turned into the following categories, (a) WFH employees, (b) essential workers and (c) laid-off employees that sought temporary pandemic unemployment payment, (Kniffin, 2020). Whilst on the

organisation level, industries were fundamentally changed, trends that were underway were accelerated and swiftly implemented, and opportunities for novel industries emerged, (Kniffin, 2020).

The most obvious changes for organisations as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic was the implementation of WFH arrangements, many of which had no prior experience and occupational groups which opposed WFH, (Kramer and Kramer, 2020). There are negative impacts that must be considered when shifting employees to mandatory WFH. Some of the cons to WFH are the blurring of the lines between work and personal life (Grant et al., 2019), social isolation from co-workers, (Collins and Moschler, 2009), distractions with family-life or dependent children, (Baruch 2000; Kazekami, 2020) and the inability to disengage from work, (Eddleston and Mulki, 2017). Although WFH has increased across the globe, academics are debating its pros and cons, (Vyas and Butakhieo, 2020). Some of the advantages are a reduction in commuting time, increased motivation, job satisfaction and retention, improved gender diversity, and healthier workforces with reduced absenteeism and turnover, (Mello 2007; and Robertson et al., 2003). Research has identified that WFH can improve employee productivity, job engagement, and reduce turnover, (Collins and Moschler 2009; Delanoeije and Verbruggen, 2020). This research provides an opportunity to establish if WFH has improved the work-life balance of Civil Servants in Ireland, and if they wish to continue WFH into the future.

WFH has become a policy priority for most Governments, (Vyas and Butakhieo, 2020). At present, the Civil Service of Ireland is in the process of developing a WFH or blended working policy. The current situation provides a unique insight to determine how Civil Servants are managing WFH arrangements, and it may play a role in future government policies that reshape the current structure of working hours and work-life balance.

Performance Management

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, WFH was needed temporarily or when required, (Allen et al., 2015). The swift digitalisation of work processes and management of virtual teams has modified the nature of how organisations work. Digitalisation has extended the boundaries of working time and working in virtual teams has altered work processes and relationships, (Davenport and Harris, 2007, Lorenz et al., 2015; and Vidgen et al., 2017). The loss of social contacts, ICT difficulties, managing virtual teams, compiled with the lack of cohesion amongst

teams and the lack of observation of employee performance are some of the issues which need to be addressed following the implementation of mandatory WFH.

It has been speculated that mandatory WFH will continue after the pandemic, which will require the development of effective virtual leadership skills and abilities to ensure that virtual teams continue to deliver on the Government's Statement of Strategy 2021-2023. Over the past few decades, leadership scholars have been monitoring the effects digitalisation had on the leadership process. An academic debate has formed which focuses on the ability of leaders to integrate digital transformation into organisations, whilst simultaneously inspiring workers to embrace this change which is perceived as a threat to the current status quo, (Gardner et al., 2010; and Kirkland, 2014). Virtual teams are necessary to ensure the Civil Service continues delivering its objectives to the citizens of Ireland. Virtual leadership can be defined as "a social influence process mediated by Advanced Information Technologies (AITs) to produce a change in attitudes, feelings, thinking, behaviour and performance with individuals, groups and/or organisations", (Avolio et al., 2000).

The skills required for successful management of virtual teams is more complex than in traditional teams, (Berry, 2011; Manzevski and Chudoda, 2000; and Nicholson et al., 2007).

Virtual teams are prone to conflict which arises from the lack of socialisation (Townsend et al 1998), weak interpersonal bonds and poor information sharing, (Hinds and Bailey, 2003; Hinds and Mortensen, 2001). As such, the leadership role has become vital in managing these challenges, implementing new processes, retaining talent and engagement with employees.

To ensure effective leadership and sustainable performance are maintained, leadership practices must be agile and willing to adapt to manage virtual teams, (Contreras et al., 2020).

Remote working has been a highly debated concept over the last decade, due to the blurring of the boundaries between work and non-work life, and the personal and social impacts of not being physically present at a workplace, (Gilson et al., 2014). Wiesenfeld et al. (2001) stated that social supports and the requirement for affiliation are considered the missing elements in virtual teams, and a study by Kenyon et al., (2000) identified that an increase in virtuality leads to a higher degree of social isolation. Previous research has identified that WFH increases work performance, however it was also determined that WFH increases feelings of loneliness amongst workers and workers also felt concerned that their performance was not visible, (Bloom et al., 2015).

This research is interested in examining if the performance of managers were impacted more than that of the employees. As research in the field suggests, it is a more complex and challenging task to manage a virtual team than traditional teams. Literature on distant management also addresses issues of social isolation and loneliness due to the lack of physical interactions. Thus, this research also examines the impact of social isolation.

Social Isolation and loneliness

Psychologists are worrying that the Covid-19 pandemic has triggered a loneliness epidemic. Research conducted by Harvard University suggests that feelings of social isolation are rising, and it is rising amongst teens and young adults, (Walsh, 2021). Similar research in Ireland found that more than one-in-four people screened positive for generalised anxiety disorder or depression during the strictest Covid-19 lockdown measures in Ireland. The following results were found, 20% screened positive for generalised anxiety disorder and 23% for depression, (Hyland, 2020). The Central Statistics Office Social Impact of Covid-19 Survey conducted in April (2020) also identified some worrying trends relating to the declining wellbeing of Irish people, refer to Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Social Impact of Covid-19 Survey April 2020.

Responses	2020	2019
Overall life satisfaction - High	12.2%	44.3%
Feeling of loneliness	26.6%	16.9%
Feeling depressed some of the time	32.4%	13.4%

Workplace wellbeing relates to all aspects of working life, it includes the quality and safety of working environment, refers to how workers feel about their work, their working environment, the climate at work and work organisation, (Workplace well-being, 2021). Employee wellbeing has been linked to several job performance indicators such as productivity, job satisfaction, employee turnover, stress, and work-life balance, (Bakker and Oerlemans, 2011; and Keeman et al., 2017). Wellbeing can be viewed as being a multidimensional occurrence, as it contains aspects of psychological health, for example happiness and job satisfaction, physiological wellness, and sociological aspects i.e., interpersonal relationships, (Grant et al., 2007; and Ponting, 2020). The lack of interface creates threatening conditions for an organisation, that increases social isolation in the workplace, and subsequently has a negative impact on the

wellbeing of employees, (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). The impacts on employee wellbeing are more critical during a pandemic, and workers are now facing increasing health risks from possible infection, stress, and mental illness, (Sim, 2020). WFH arrangements may result in self-isolation which leads to mental health issues including anxiety, depression, social isolation, and loneliness, (Braverman, 2020; and Staglin, 2020).

Current research by Mogilner et al. (2018) identified that quality social interactions and informal discussions amongst co-workers are essential for the mental and physical health of people. Covid-19 has created less obvious impacts for employees, such as social isolation and loneliness. Reduced onsite workforces supporting physical distancing measures are likely to impact employees physical and mental health, (Brooks et al., 2020). This research is interested in examining if social isolation is a problem area for Civil Servants WFH during Covid-19.

Rationale for the research

In relation to the three main subjects discussed, which are (WFH) and work-life balance, Performance Management and Social Isolation, there are several factors and challenges for the Civil Service of Ireland that this research addresses.

In relation to WFH, the implementation of WFH practices without a specific policy to guide employees, may propose new challenges. Civil Servants were forced to manage new processes, perform duties, engage with colleagues, manage virtual teams, and manage in home environments which may not be suitable as a workplace. This research provides insights as to how Civil Servants are managing WFH arrangements, impact on performance, work-life balance and if they are experiencing feelings of social isolation.

In relation to Performance Management, existing literature has identified an academic debate as to whether leaders can integrate digital transformation into organisations whilst also continuing to inspire workers to perform and embrace a change that it is perceived a threat. The primary focus of this research is to explore the impact WFH had on productivity of Civil Servants. More so, the aim of the research is to compare the productivity of managers and employees to see if there is a difference in their productivity.

In relation to social isolation, this research provides a great opportunity to explore these impacts fifteen months since the Civil Service shifted to mandatory WFH arrangements. Existing

research has identified that people across the globe are experiencing an increase in feelings of anxiety, depression, and social isolation symptoms.

Aim of Research

Drawing on current literature and research, the aim of the research is to provide insights as to how Civil Servants are managing the mandatory WFH arrangements, to examine if the work-life balance and performance management was impacted, and to determine if Civil Servants feelings of social isolation were impacted while WFH during Covid-19.

A quantitative survey was designed to focus on the hypotheses outlined in chapter 3. The survey was issued on 22 April 2021 and the report represents results from data collected in the period 22 April 2021 to 07 May 2021.

The sampling was conducted by invitations via emails to current Civil Servants across several Government Departments within Ireland. Networks were utilised and these groups were encouraged to complete and distribute the survey to their respective staff members. The survey was designed as a questionnaire that respondents can complete in up to 20 minutes.

In chapter 2, the current literature in the respective fields i.e., WFH and work-life balance, performance management, and social isolation are examined. Through an examination of theory, current academic research, literature and surveys, the research seeks to provide an answer to the issues identified previously.

In chapter 3, the methodology applies the lessons learned from the literature review to assess what is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and mandatory WFH on the work-life balance, productivity, and social isolation of Irish Civil Servants? It describes and explains the focus of the research, the different research methods applied, and the justification for using certain research methods.

In chapter 4, the findings from the analysis of the survey data are reported. It provides a detailed analysis and discussion of the survey data set. It presents a highlight of the results and address the research hypotheses outlined in chapter 2.

In chapter 5, it presents the findings derived from the analysis of the impact WFH had on work-life balance, performance management and social isolation of Civil Servants in Ireland. It sets out the issues to be addressed and proposes several measures to address them.

In chapter 6, the chapter outlines the main conclusions and key recommendations based on the issues identified and discussed in the literature review and detailed consideration of the findings discussed in chapter 6.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The review of literature focuses on current research on WFH and the consequences that working remotely may have on work effort and work-life balance. Current literature is limited as it does not examine mandatory WFH actioned by the Government. It outlines the implications and issues of the implementation of mandatory WFH arrangements without a policy, without the required training or experience to manage virtual teams and deliver work via a virtual setting. It examines research on performance management through virtual leadership and analyses the challenges to supervise and cultivate the development of workers from greater distances, in unusual circumstances. This research is interested in examining if the performance of managers is impacted more than that of employees. The literature review also focuses on current research on the effects of social isolation on employee wellbeing. Isolation can affect people mentally and physically, and is linked to team performance, as it impacts productivity, commitment, and the resilience of workers.

The literature review seeks to provide the reader with knowledge on the above-mentioned subjects and seeks to establish and address gaps in current academic literature.

2.1 Working From Home (WFH) and Work-life balance

This literature review focuses on the emergent changes in work practices which are working from home (WFH) in a mandatory capacity, and the work-life balance consequences. The review provides an integrative approach for analysing the challenges the Covid-19 pandemic had on employees and organisations, and identifies issues for future research to address.

At the onset of the pandemic, work and social lives were abruptly changed, and it was envisioned that lockdown measures and social distancing are likely to continue into the foreseeable future, (Gallagher, 2020). According to Kniffin (2020) Covid-19 abruptly disrupted normal work practices, however it also accelerated trends such as WFH and virtual leadership. Organisations swiftly implemented technology-driven work practices to continue delivering services. These practices were implemented under severe time pressure, with minimal time to develop strategies, and train employees, (Carroll and Conboy, 2020) or to develop remote working practices with employer and manager, (Agerfalk et al., 2020). At present, there is no formal WFH policy or policies established for Civil Service Departments. As these measures are proceeding fifteen months, more research is required to consider sustained long-term practices. It has surpassed fifteen months since Civil Servants were shifted to WFH arrangements, and it was not anticipated that employees would still be suffering from

the impacts of these temporary actions. These actions affected the workplace such as WFH and virtual leadership, and lockdown measures impacted the social and personal aspects of employee's lives. Employees homes became their workplace, a school for those with young children, and their place for relaxation.

Mandatory WFH during the Covid-19 pandemic is an area that existing WFH or remote working literature does not address, and current research may lack contextual relevance during the Covid-19 pandemic, (Wang et al., 2020). Existing literature focuses on employees WFH in a voluntary capacity to fulfil various purposes, such as managing domestic obligations and a positive work-life balance (Versey, 2015), intensification of work in exchange for flexible working and a satisfactory work-life balance (Kelliher and Anderson, 2009). The central feature of these work arrangements is that employees opted for these work arrangements in exchange for flexibility i.e., remote working or reduced work hours, not the employer (Alis et al., 2006). Covid-19 forced employees to perform their duties, engage with colleagues, manage virtual teams in new ways, and this is combined with pressures of managing home environments not suitable as a workplace, (Waizenegger et al., (2020). Further research is essential in contributing to mandatory remote working literature. This research examines the impact WFH during the pandemic had on the work-life balance of Civil Servants.

Mandatory WFH was the most observational change for organisations, and some occupational groups that resisted WFH in the past that found themselves forced to WFH, and these need to be examined, (Kramer and Kramer, 2020). WFH is not suitable to all occupational groups, and some people are more suited to perform more effectively than others. There are health and wellbeing aspects that need to be examined such as the suitability of employee's homes, to work in a safe and comfortable workspace that is free from domestic disturbances. Employees in shared accommodations or that have a dedicated home office will experience different challenges to their counterparts. According to Kramer and Kramer (2020) the interplay of individual and occupational characteristics is important for researchers to examine the practical implications. Further research is required to examine the individual preferences, behaviours, and personalities against the occupational characteristics.

There are debates as to whether WFH is a 'win-win' situation for both employers and workers. The social exchange theory (SET) has been used by (Gouldner, 1960; and Blau, 1964) to explain motivations behind a person's behaviour and attitudes. The SET believes that people agree to obey certain rules and norms in exchange for mutual benefits, (Cropanzano and

Mitchell, 2005). Research suggests that workers are willing to make sacrifices which include working additional hours unpaid, working harder for recognition, and inputting extra effort out of obligation to the employer for that flexibility, (Golden, 2007; Kelliher and Anderson, 2010; de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011; and Elsbach et al., 2012). On the other hand, border theorists believe that remote working will heighten work-home spill overs, as suggested by (Mirchandani, 2000; Crosbie and Moore, 2004; and Marsh and Musson, 2008), as workers are unable to switch-off at the end of the day, (Felstead and Henseke, 2017). Key arguments suggest that remote working brings more business benefits, some of which stem from the increased effort of workers as predicted by social exchange theory, (Felstead and Henseke, 2017).

There is a debate in academia as to the negative associations with WFH. If the boundary is blurred between a person's work and non-work life, (Oakman, 2021), it negatively impacts on an individual's physical and mental health. This can stem from a lack of support from the organisation, and an unclear delineation between home and work, (Allen, Golden and Shockley, 2015). Research by Grant et al., (2019) established that remote workers find it difficult to manage boundaries between work and non-working time, that results in overworking and reduce work-life balance.

The current mandatory WFH situation requires further research on the impact on organisational, physical, and environmental factors, and the psychosocial factors on individuals physical and mental health, (Oakman, 2021). As work and non-work life priorities are generally in flux (Brower, 2014), researchers believe the achievement of a perfect balance between work and non-work life is an unachievable ideal, (Carpenter, 2017; Ezzedeen & Zikic, 2017). According to Como et al. (2021) work-life integration has both positive and negative impacts on employees' lives, and the term 'work-life wellness' is used to represent the desired outcome of having wellness in both work and non-work life. It is crucial that any Civil Service policy ensures there is an equilibrium in terms of the benefits of WFH for the employee and employer.

According to Como et al., (2021), the work-life wellness of employees can be influenced by organisational supports during the transition to WFH, and employees will require suitable remote working plans post-Covid that are suitable to their needs. They believe employees can achieve the desired level of wellness by adopting approaches such as balance, segmentation, and integration, that best suit the individuals' requirements. As the WFH situation differs in terms of a person having a family, increased caregiving responsibilities or lack of a dedicated

workspace. To find the optimal work-life balance, the WFH policies must be flexible. WFH should provide flexibility in completing their tasks, that does not require employees to strictly follow office hours, (Grant et al., 2019; and Purwanto et al., 2020).

WFH is new for the Civil Service, and if the Civil Service National Remote Working Strategy is to be effective, WFH needs to be examined at the individual level to examine a person's occupational factors and their preferences and ability to perform. It is important that further research is conducted to examine work-life balance and psychosocial impacts and challenges that remote workers face during the pandemic.

2.2 Performance Management and Virtual Leadership

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed new challenges for managers to supervise and cultivate the development of their subordinates from much greater distances than usual, and in unusual circumstances. It is good practice to establish clear WFH policies and training prior to employees WFH, however, this was not feasible at the onset of the pandemic, (Larson et al., 2020).

Leaders play a pivotal role in determining organisational outcomes that have a broad impact on employees at all levels especially in the crucible of a crisis, (Antonakis and Day, 2017). Previous research has shown that leadership works well from a distance, and successful leaders are those with the ability to make the right decisions and provide optimistic and realistic reassurances regarding the future, (Antonakis et al., 2016). This literature review will focus on the dynamics and processes of virtual teams, with reference to several studies which have focused on the relevance of leadership, performance, integrity, communication, coordination mechanisms, and trust (Anderson et al., 2007; Avolio and Kahai, 2001; Järvenpää et al., 1998; and Maznevski and Chudoba, 2000).

Some of the top cited research by authors focuses on the characteristics of digital leaders, and how technology is changing the concept and practice of leadership, (Avolio et al., 2014; Horner-Long and Schoenberg, 2002; and Hambley et al., 2007). In relation to leadership theoretical frameworks, there is an abundance of theories used by scholars. Horner-Long and Schoenberg (2002) contrapose two main theoretical approaches, these are universal theory and contingency theory. Universal theories of leadership argue that all leaders share an identifiable set of generic leadership traits and attributes which are equally applicable to e-leadership context, (Lord et al., 1986; and Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991). Contingency theorists, argue that a leader must match the environmental and organisational settings in which they operate.

Contingency theorists suggests that a distinctive set of leadership behaviours and characteristics are required to be adopted depending on the situational context, such as in the management of virtual teams, (Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1973; and Goleman, 2000). Contingency theory is more suitable to the current changing environment, as the state of the organisational environment is in flux and never static, particularly in a crisis.

Technological advancements have enabled new ways of working. Time and space are not a limitation and means of communicating through an abundance of technological tools and networks that go beyond the traditional organisational boundaries, are creating new and unexpected relationships, (Torre and Sarti, 2020). As a result of these changes, leadership in organisations are required to adapt in response to the organisational and environmental context, whereby work is mediated by Advanced Information Technologies (AIT's), (Avolio et al., 2000). Avolio et al., (2014, p.107) conceptualised the term e-leadership as a “social influence process mediated by AIT to produce changes in attitudes, feelings, thinking behaviour, and/or performance with individuals, groups and/or groups organisations”. E-leaders must balance relationships with online teams and traditional face-to-face teams, and must create cohesion and collaboration, and inspire and instil effective performance, and trust. This must be done in the absence of non-verbal cues, and can often lead to miscommunications, conflict or delayed responses and decision-making. (Avolio et al., 2001; Crawford-Mathis, 2009; Avolio & Kahai, 2003; Hambley, 2007; DasGupta, 2011; Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Adaba et al, 2015; Iriqat & Khalaf, 2017; and Van Wart et al., 2019).

Scholars have adopted the term ‘digital ubiquity’, (Gerth and Peppard, 2016) as it describes how technology is pervasive, (Roman et al., 2018), prevalent and constantly interacting with humans. Therefore, technological advancements impact the behaviour of people, their thinking and engagement, (Wellman et al., 1996). Organisational structures such as leadership transforms because of AIT's, (Avolio and Kahai, 2003). The prevalence of technology has many benefits as it enables flexibility in global teams, to operate in different time zones, locations, and cultures, (Huang et al., 2010). There is no guarantee that organisations operating in virtual settings will certainly reap the productivity gains associated with it, as co-ordinating work, keeping employees motivated and committed, and developing trusting relationships are some of the challenges, (Huang et al., 2010).

There are many barriers in developing and managing interpersonal relationships in virtual teams, such as the lack of physical observation of team's performance, behaviours, lack of

verbal cues and facial expressions. This makes it difficult to interpret teams' moods, feelings, and actions, (Jawadi et al., 2013). There is the potential for a breakdown in communication, as teams may not distribute relevant information, or understand and/or convey the level of urgency of information, (Cascio and Montealegre, 2016). Leaders are required to develop both digital and human skills, which able leaders to effectively communicate, support cohesion among distant teams, foster innovation and manage complex and fast problem solving.

Previous research has demonstrated the impact leadership makes on the effectiveness of team's performance, (Huang et al., 2010). Leadership styles may influence virtual teams interactions and performance, (Sosik et al., 1998; and Kahai and Avolio, 2006). Research suggests that challenges experienced by virtual teams can be overcome with processes implemented by its leader, (Avolio et al., 2003; Kayworth and Liedner, 2000; Leenders et al., 2003; Joshi et al., 2009; and Purvanova and Bono, 2009). However, there is a gap in current literature to guide research on the leadership of virtual teams, and leadership styles and behaviours that influence virtual teams' effectiveness, (Bell and Kozlowski, 2002; Kahai et al., 2010; and Ziek and Smulowitz, 2012).

With the absence of empirical research in terms of suitable leadership styles and behaviours that facilitate the process of virtual teams' interaction and outcomes, this research cannot recommend a specific leadership style that suits the individual needs of Civil Service Departments in Ireland. This research suggests that leaders that have similar characteristics of transformational leaders, such as inspirational, intellectually challenging, goal-orientated, innovative, caring, and empathetic, and trusting characteristics would be seen as effective in leading virtual teams in the Civil Service of Ireland.

Research has demonstrated that a positive relationship exists between trust and team performance. According to a meta-analysis research by Bart de Jong (2016), the data resolved a debate as to whether intrateam trust has an impact on team performance. It found that a positive relationship exists between trust and team performance. Where there is a lack of intrateam trust, people feel vulnerable, uncertain about the future, and people tend to exert their energy and effort on defending their personal interests rather than supporting the teams' goals, (de Jong, 2016). Trust directly influences the performance of a team, and those with higher levels of trust are better organised and more capable of becoming productive more quickly, (Cascio and Shurygailo, 2002). There are many common challenges associated with managing virtual teams, initially the lack of face-to-face supervision and engagement, lack of trust by

management, whilst employees may find the lack of managerial support and communication particularly challenging, (Larson et al., 2020). The concept of building reciprocal trust, and the direct relationship it has in improving team performance and increased organisation of teams is recommended as a priority for line managers within the Civil Service.

It is recommended that leaders provide ongoing feedback and learning opportunities, as previous research suggests that a lack of learning opportunities is associated with lower organisational commitment and higher risk of turnover, (Vandenberghe et al., 2019). Specifically, for new entrants it's important to ensure they are not at a disadvantage due to the loss of face-to-face interactions with leaders, (Dunbar, 2018). Therefore, it is of the opinion that research by Kniffin et al., (2020) and Vandenberghe (2019) on the development of virtual leadership for management and ongoing feedback and learning opportunities is an approach the Civil Service should consider. This could assist in the effective management of teams, development of talent, improvement of retention capabilities and increased commitment. It is also recommended that when designing a remote working policy, the nature of individual characteristics and preferences, and behaviours that may trump the organisational characteristics are analysed. If the WFH policy is not managed correctly it can result in a decline in job performance and engagement from high-performing employees.

Also, from an employee wellbeing perspective the work intensification due to technology access and temptation to work longer hours (Grant et al. 2013) and professional isolation, (Garg and Van der Rijst, 2015) are areas of concern that should be addressed by blended working policies and monitored by management. Social isolation and loneliness are a common complaint from employees WFH, due to loss of informal social interactions, loss of connections with colleagues and the organisation, that may result in an increase in turnover (Larson et al., 2020).

2.3 Effects of Social Isolation and Loneliness on Employee Wellbeing

Loneliness has significant impacts on people's health and their happiness. Research has shown that loneliness increases the likelihood of early death and has been associated with increased risk of personality disorders, depression, psychoses, and suicide, (Hawkley and Cacioppo, 2010).

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the former Surgeon General of the United States, Vivek Murthy coined the term "epidemic of loneliness". Loneliness and poor social connections are associated with dementia, depression, and anxiety on an individual level, and it also impacts at

an organisational level as it reduces task performance, creativity, reasoning, and decision-making capabilities, (Murthy, 2017). The National University of Ireland (NUI) Galway conducted a Corona Citizens Science Project through a series of 5 waves of anonymous surveys, with results available for the first four waves. The results of the fourth wave identified that 58% of 2620 respondents indicated to be more or much more anxious, than in the previous wave. The results also found that 31% of respondents are worried about WFH. The research found that Covid-19 impacted the younger demographic, specifically the under 25 age group in terms of wellbeing and mental health. With 17% of under 25 age group more likely to have developed social anxiety. The literature reviewed highlights the affects social isolation and loneliness have on the workforce and examines the increased level of anxiety brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Loneliness is defined as “*an enduring condition of emotional distress that arises when a person feels estranged from, misunderstood, or rejected by others and/or lacks appropriate social partners for desired activities, particularly activities that provide a sense of social integration and opportunities for emotional intimacy*”, (Rook, 1984: p1391). From a social psychology and neuropsychology perspective, loneliness is an emotion that reflects a fundamental and transient human motivational state, such as the feeling of pain. Loneliness consists of a person’s feelings about the adequacy and quality of relationships in certain situations. These feelings can involve alienation from others and lack of security that can impact attentional deficits and relational withdrawal from the workplace. This can subsequently lead to lower work performance, (Ozcelik and Barsade, 2011). Loneliness is an emotion that is relevant to the workplace, as it is an inherently interpersonal and relational emotion, (Weiss, 1989) and has been linked to lower productivity and team performance and reduced commitment to the workplace, (Ozcelik and Barsade, 2011).

Several studies have identified an association between social isolation and adverse health conditions, such as living alone, low participation in social activities, small social network, lack of social support and feelings of loneliness, (Berkman and Syme, 1979; Dean et al., 1992; Hawkey et al., 2006; Krause 1987; and Thoits and Hewitt, 2001). Cornwell and Waite (2009) identify two forms of social isolation, these are social disconnectedness and perceived isolation. With social disconnectedness being characterised as a lack of contact with others, small social network, or infrequent social interaction, whilst perceived isolation can be characterised as a subjective experience of a person’s social companionship and support circles. Social isolation and loneliness have a direct impact on employee wellbeing. Employees with a

strong set of connections in the workplace socialise and effectively adapt to new roles, take less time to onboard and are likely to perform better with peer support, (Cohen and Wills, 1985, and Castilla et al., 2013). As Civil Servants continue to WFH, the onboarding process has become challenging, as new entrants are not physically interacting with the workplace and lose the social connections that help them settle into new roles and within the organisation. Without physical interactions with new entrants, it becomes difficult for Civil Service Department's to ingrain Civil Service visions and values into new entrants.

Cultivating emotional wellbeing at work can diminish people's feelings of loneliness and improve business goals and objectives. Having strong social connections at work is more likely to have employees which are engaged with their jobs and performance, which produces a higher quality of work, and this should be a strategic priority for organisations such as the Civil Service to develop. If management can cultivate emotional wellbeing at work, it can improve employees' sense of connectedness and improve engagement and self-efficacy.

As discussed in chapter 1 under WFH, there are several negative impacts that WFH can have on employees. Several issues were noted from literature such as the blurring of the lines between work and non-work life (Grant et al., 2019), social isolation from co-workers (Collins and Moschler, 2009), distractions with family-life or dependent children, (Baruch 2000; and Kazekami, 2020), and the inability to disengage from work and switch off, (Eddleston and Mulki, 2017). To further support these findings, research by Campbell and Gavett (2021), using an international survey found that most people are struggling with workplace wellbeing and a deteriorating mental health. It was found that increasing job demands, lack of separation of work and non-work life and increased burnout are reasons for a decline in wellbeing. Also, anxiety over Covid-19 and increased stressed, prevalence of new technologies, isolation and lack of connection and growing disengagement are just some of the worrying trends, (Campbell and Gavett, 2021).

Research by Ipsen et al., (2020) and the Global Work-From-Home Experiences survey 2020 by Kamouri and Lister (2020) were conducted to determine workers experiences of WFH, and to gauge the levels of employee wellbeing and performance. The results identified some worrying trends that further support literature by Murthy (2017) on the effects of loneliness going beyond physical and mental health to impacting performance, productivity, and resilience of workers. Although 71% of respondents were satisfied with work activity performance, the research established that respondents experienced a reduction in their ability

to collaborate with teammates and experienced a reduction in their ability to coach, mentor, and manage other people. 40% of managers experienced a positive impact in employee productivity, whilst 41% felt a negative impact on teamwork and cohesion among team members and 43% felt a negative impact on employee engagement, (Kamouri and Lister, 2020). The research identifies a trend from the onset of the pandemic that employee engagement and wellbeing have been negatively affected, refer to Appendix 1.

This research also reviewed reports produced by the Irish Government, which includes findings from the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) and Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (CSEES) 2020 reports. According to the CSEAS Activity Report 2020, 15% of Civil Servants contacted the CSEAS for support, this number related to approximately 5690 Civil Servants. In 2020, 10,369 one-to-one client sessions were provided, of these 11% were related specifically to Covid-19, and 10% of one-to-one work-related sessions were manager consultations and staff wellbeing concerns, (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2020). A comparison of the CSEAS Activity Report 2019 and 2020 are present below in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – CSEAS Activity Reports.

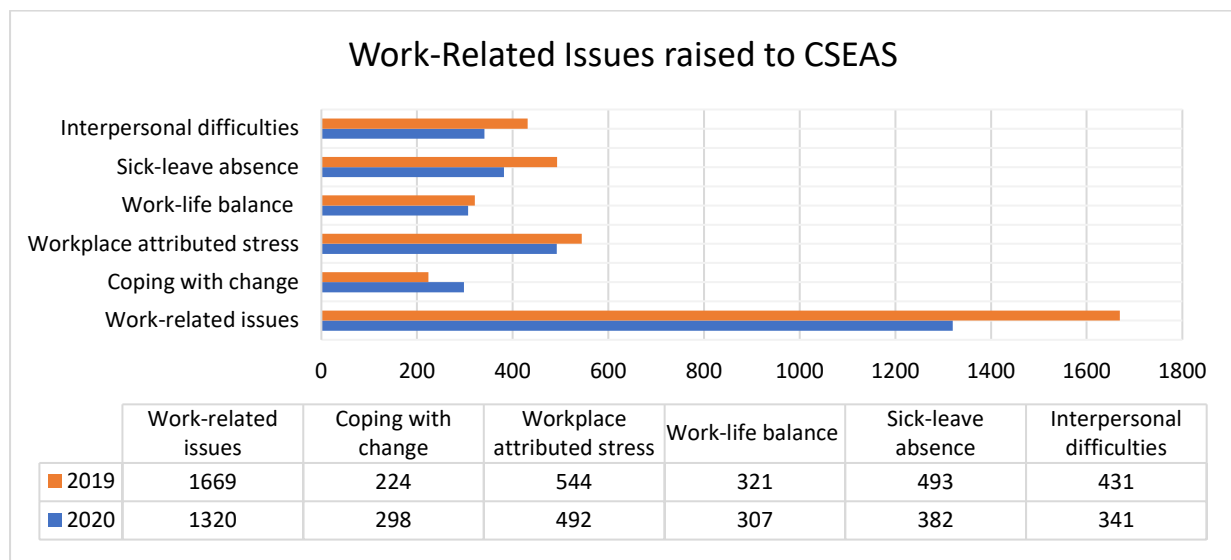


Figure 3 presents the findings from the CSEAS Activity Report 2020. There was a surge in the number of Covid-19 related concerns. A comparison of the 2019 report was conducted, and the following changes in concerns raised were noted; work-related issues declined by 21%, workplace attributed stress declined by 10%, work-life balance issues declined by 4%, sick-

leave absences declined by 23% and interpersonal difficulties declined by 23%. This could be attributed to a significant decline of onsite presence and/or a combination of WFH benefits reducing work-related stress or interpersonal difficulties.

Figure 3 – CSEAS Activity Report.

Work-related issues/Concerns	2020
Number of Civil Servants that contacted CSEAS	5690
Covid-19 related concerns	491
Return to Work issues	173
Support to managers	444
Working From Home	63
Work-life balance	307
Workplace attributed stress	492
Covid-19 One-to-One sessions	1141
Manager consultations and staff wellbeing concerns	1037

The CSEES Survey 2020, received a response rate of 65% of Civil Servants, which is approximately 26,822 employees. Of those respondents, 75% were WFH during the pandemic, of which 90% never WFH. As discussed previously, several research studies conducted during the pandemic highlighted areas of concern such as employee wellbeing and mental health issues, inadequate home working conditions, lack of supports, and difficulties in team cohesion. WFH will continue post-Covid, and at present there is no official remote working strategy for Civil Service Departments to guide employees. A comprehensive policy must be inclusive of employee and employer requirements. Trade unions are likely to be involved in the development process.

Forsa, which is the largest trade union for public sectors in Ireland, has stated that remote working has been a key feature since the onset of the pandemic, and they believe that it will continue post-Covid-19. Forsa has emphasised that remote working policies need to reach agreements on arrangements for remote working, by ensuring that health and safety issues are accounted for and that its members are equipped to effectively WFH. They want fairness across the board for employees that opt or apply to continue WFH post-Covid, (Mullen, 2020). Although WFH was considered a temporary action, and is still ongoing, the unions support the Government’s decision for restrictions.

The Government has developed policies and legislation which supports WFH such as the Remote Working Strategy, right to disconnect legislation, and guidance documents and supports such as the Covid-19 Guidance for Managers booklet by the Department of Justice

and Equality. These documents were published for the purpose of providing support for managers dealing with remote workers, as remote working has become a continuing reality for the Civil Service.

In relation to the advantages and disadvantages of WFH which were identified in the literature reviewed. The main issues identified are as follows, isolation from co-workers, the straining of workplace relationships, the interference from domestic and family responsibilities, and the blurring boundaries between work and non-work life. This research examines if these issues to identify if they are experienced by Civil Servants WFH, and if they are areas of concern for the Civil Service that need to be addressed.

2.4 Conclusion of Literature Reviewed

The Covid-19 pandemic is a multidimensional phenomenon. There are many dimensions which experienced radical shifts or developments, these include changes in the medical and health care fields, civilisation was impacted by restriction measures, and forced into new ways of doing things. The future of work and working arrangements were impacted, and across the globe employees were shifted to WFH practices. Thus, traditional leadership styles were shifted to leading virtual teams. Humans who are socially innate creatures, were forced to come together by staying apart. The pandemic continues to effect civilisation, and Governments around the world continue to adapt and adopt new practices for the future. One radical change experienced by the Civil Service of Ireland was the shift to mandatory WFH arrangements. As discussed previously, WFH is not a new trend, but it was rapidly accelerated in response to Covid-19. These practices were implemented under severe time pressure, with minimal time to develop strategies, and train employees, (Carroll and Conboy, 2020) or to develop remote working practices with employer and manager, (Agerfalk et al., 2020).

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from the literature reviewed, with the first conclusions addressing the lack of research on mandatory WFH arrangements during a pandemic. Further research is required to determine its impacts on employees and to ensure literature on remote working has contextual relevance during a pandemic.

There are positive impacts such as improved work-life balance and increased flexibility, (Kelliher and Anderson, 2009). Research by Como et al. (2021) determined that the work-life wellness of employees can be influenced by organisational supports during the transition to WFH, and employees will require suitable blended working polices post-Covid that are suitable to their individual needs.

There are several negative impacts associated with WFH that need to be examined, these are outlined below:

- The lack of adequate home workstations, additional pressures of managing work and non-work life, and new ways of performing duties, (Waizenegger et al., 2020).
- Border theorists argue remote working heightens work-home spill overs and blurs the boundary between work and non-work life, due the pervasiveness of technology and employee's inability to switch off.
- The intensification of work due to technology access and temptation to work longer hours (Grant et al., 2013) and professional isolation, (Cornwell and Waite, 2009; Garg and Van der Rijst, 2015; Murthy, 2017).
- The loss of informal social interactions, loss of connections with colleagues and the organisation, withdrawal from the workplace, that may also result in an increase in turnover (Larson et al., 2020; Carmeli, 2009; and Ozcelik and Barsade, 2011).

In relation performance management, the following conclusions were reached:

- Managing virtual teams is a complex and challenging task.
- The lack of physical observation of team's performance, behaviours, and the lack of verbal cues and facial expressions is difficult in determining the mood and feelings of teams, (Jawadi et al., 2013).
- Breakdown in communications is common and team cohesion is negatively impacted.
- Further research may contribute to the virtual leadership knowledgebase by examining the leadership styles and behaviours that may impact the effectiveness of virtual teams and to actualise theoretical developments.
- The lack of face-to-face supervision and engagement, perceived lack of support from management, and lack of intrateam trust is a challenge for virtual teams and leaders, (Cascio and Shurygailo, 2002; de Jong, 2016; and Larson et al., 2020).

From the literature reviewed, the central questions to determine the impact Covid-19 had on Civil Servants WFH are as follows:

- **Hypothesis 1 (H1):** When WFH during the Covid-19 pandemic, was managers performance in terms of their overall accomplishment of goals and objectives impacted more than that of employees.

- **Hypothesis 2 (H2):** When WFH during the Covid-19 pandemic, was managers performance in terms of their ability to effectively managed work performance impacted more than that of employees.
- **Hypothesis 3 (H3):** When WFH during the Covid-19 pandemic, was managers performance in terms of team cohesion and teamwork with colleagues impacted more than that of employees.
- **Hypothesis 4 (H4):** When WFH during the Covid-19 pandemic, was managers performance in terms of their quality of work impacted more than that of employees.
- **Hypothesis 5 (H5):** Is there an association between knowing when to switch off when WFH and a positive work-life balance?
- **Hypothesis 6 (H6):** Is there an association between having flexible and a positive work-life balance?
- **Hypothesis 7 (H7):** Is there an association between keeping a regular working schedule when WFH and a positive work-life balance?
- **Hypothesis 8 (H8):** Is there an association between having a dedicated home workstation and a positive work-life balance?

To assist in examining the above-mentioned issues, section 3 of this research discusses the research problems and aims of the research, with additional information on the research process.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The methodology refers to specific procedures or techniques used to ascertain, process, and analyse information about a topic. Research methods assist in finding answers to the questions outlined in this section of the report. The methodology was informed by secondary data sources such as literature, academic research, and reports such as the Global Work-From-Home Experiences survey 2020 referenced in the literature review. It describes the research methods applied and the justification for using certain methods and key data inputs.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter applies the lessons learned from the literature reviewed, to assess the impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on Civil Servants WFH. This chapter describes and explains the focus of this research, the research methods applied, the justification for the methods used, and the key data inputs used in this research. It also contains a discussion of the limitations encountered whilst conducting the research.

3.2 Focus

As a current Civil Servant impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, the research was most opportune to examine the impacts the Covid-19 pandemic had on Civil Servants. At the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic it was imagined that WFH would be a temporary measure, and normal business operations would resume in due course. As it has now surpassed fifteen months since Civil Servants shifted to mandatory WFH arrangements, further research was required to identify the issues and challenges experienced by Civil Servants. The key research questions which emerged following an examination of the literature are referenced in chapter 2.

3.3 Methodology

A methodology is defined as a “strategy or architectural design by which the researcher maps out an approach to problem-finding or problem-solving”, (Buckley et al., 1979). It is a strategy which enables researchers to formulate, organise and assimilate collected data to reach a conclusion, including the data collection and analysis tools, (Kothari, 2004). The methodology used was informed by various studies by academics which includes journals and articles, it was also informed based on results of reports and surveys conducted by various organisations in both public and private sector.

The strengths and limitations of both quantitative and qualitative methods were examined as part of this research. According to research by Choy (2014) both methodologies can be used,

and a complementary approach would provide better results. As a part-time researcher there were obvious time limitations, which restricted the feasibility of conducting both qualitative and quantitative research. In relation to the focus of the research and formulation of the research hypotheses in chapter 2, several methodology approaches were considered. It was decided that the methodology would use a descriptive research design using quantitative research in the form of a survey, to accurately and systematically describe the sample population which are Civil Servants. Descriptive research can be used to portray the characteristics of persons, situations, or groups, and can observe, describe, and document aspects of a situation or phenomena as it occurs, which assists in discovering the relationships between certain variables, (Dulock, 1993). A quantitative approach was considered the most appropriate methodology given the ability to reach a large sample that is representative of the population of Civil Servants. As the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic continues to evolve, so does the requirement to explore this phenomenon by accurately and reliably obtaining measurements that allow a statistical analysis which can be used to identify the impact the pandemic had on employees.

The strengths of qualitative methods were considered and according to Sharps et al. (2004) qualitative data can be richer than quantitative data and provides a deeper understanding of a problem. Qualitative methods facilitate the studying of issues in more depth, openness, and detail, (Patton, 2002). Some of the pitfalls identified for the use of qualitative methods in this research is that it is not a statistically representative form of data collection and provides perspectives only of a smaller sample. Data collected cannot be measured or compared to the representative sample. Covid-19 presented many challenges in conducting research, the ability to conduct interviews or host focus groups was hindered by social distancing restrictions. The lack of anonymity using interviews can negatively impact the response rates and honesty of respondents in answering questions. As the WFH phenomenon is a relatively new ordeal for most Civil Servants, the data may be difficult to present as individual may have different perspectives and reactions to the research findings. When asking questions about challenges experienced, impacts on employee wellbeing, feelings of social isolation, and loneliness because of the subjective nature of qualitative methods, it is difficult to apply conventional standards of validity and reliability. As mentioned previously, time is of the essence and qualitative research can be time and labour intensive. There was a likelihood that several sessions might be required with the sample to ensure the questions sought were answered.

Another pitfall considered was the inability of qualitative research results to be replicated, as it is based on individual perspectives.

As a serving Civil Servant there was a desire for the research to examine and observe the impacts experienced by other Civil Servants WFH and learn from their experiences and identify areas for further development. It was the assumption that mandatory WFH would have an impact on Civil Servants, as they may lack the training or experience, as well as suitability of home workstations. The research was interested in examining the impacts on productivity and work-life balance.

The obvious limitations of quantitative research were examined. Quantitative research is less likely to offer rich and complex views of organisational realities, it cannot account for the differences in individual contexts and experiences (Saunders et al., 2009). It cannot provide an in-depth understanding of the context or phenomenon. It was noted that the data may not be robust to provide an understanding or explain complex issues. The use of quantitative methods via a survey, is a common strategy in business research to assist in answering the who, what, why, where, and how much and how many, (Saunders et al., 2009). The advantage of quantitative research is that it is appropriate when measuring the relationship between variables, (Robson, 2002) and whereby research is investigating the relationship between variables, a predictive and correlational quantitative research is the appropriate design, (Creswell, 2009). According to Babbie (2004) the reliability of survey research is high, and this assisted in the decision to choose a quantitative approach.

Quantitative research focuses on objectivity, (Almeida et al., 2009) and this research aims to produce objective and rational results without biases. To quantify the attitudes, and experiences of the larger population, and to make generalisations and reveal patterns, a survey is the most suitable methodology. The decision to choose quantitative techniques derived from the requirement to obtain direct answers in a structure setting, through pre-determined responses, closed-ended questions and Multiple-Choice questions and scales, that produce quantifiable results. Direct answers will assist in streamlining results from the data gathered. The research aims to survey at least 100 Civil Servants across several Government Departments. The limited timeframe of the research does not support the gathering of qualitative data through interviews to a large sample. The nature and anonymity of surveys promote an increased likelihood of greater disclosure of sensitive information, and it was anticipated that Civil Servants would be more forthcoming and honest in their responses if the surveys were anonymous. Also, the

research was designed to acquire insights into Civil Servants experiences of WFH and to investigate and measure their experiences of WFH, the challenges faced in performance management, virtual leadership, and the effects on employee wellbeing. As quantitative data is based on measured values which can be verified, it is less open to ambiguities or misinterpretation.

As discussed in the literature review, virtual leadership and managing of distant teams brought about new challenges for Irish Civil Servants. The aim of the research was to gather data about how leaders and employees were performing and observe how WFH in virtual teams impacts productivity.

3.4 Research Instrument and Sample

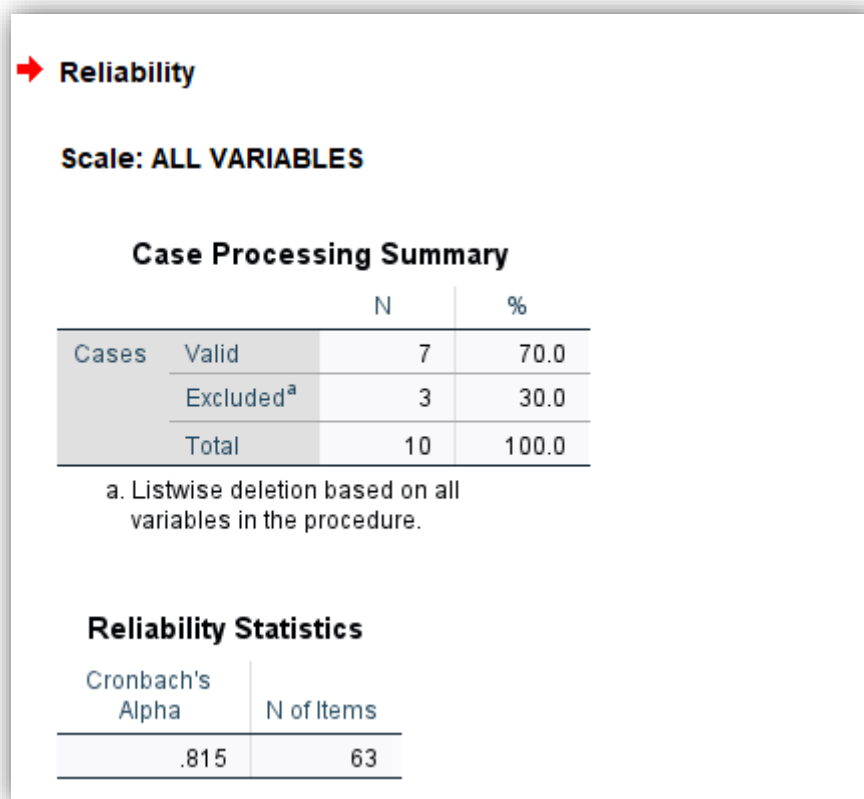
The research was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire which was sent electronically to current Civil Servants across multiple Government Departments. This research could offer insights into the development of individual Department remote working policies by analysing the impacts that WFH had on its employees.

According to Fowler (1995) and Oppenheim (1992) when choosing an appropriate questionnaire method, criteria such as the purpose of the research, characteristics of the target sample, and the financial and time resources need to be assessed. A self-administered questionnaire is cost effective, quick, and efficient in obtaining vast quantities of data and has the advantage of a wide reach. As a Civil Servant, access to large sample was available, and proved as a rich resource for data collection. As it is not Civil Service policy to engage in independent research, there was an advantage in engaging professional connections within several Civil Service Departments to form a large sample that would be representative of the population. As a part-time researcher there are time and financial implications to consider, which informed the decision to apply a non-random sampling technique which is cost effective. The questionnaire was issued to professional contacts within the Civil Service, which was subsequently shared to other Civil Servants. The questionnaire was issued to Civil Servants across several Departments, with the data collection period starting on 22nd April 2021 and closing on 7th May 2021. The goal was to reach at least 100 fully answered questionnaires by Civil Servants.

Prior to issuing the survey, the design of the questionnaire used in the methodology was evaluated by assessing the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The validity assesses the questionnaire to see whether it measures what it is intended to measure, (Zikmund, 2003).

According to Rattray and Jones (2007) to assess the reliability of the questionnaire, the Cronbach's alpha statistic can be used to measure internal consistency. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct a pilot test of the survey with a sample of participants which are same and/or similar to the intended sample, (De Vaus, 2002). The questionnaire was tested on 10 respondents prior to officially issuing the questionnaire to assess the validity and reliability of the 63 scales used within the questionnaire. The alpha coefficient for the scales used is .815, suggesting that the items have a relatively high internal consistency, as seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4 – Cronbach's Alpha Pilot test of scales



3.5 Research Approach

Employees face many challenges in adopting and adapting to new WFH practices. From the perspective of leaders and managers, the aim of the research was to identify if managers experienced challenges from the shift in traditional leadership styles to managing virtual teams? The focus of the research is to determine the impact Covid-19 had on individual and team performance, and the impact on individual's ability in delivering of goals and objectives, managing performance, quality of work, and team cohesion. From the literature reviewed, several academics identified the importance of establishing intrateam trust to ensure effective

team and individual performance and connectedness to the organisation. The research examined if managers trust their teams to perform effectively while WFH, and if employees perceive their managers to trust them in performing at home.

The questionnaire – “Working From Home during Covid-19 Experience Survey for Civil Servants in Ireland”.

The questionnaire consists of eight sections, with a variation of multiple-choice and scales. The sections within the questionnaires are as follows:

- 1. Informed Consent**
- 2. Personal Information**
- 3. Working From Home Participation**
- 4. Working From Home Success Factors**
- 5. Current Work Situation**
- 6. Team Performance and Productivity for Managers**
- 7. Individual Performance and Productivity**
- 8. Connectedness to your Organisation and People**
- 9. The Future of Working From Home or Blended Working**

The aim of section 1 was to introduce the purpose of the research, provide information on the lead researcher, the type of data used, the processing and storing of data and informed consent. The section also requires the respondents consent prior to completing the questionnaire.

Section 2 focuses on gathering personal information/demographics of the sample, and includes question relating to the age, gender, grade in the Civil Service, reason for WFH, family-life, living situation and education.

Section 3 focuses on obtaining data relating to respondents current WFH situation to ascertain if respondents had prior experience WFH, and to understand current working patterns.

Section 4 focuses on WFH success factors. The aim of this section is to gather insights into how respondents are coping WFH, satisfaction with home workspace, and it addresses the impact WFH had on work-life balance. Based on literature reviewed, it was established that WFH has several challenges, such inadequate home working conditions, difficulties in balancing family-life with work-life, employee wellbeing concerns due to social and professional isolation, and the lack of communication and cohesion with colleagues. This

section seeks to establish if the problem identified in literature reviewed is present in the respondent group.

Section 5 seeks to establish if respondents have the required equipment, dedicated workspace, and resources to fulfil their duties. It also establishes if respondents keep regular working schedules, examines if work is more demanding and challenging than normal, and it analyses the advantages, disadvantages, and the challenges experienced.

Section 6 seeks to establish if the performance of managers was impacted by WFH, and if it impacted overall team performance. The section also sought to establish if managers trust their employees to perform effectively at home. From literature reviewed, it was identified that trust is required to manage a team, and that the building of reciprocal trust has a positive impact on organisational and team performance, (Lewicki and Bunker, 1996; de Jong, 2016; Praveen and Prashant, 2013).

Section 7 focuses on establishing if individual employees' productivity was impacted since the transition to home working, and if employees feel they are trusted by management to perform effectively while WFH.

Section 8 seeks to establish the impact WFH had on Civil Servants regarding their feelings of social isolation, professional isolation, and disconnectedness from their respective organisations.

Finally, section 9 of the survey seeks to establish Civil Servants preferences for WFH post-Covid, and the future of work. It seeks to establish the preferred working pattern post-Covid.

A statistical analysis of the data collected will be conducted to identify patterns and trends amongst the respondent group. The data will be used to offer insights into the current working situation of employees, the equipment and environmental perspectives, the challenges experienced and impacts on performance management and employee wellbeing. Also, the preferences for Civil Servants to continue WFH post-Covid.

It is the assumption that this research could form the basis of future research in the development of individual Civil Service Departments remote working policies, by analysing the individual characteristics, the challenges and impacts that WFH had on its employees.

3.6 Key data Inputs – Secondary Data

The secondary data used provided a background and information on the impacts WFH can have on employees during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Background reading and the literature reviewed was on ongoing process and informed this research and the development of the research hypotheses outlined in chapter 2. The research was inspired by several sources of secondary data which include books, academic journals, published sources, Government reports, and existing research via surveys by other academics and studies by Government bodies.

As current literature is limited in terms of researching the impact mandatory WFH had on employees, and the lack of any empirical research on the impact WFH had on Civil Servants in Ireland, primary research through online questionnaires was conducted to generate statistical data on the impact Covid-19. There were gaps in literature as mentioned previously, and this research was designed to address the gaps in research such as the impact of mandatory WFH, its impacts on productivity, challenges in virtual teams, and to determine if intrateam trust was established in virtual teams. The research also seeks to establish the impact WFH had on social isolation of respondents.

3.7 Limitations

Inevitably, several limitations emerged in conducting this research. As a part-time student obvious time limitations were experienced in terms of interviewing a large sample of Civil Servants in conjunction with administering a quantitative survey. As a result of a foreshortened period available to conduct research into this area and financial restrictions, face-to-face interviews and focus groups were not possible to conduct. This research would have been further complimented if it was possible to collate data from both in-depth qualitative data resources and quantitative data. The research would have benefit further from surveying a larger sample, however, time limitations did not afford an opportunity to open the survey for an extended period. In total 129 respondents completed the survey.

The Covid-19 pandemic and Level 5 restrictions in Ireland during the period of my research posed restrictions in terms of travel and physical distancing. To survey a large sample during the pandemic was more feasible via a quantitative online questionnaire. Also, surveys can quantifiably measure the impact and challenges that WFH had on Civil Servants in Ireland and it produces quantifiable facts and experiences of the consensus of workers regarding how they are managing WFH arrangements during a pandemic.

To conclude, a quantitative method through the administration of a survey was chosen as the most appropriate and relevant data gathering tool to assist in answering the research hypotheses outlined in chapter 2. It was anticipated that quantifiable results produced could form the basis of future research by the Civil Service to assist in the development of individual Departmental remote working policies.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity are of utmost concern when designing the methodology, (Miles et al., 2014). To strengthen the relationship between researcher and respondents and to develop a degree of trust, it was decided that the participants completion of the questionnaire would be completely anonymously, (Berg, 2016). All respondents were informed of the purpose of the research, the use of data collected, and the type of data collected.

It should be noted that no personally identifiable data such as (IP address, email, geo-location) were collected and that the reporting of the findings does not contain confidential information. Respondents were informed of the data analysis process and the storing of data electronically, with limited access by the lead researcher.

All respondents were required to complete an explicit informed consent form prior to completing the survey, (Patton, 2014). Additional measures were introduced to avoid any risks in the research design and analysis of findings, (Berg, 2016). For those reasons it should be noted that all respondents surveyed are adults, and current Civil Servants. All respondents were informed that the questionnaire is completed in a voluntary capacity and participants can withdraw from the survey at any time. The potential for any harm was evaluated, and the above actions were necessary to protect respondents from any psychological, social, or financial harm in participating in this research.

Chapter 4. Analysis and Findings

This chapter presents the findings obtained from the online questionnaire and presents evidence of the impact WFH had on Civil Servants. The questionnaire sought to establish the impact WFH had on performance management and employee wellbeing, and this section presents evidence of employee's experience of WFH and the impact it had on managing team and individual performance and impacts on employee wellbeing.

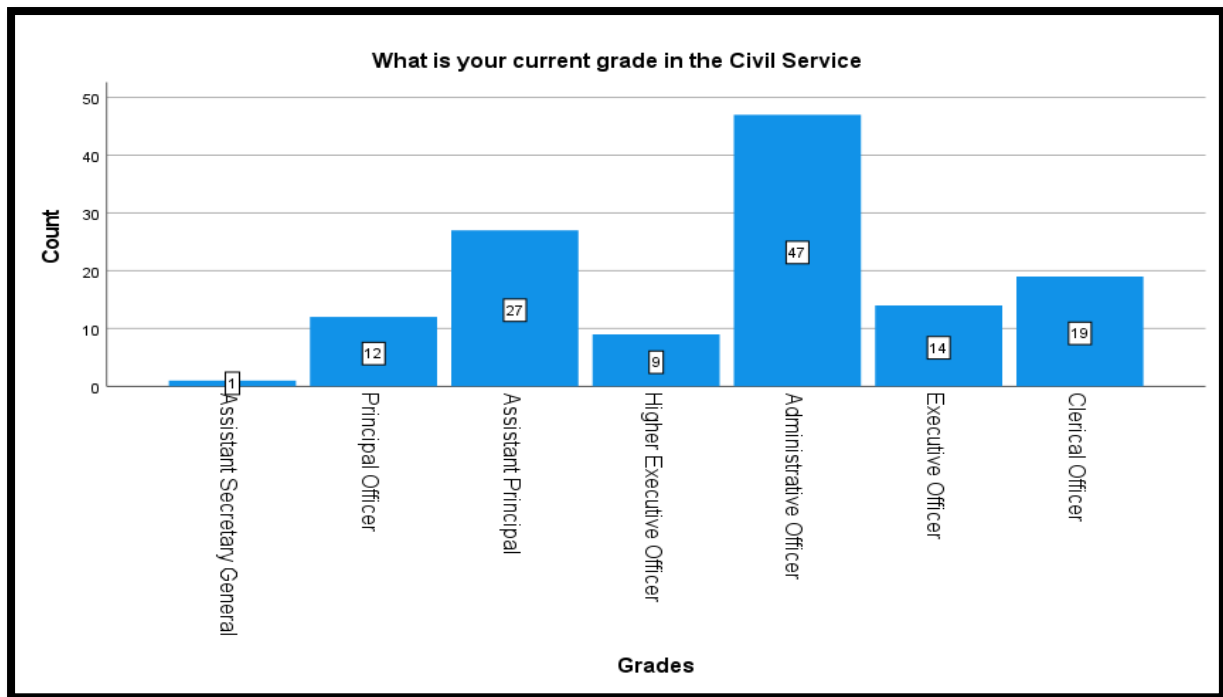
A highlight of the results is presented in this section. As mentioned previously, the focus of this research was to examine the impact WFH during the Covid-19 pandemic had on performance of managers and employees. Other interesting findings are presented throughout this section.

4.1 General Information (demographics)

Of the respondents, 68 (53%) were female and 61 (47%) were male. The grades of the respondents were varied and ranged from Clerical Officer position to Assistant Secretary General level, which is executive management level. Table 1 provides a bar chart description of the grades and numbers in each respective grade. The educational level of the respondents is very high, 65 (50%) of respondents have a Master's Degree. 38 (29%) have a Bachelor's Degree, 11 (9%) had other qualifications which were not listed in the survey, 10 (8%) had secondary education, and 2 (2%) had Associate Degree and 2 (2%).

In relation to the number of person(s) present while WFH, of the respondents, 23% had 1 person living with them, 33% had 2 persons, 26% had 3 persons and 18% had 4 or more persons present while WFH. 27% of all respondents had dependent children living with them, of that 53% had one person, 31% had 2 persons, 13% had 3 persons and 3% had 4 or more dependent children living with them when WFH.

Table 1 – Breakdown of Grade



The highlights of the results are present in the following sections. The results section applies the findings of the data into context with theory discussed in the literature reviewed chapter.

4.1.1 Working From Home Participation

In relation to the working pattern of the respondent group, 127 (98.5%) were currently WFH and 2 (1.5%) had returned to normal working arrangements. 93% were mandatorily WFH as it was “*Compulsory due to the Covid-19 pandemic*”, and 7% were WFH in an “*Agreement with employer in response to the Covid-19 pandemic*”. 89% never WFH, as the option was not available. The results found that 81% were WFH remotely all the time and 19% were working a blended arrangement of both remote working and attendance in the physical workplace.

4.2 Impact on Manager and Individual Productivity

As discussed previously, this research is interested in examining if there was a difference in terms of the impact on performance of managers and that of employee’s while WFH during Covid-19. To effectively examine this, the research survey included a section which required respondents to identify if they are managers or employees, and thus, the research could compare the impact WFH during Covid-19 had on the performance of managers and employees. Based on the answers provided by the respondents, this survey must believe that managers truthfully answered the required section. The research analysed the responses of managers and employees through a series of statements which required respondents to rate the

impact on performance using a Likert of 1 to 5 (1 Large Negative Impact and 5 Large Positive Impact).

To compare the differences between the two-sample means, it was decided that a Mann-Whitney U Test be used to analyse the results. To justify the use of the Mann-Whitney U test, the data set is ordinal, and the assumptions of the t-test were violated. The Mann-Whitney U test “is the non-parametric alternative to the t-test for independent samples”, (Pallant, 2005, Pg., 291). The Mann-Whitney U test converts the scores on the continuous variables to ranks and compares the median score, and it evaluates if the average of the ranks of the dependent variables across the two groups differ significantly.

This Mann-Whitney u statistic was conducted for several dependent variables associated with performance across the two groups, to evaluate if there was a significant difference. The results are presented in this chapter. The Mann-Whitney U statistic assumes distributions are non-normal and of a similar nature. A Levene’s median-based homogeneity of variance test was conducted to verify if homogeneity of variance was equal across groups. Results confirm that the homogeneity of variance is non-statistically significant based on the median and with adjusted degree of freedom results presented in Appendix 3. Based on this result, the research can infer based on the median and mean ranks to interpret the results.

4.2.1 Hypothesis testing

H1: Overall accomplishment of goals and objectives

Mann-Whitney Test				
Ranks				
	Do you manage staff?	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
[Overall accomplishment of my goals and objectives.]	Yes	63	68.46	4313.00
	No	66	61.70	4072.00
	Total	129		

Test Statistics ^a	
	[Overall accomplishment of my goals and objectives.]
Mann-Whitney U	1861.000
Wilcoxon W	4072.000
Z	-1.136
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.256

a. Grouping Variable: Do you manage staff?

In relation to managers and employees ‘overall accomplishment of goals and objectives’, the Mann-Whitney U test revealed that there is no statistically significant effect on productivity in terms of accomplishment of goals and objectives in the manager or employee groups. Manager group (Md = 2.00, n = 63) compared to employee group (Md = 2.00, n = 66). The U = 1861, Z = -1.136, and the p-value = .256.

This research calculated the R-value or effect size ($R = \frac{Z}{\sqrt{N}} = \frac{1.136}{\sqrt{129}} = 0.100$). Here the effect size of (0.100) is a small effect according to Cohen’s classification of effect sizes, these are 0.1 (small effect), 0.3 (moderate effect) and 0.5 and above (large effect), (Cohen, 1988).

Based on the results of the Mann-Whitney U test and the p-value (.256), this research will accept the null hypothesis, which is that there is no difference in the impact on managers overall accomplishment of goals to employees. The alternative is rejected.

H2: Ability to effectively manage work performance

Ranks				
	Do you manage staff?	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
[Ability to effectively manage my work performance.]	Yes	63	64.11	4039.00
	No	66	65.85	4346.00
	Total	129		

	[Ability to effectively manage my work performance.]
Mann-Whitney U	2023.000
Wilcoxon W	4039.000
Z	-.288
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.773

a. Grouping Variable: Do you manage staff?

In relation to managers and employees ‘ability to effectively manage work performance’, the Mann-Whitney U test revealed that there is no statistically significant effect on productivity in terms of ability to effectively manage work performance in the manager or employee groups. Manager group (Md = 2.00, n = 63) compared to employee group (Md = 2.00, n = 66). The U = 2023, Z = -.288, and the p-value = .773.

This research calculated the R-value or effect size ($R = \frac{Z}{\sqrt{N}} = \frac{-.288}{\sqrt{129}} = 0.025$). Here the effect size of (0.025) is a small effect according to Cohen’s classification of effect sizes.

Based on the results of the Mann-Whitney U test and the p-value (.773), this research will accept the null hypothesis, which is that there is no difference in the impact on managers ability to effectively manage work performance to that of employees. The alternative is rejected.

H3: Team cohesion and teamwork with colleagues

Mann-Whitney Test

Ranks

	Do you manage staff?	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
[Team cohesion and teamwork with colleagues.]	Yes	63	63.73	4015.00
	No	66	66.21	4370.00
	Total	129		

Test Statistics^a

[Team cohesion and teamwork with colleagues.]

Mann-Whitney U	1999.000
Wilcoxon W	4015.000
Z	-.403
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.687

a. Grouping Variable: Do you manage staff?

In relation to managers and employees ‘team cohesion and teamwork with colleagues’, the Mann-Whitney U test revealed that there is no statistically significant effect on productivity in terms of ability to effectively manage work performance in the manager or employee groups. Manager group (Md = 1.00, n = 63) compared to employee group (Md = 1.00, n = 66). The U = 1999, Z = -.403, and the p-value = .687.

This research calculated the R-value or effect size ($R = \frac{Z}{\sqrt{N}} = \frac{-.403}{\sqrt{129}} = 0.035$). Here the effect size of (0.035) is a small effect according to Cohen’s classification of effect sizes.

Based on the results of the Mann-Whitney U test and the p-value (.687), this research will accept the null hypothesis, which is that there is no difference in the impact on managers ability to effectively manage work performance to that of employees. The alternative is rejected.

H4: Quality of work completed to high standard

Mann-Whitney Test				
Ranks				
	Do you manage staff?	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
[Quality of work completed to a high standard.]	Yes	63	66.52	4190.50
	No	66	63.55	4194.50
	Total	129		

Test Statistics ^a	
	[Quality of work completed to a high standard.]
Mann-Whitney U	1983.500
Wilcoxon W	4194.500
Z	-.514
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.607

a. Grouping Variable: Do you manage staff?

In relation to managers and employees ‘quality of work completed to a high standard’, the Mann-Whitney U test revealed that there is no statistically significant effect on productivity in terms of ability to effectively manage work performance in the manager or employee groups. Manager group (Md = 2.00, n = 63) compared to employee group (Md = 2.00, n = 66). The U = 1984, Z = -.514, and the p-value = .607.

This research calculated the R-value or effect size ($R = \frac{Z}{\sqrt{N}} = \frac{-.514}{\sqrt{129}} = 0.045$). Here the effect size of (0.045) is a small effect according to Cohen’s classification of effect sizes.

Based on the results of the Mann-Whitney U test and the p-value (.687), this research will accept the null hypothesis, which is that there is no difference in the impact on managers ability to effectively manage work performance to that of employees. The alternative is rejected.

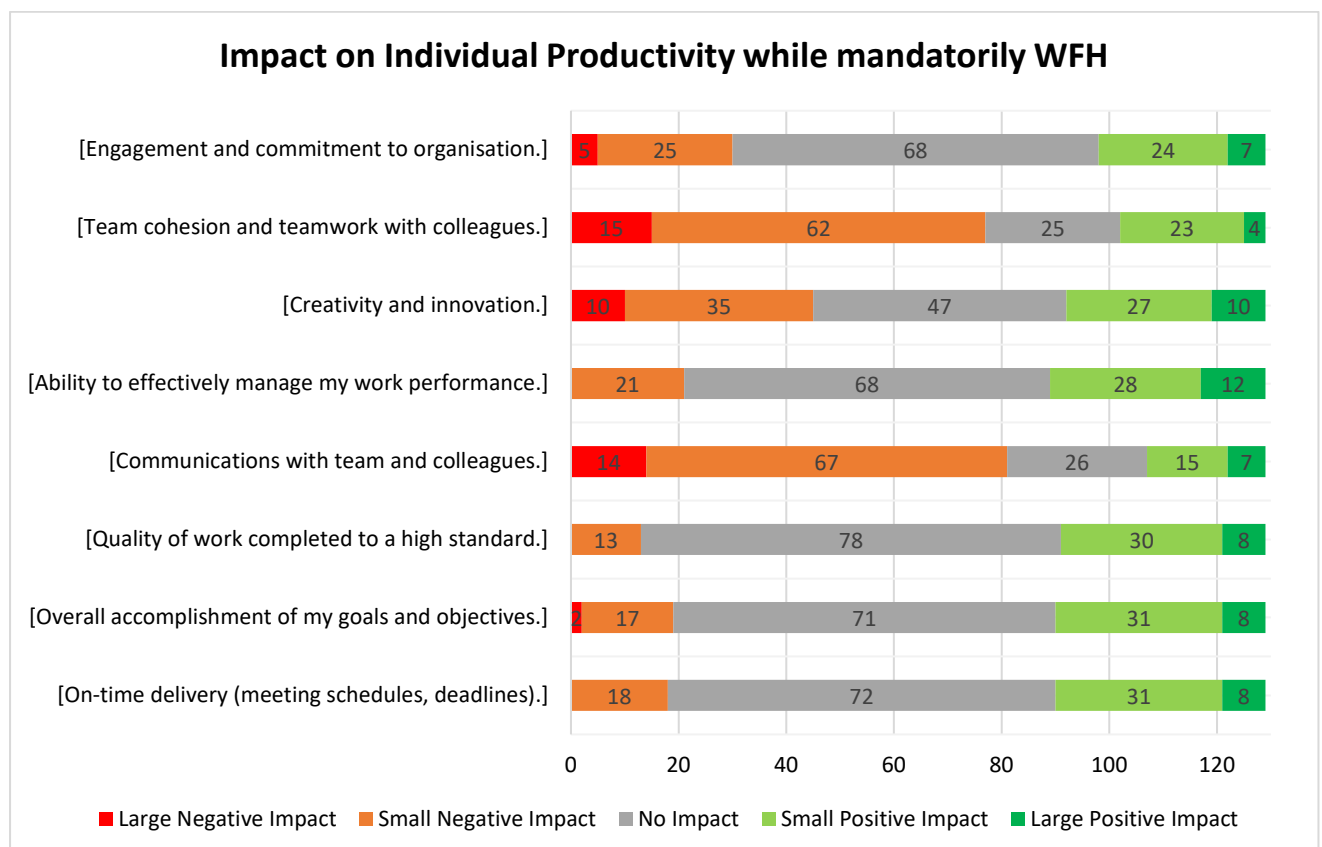
4.2.2 Impact on Individual Productivity

In the previous section the results compared the impact on productivity across both manager and employee groups, which overall showed that managers were not impacted more than that of employees. Considering these results, table 2 displays an inclusive impact on respondents regarding eight performance indicators. The results conclude that most respondents experienced ‘no impact’ in terms of their accomplishment of goals, ability to manage performance, on time delivery of results and the quality of work. However, the research found that the areas worst impacted by WFH arrangements are as follows:

- Communication with team and colleagues – with 63% of individuals experiencing a negative impact.
- Team cohesion and teamwork with colleagues - with 60% experiencing a negative impact.
- Creativity and innovation – with 35% experiencing a negative impact.

Although the results showed the above-mentioned aspects of performance were negatively impacted, overall, the respondent’s ability to effectively manage performance, accomplish objectives, and deliver tasks on-time while WFH is not hindered.

Table 2 – Impact on Productivity

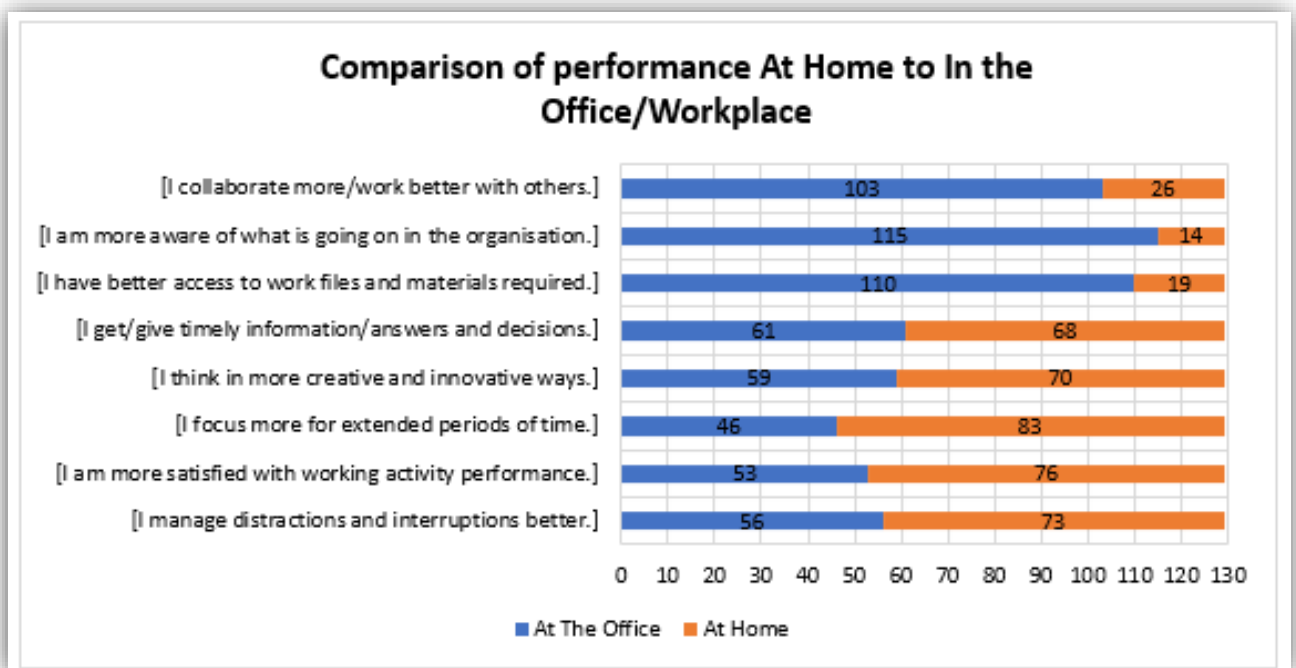


4.2.3 Comparison of performance ‘At Home’ to ‘In the office’

The results also ascertained respondent’s satisfaction with working activity performance while WFH in comparison with working in the office/workplace. The results are referenced in Table 3.

To support the trend identified previously, regarding the impact WFH had on team cohesion and communication with colleagues. The results found that 80% of respondents collaborate and work better with others at the office. Results found that 89% of respondents are more connected and aware of what is going on within their organisation when working in the office. 85% of respondents have better access to work files and materials when in the office than at home. Interestingly, to support the previously reported results regarding the impact on productivity, 59% of respondents report that they are more satisfied with their working activity performance while WFH.

Table 3 – Comparison of productivity ‘At Home’ to ‘At Workplace’



4.2.4 Evidence of reciprocal trust

The research also sought to establish if intra-team trust was present, and so a section was included which required line managers to state whether they trust employees to perform. This was based on findings in the literature reviewed, whereby research established the importance of building reciprocal trust in virtual teams, (Avolio, 2000; Praveen and Prashant, 2013;

Merriman et al., 2007; de Jong, 2016). The results conclude that 91% of managers trust their teams to effectively perform work activities while WFH.

Similarly, employees were asked if they felt they were trusted by line managers to perform effectively while WFH. The results established that 92% of employees felt trusted by line management and/or employer to perform while WFH. Based on these results it is evident that reciprocal trust between line managers and employees exists, and it could be an influencing how the respondent group are performing and maintaining performance since the move to WFH.

4.3 Work-life balance

This research is interested in examining the impact WFH during the Covid-19 pandemic had on Civil Servants work-life balance. During the design of the research survey, a section comprising of several dependent variables or predictor variables relating to work-life balance where included.

In relation to work-life balance, the research established that 64% of respondents agreed that WFH had a positive impact on work-life balance. 71% agree that having flexible hours allows them to integrate work and non-work life and this is indicative that respondents are experiencing benefits of WFH that provides an opportunity for them to improve their work-life balance. As identified in the literature reviewed, research suggested that remote workers make sacrifices in terms of working longer hours unpaid and input extra effort out of obligation for flexibility, (Golden, 2007; Kelliher and Anderson, 2010; de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011; and Elsbach et al., 2012). Results found that 57% agree to work longer hours than compared to normal working conditions. Border theorists also believe that remote working heightens work-home spill overs, (Mirchandani, 2000; Crosbie and Moore, 2004; and Marsh and Musson, 2008). Results found that 64% of respondents agree they know when to disconnect, with only 15% disagreeing. This is a positive result that respondents can disconnect. However, results found that 48% agree that they often think about work-related issues outside of working hours. This could be indicative that work-home spill overs are a problem for Civil Servants WFH.

This research is interested in examining if there are independent variables which may impact work-life balance. To measure the strength of association between two variables and to examine if a relationship exists, this research applied the Spearman rank-order correlation. As the data is categorical and ordinal, the Spearman rank correlation is suitable for analysing the data. The Spearman rank correlation is the non-parametric version of the Pearson's correlation.

The Spearman's correlation coefficient is used to measure the strength and direction of association between two ranked variables, (Pallant, 2005). In this research, the dependent variable is the respondents rating towards their positive work-life balance. The Spearman's correlation coefficient is used to examine if there is an association between a respondent's work-life balance while WFH, and the independent variables outlined below. For clarity, as the data collected was rated on 5-point Likert scale, this research is only interested in analysing results whereby respondents answered 'agree or disagree' in response to the variables below. The results were collated into agree or disagree responses, and respondents which answered neither agree nor disagree were removed across the variables as they do not add value. Therefore, this reduced the number of respondents from 129 to 62.

- Knowing when to disconnect from work activities and switch off.
- Having flexible hours to integrate work and non-work life.
- Keeping a regular working schedule.
- Having a dedicated workspace.

As outlined in the conclusion of the literature reviewed in chapter 2, this research established several hypotheses to test and approve, regarding work-life balance when mandatorily WFH. The hypotheses referenced below, are tested in this section to provide evidence concerning the plausibility of the null hypothesis. To measure the probability that the observed difference of this sample could have occurred by random, statistical tests using the Spearman rank-order correlation were applied. Correlation coefficients range between +1 and -1, with +1 meaning perfect positive correlation and -1 meaning perfect negative correlation. The p-value in this research must satisfy a significance level of $\leq (0.05)$. The p-value is used to indicate if the observed value in the sample is statistically significant. Whereby it is not ≤ 0.05 , the null hypothesis will be accepted.

4.3.1 Hypothesis testing

(H5): There is an association between knowing when to switch off and disconnect when WFH and a positive work-life balance.

			WLB Improved	Knowing when to disconnect or switch-off
Spearman's rho	Work-Life Balance Improved	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.024
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.853
		N	62	62
	Knowing when to disconnect or switch-off	Correlation Coefficient	.024	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.853	.
		N	62	62

When analysing the relationship between knowing when to disconnect and switch-off and improved work-life balance, the Spearman Rho calculated the correlation coefficient of positive ($r=.024$). This indicates a small correlation between the two variables, and it suggests a weak relationship between knowing when to switch-off and an improved work-life balance.

The coefficient of determination or percentage of variance, (Pallant, 2005) found that the variables only share 0.5% of a variance. There is little or no overlap, which suggests that knowing when to disconnect only explains 0.5% of the variance in respondents scores on work-life balance improved.

Based on the results of the Spearman Rho test and the p-value (.853), this research will accept the null hypothesis, which is that there is no relationship between the two variables. The alternative is rejected.

(H6): There is an association between working longer hours at home compared to the workplace, and a positive work-life balance.

Correlations			Work-life Balance Improved	Having flexible hours
Spearman's rho	Work-life Balance Improved	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.175
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.175
		N	62	62
	Having flexible hours	Correlation Coefficient	-.175	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.175	.
		N	62	62

When analysing the relationship between having flexible hours and improved work-life balance, the Spearman Rho calculated the correlation coefficient of negative ($r = -.175$). This indicates a small negative correlation between the two variables, and it suggests a weak relationship between having flexible hours and an improved work-life balance.

The coefficient of determination found that the variables only share 3% of a variance. There is little or no overlap, which suggests that having flexible hours only explains 3% of the variance in respondents scores on work-life balance improved.

Based on the results of the Spearman Rho test and the p-value (.175), this research will accept the null hypothesis, which is that there is no relationship between the two variables. The alternative is rejected.

(H7): There is an association between keeping a regular working schedule when WFH and a positive work-life balance.

Correlations			Work-life Balance Improved	Keeping a regular working schedule at home
Spearman's rho	Work-life Balance Improved	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.383**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.002
		N	62	62
	Keeping a regular working schedule at home	Correlation Coefficient	.383**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.
		N	62	62

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

After analysing the relationship between keeping a regular working schedule and improved work-life balance, the Spearman Rho calculated the correlation coefficient of positive ($r = .383$). This indicates a moderate positive correlation between the two variables, and it suggests a moderate relationship exists between keeping a regular working schedule and an improved work-life balance.

The coefficient of determination found that the variables share 15% of a variance. Although the results are statistically significant, there is a minimal overlap, which suggests that keeping a regular work schedule only explains 15% of the variance in respondents scores on work-life balance improved.

Based on the results of the Spearman Rho test and the p-value (.002), this research will accept the alternative hypotheses, which is that a relationship exists between the two variables. The null is rejected. As this research is not representative of the wider population i.e., it is limited to Civil Servants in Ireland, it is not to be construed as representative of the entire population.

(H8): There is an association between having a dedicated workspace at home and a positive work-life balance.

			Work-life Balance Improved	Having a dedicated workspace at home
Spearman's rho	Work-life Balance Improved	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.248
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.052
		N	62	62
	Having a dedicated workspace at home	Correlation Coefficient	.248	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.052	.
		N	62	62

When analysing the relationship between having flexible hours and improved work-life balance, the Spearman Rho calculated the correlation coefficient of positive ($r = .248$). This indicates a small positive correlation between the two variables, and it suggests a weak relationship between having a dedicated home workspace and an improved work-life balance.

The coefficient of determination found that the variables only share 6% of a variance. There is little or no overlap, which suggests that having a dedicated workspace only explains 6% of the variance in respondents scores on work-life balance improved.

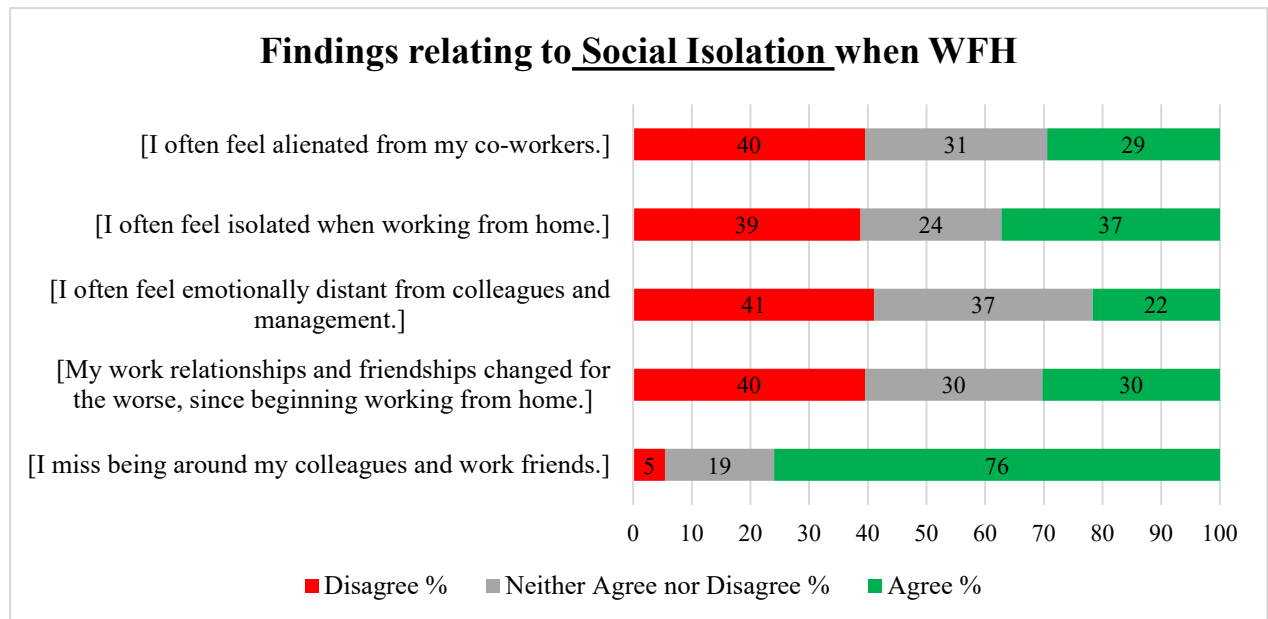
Based on the results of the Spearman Rho test and the p-value (.052), this research will accept the null hypothesis, which is that there is no relationship between the two variables. The alternative is rejected.

4.4 Social Isolation

As identified in the literature reviewed, isolation from co-workers, the lack of connections and growing disengagement are some of the worrying trends associated with WFH, (Collins and Moschler, 2009; Campbell and Gavett, 2021). The literature reviewed also identified that the Covid-19 pandemic has triggered a loneliness epidemic, with feelings of social isolation rising (Hyland, 2020; Walsh, 2021). WFH arrangements may result in self-isolation which leads to mental health issues including anxiety, depression, social isolation, and loneliness, (Braverman, 2020; and Staglin, 2020).

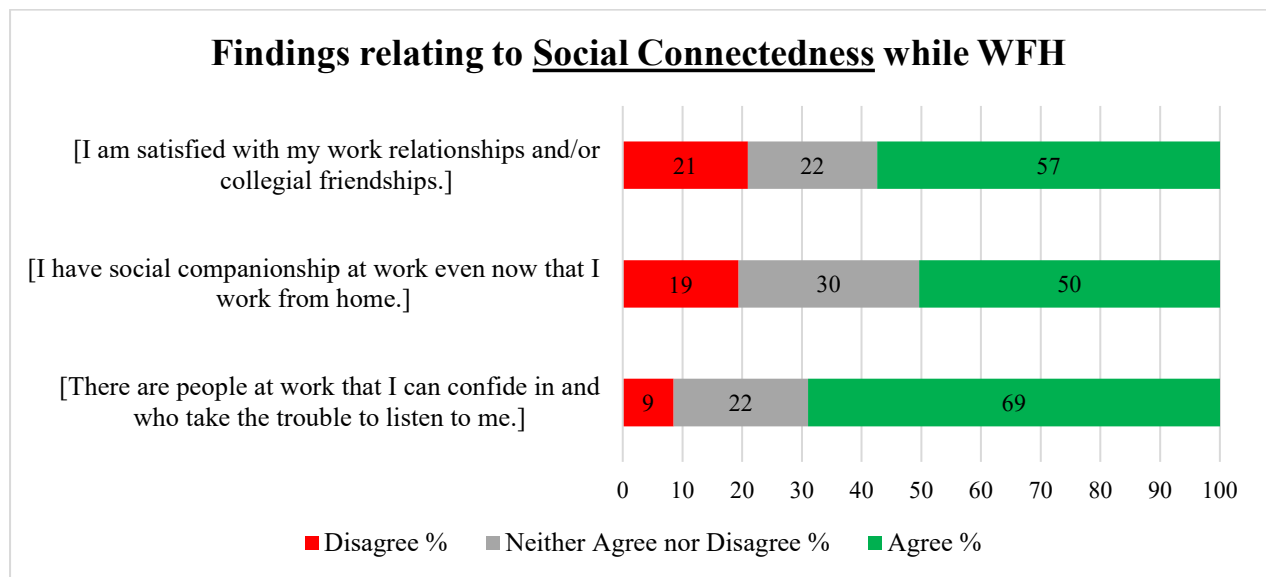
Overall, the results are not worrying nor indicative that feelings of social isolation and disconnectedness from the respondent’s organisation are a prevalent issue for the Civil Service. Table 4 presents the findings relating to Social Isolation while WFH, Table 5 represents findings relating to Social Connectedness, and Table 6 represents the findings relating to connectedness with organisation.

Table 4 – Social Isolation



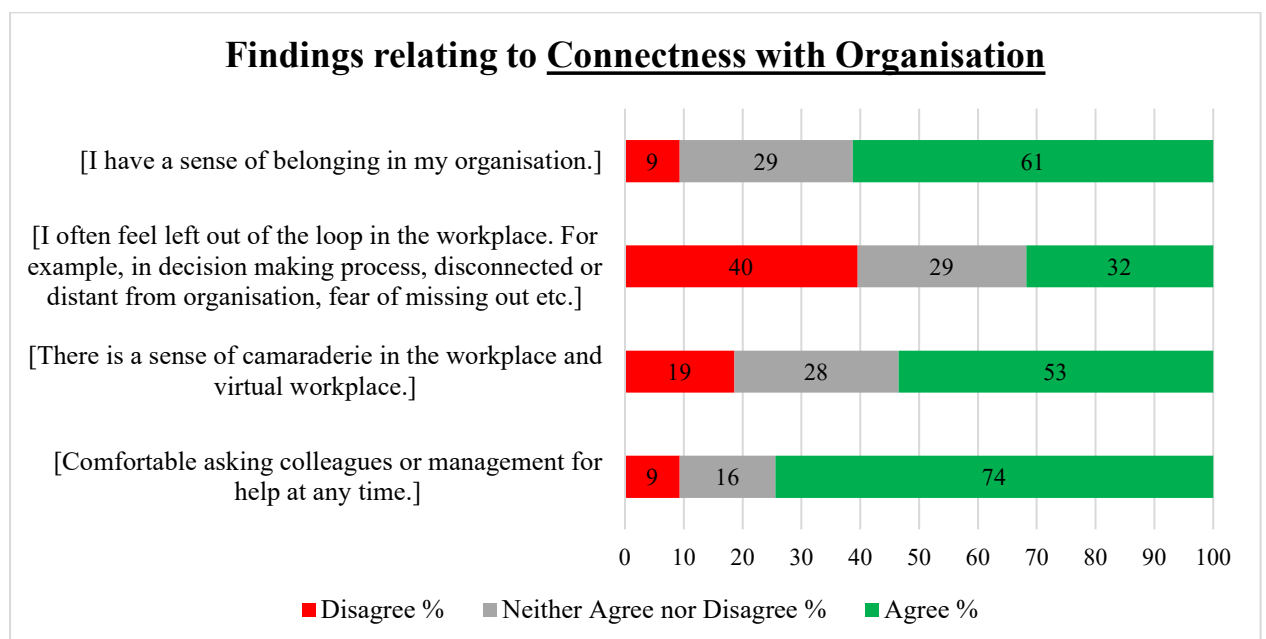
In relation to the results presented in Table 1, most respondents are managing WFH effectively in terms of social isolation and loneliness. However, it is noteworthy that respondent’s feelings of alienation and isolation when WFH are present. Although the majority of respondents disagree with the above-mentioned statements, it cannot be ignored that these feelings exist. If employees continue to feel alienated from co-workers and isolated when WFH, it may result in a negative impact to the mental health and wellbeing of respondents. Based on these results, a Blended Working policy is more suitable as it provides employees with the flexibility in performing duties i.e., when WFH and when in attendance at the office establish and maintain work relationships and connectedness with the organisation.

Table 5 – Social Connectedness



In relation to the results presented in Table x, feelings of social connectedness are positive and prevalent across the respondent group. 57% of respondents are satisfied with their workplace relationships even in the virtual setting. 50% of respondents have social companionship at work and 69% have social supports in work whereby they can confide in people and seek support. These results are very positive, as it is noteworthy that 89% of respondents never WFH prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, and social relationship are being maintained in the virtual setting.

Table 6 – Connectedness with organisation



In relation to the results presented in Table X, the research established that social supports are present, and respondents have both colleagues and management that they can confide in and seek support where required. The results also show that relationships have been maintained virtually, and workplace camaraderie exists in the virtual work setting. This is important as literature identified the lack of interface creates threatening conditions for organisations that causes social isolation, (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). The impacts on employee wellbeing are more critical during a pandemic, and employees are facing increasing health risks from infection, stress, and mental illness, (Sim, 2020). This research sought to establish if this was the case for the Civil Service, and if social isolation was a worrying trend prevalent for remote workers.

Previous research also found that quality social interactions and informal discussions amongst co-workers are essential for mental and physical health, (Mogilner et al., 2018). This research has identified that social interactions and social circles amongst respondents has been maintained, which may be positively reducing the impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on people regarding physical distancing measures and social isolation. The research found that team camaraderie, support from colleagues and management and a sense of belongingness exist.

4.4.1 Emerging trend of social isolation

A notable finding within the results section is that social isolation appears in the following areas.

1. Social isolation was recorded in the top three challenges experienced by respondents.
2. Social isolation was recorded in the top three disadvantages experienced by respondents.
3. Section 8 of the results section established that:
 - a. 29% of respondents agree that they often feel alienated from co-workers.
 - b. 37% of respondents agree that they often feel isolated when WFH.
 - c. 76% of respondents agree that they miss being around their colleagues and work friends.
 - d. 32% of respondents often feel left out of the loop.

As identified in the literature review, loneliness and poor social connections are associated with dementia, depression, and anxiety on an individual level, and it also impacts at an organisational level as it reduces task performance, creativity, reasoning, and decision-making capabilities, and impacts how employees perceive and connect with their organisations

(Murthy, 2017; Ozcelik and Barsade, 2011; Carmeli, 2009, Cornwell and Waite, 2009). To mitigate against the issues caused by social isolation, alienation, and feelings of disconnectedness, it is recommended that cultivating emotional wellbeing at work can diminish employees' feelings of isolation. As this research has established that social isolation and alienation exist however, not prevalent in the respondent sample, it would be prudent for HR to address these feelings. Over time employees' feelings may worsen with extended periods of isolation while WFH or whereby employees WFH alone with no social companionship, connectedness with organisation or social supports.

4.5 Working From Home Success Factors

This section of the survey focuses on respondent's home workstation, satisfaction with WFH set-up, and the biggest challenges experienced.

Home workstation

In relation to respondent's home workstations, Table 2 outlines the responses with a number and percentage of the respondent's home workstations. The results show that the largest percentage of respondents do not work from an appropriate home workstation. As mentioned previously, several studies conducted throughout the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the lack of adequate home workspaces as an issue. 58% are working from bedrooms or dining rooms. These do not afford the comfort, safety and privacy need to work. Also, as discussed in the literature review, inadequate space has health and safety concerns, and issues with employees blurring the boundaries between work and non-work life.

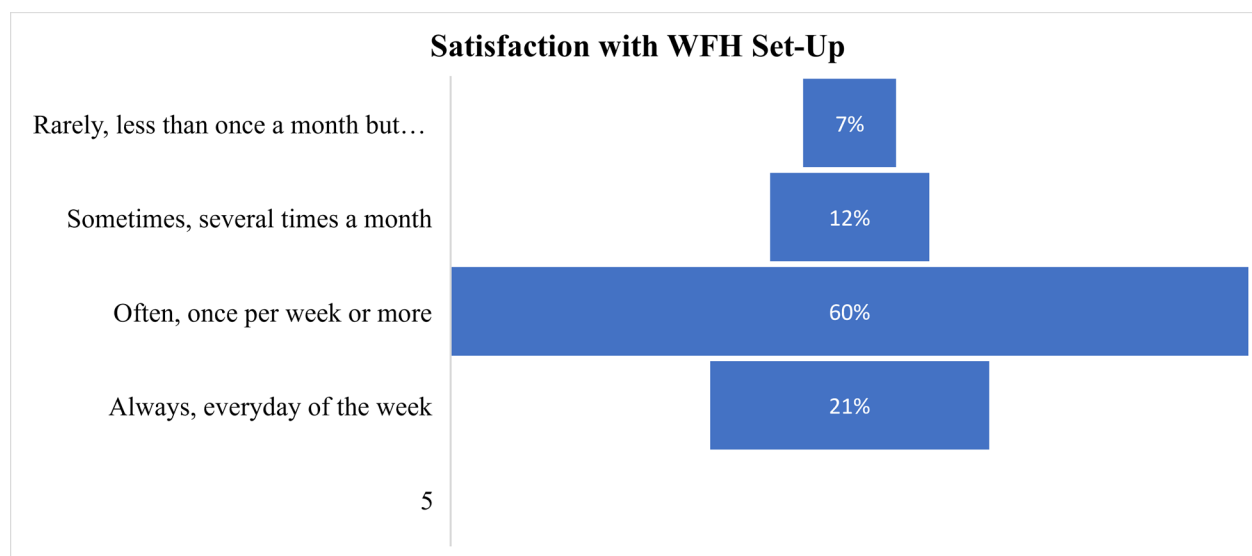
Overall satisfaction with WFH arrangement

In relation to respondent's satisfaction with current home set-up, table 8 presents the findings. Overall, 58% were satisfied and 21% were dissatisfied.

Table 7 – Description of home workstations used

Section 3 Q5: What best describes your home office or home workstation?	Number	%
Home office used solely by you for work	41	32
Home office used by multiple person(s) for work	5	4
Shared workspace	3	2
A bedroom	31	24
Living room or dining room	44	34
An external space i.e. (granny flat/log cabin/shed) for your exclusive use	1	1
An external space i.e. (granny flat/log cabin/shed) by arrangement	1	1
An external space used by multiple person(s) ad hoc	3	2
Other	0	0

Table 8 – Satisfaction rate of WFH set-up



4.6 Top 3 challenges identified

The top 3 challenges identified by respondents are outlined in rank order, as follows.

1. Communication and/or collaboration with co-workers – 30% have identified this as the top challenge.

2. Social isolation and loneliness – 16% have identified this as the second biggest challenge.
3. Unplugging or disconnecting from work – 15% identified this as the third biggest challenge.

As this research is interested in examining the impact mandatory WFH had on social isolation of Civil Servants WFH, it is interesting to note that both communication and collaboration with co-workers is the top challenge followed by social isolation and loneliness.

4.7 The future of WFH or Blended Working

The final section of the survey analyses respondents preferred options for the future of WFH. Part 1 of the section asked respondents if they would like to continue WFH into the future after normal working arrangements have resumed. Part 2 sought to determine the preferred frequency for the new working arrangement i.e., blended working arrangement or WFH all the time. The results are displayed in Table 9 and 10.

Table 9 – Future of WFH

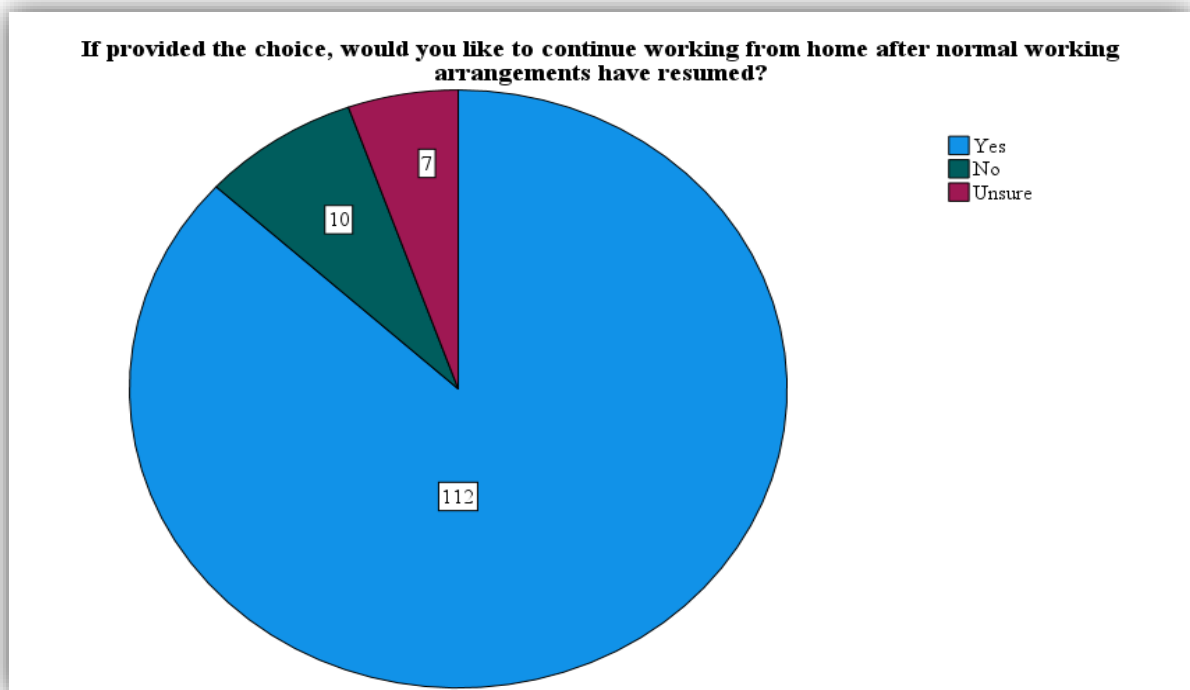
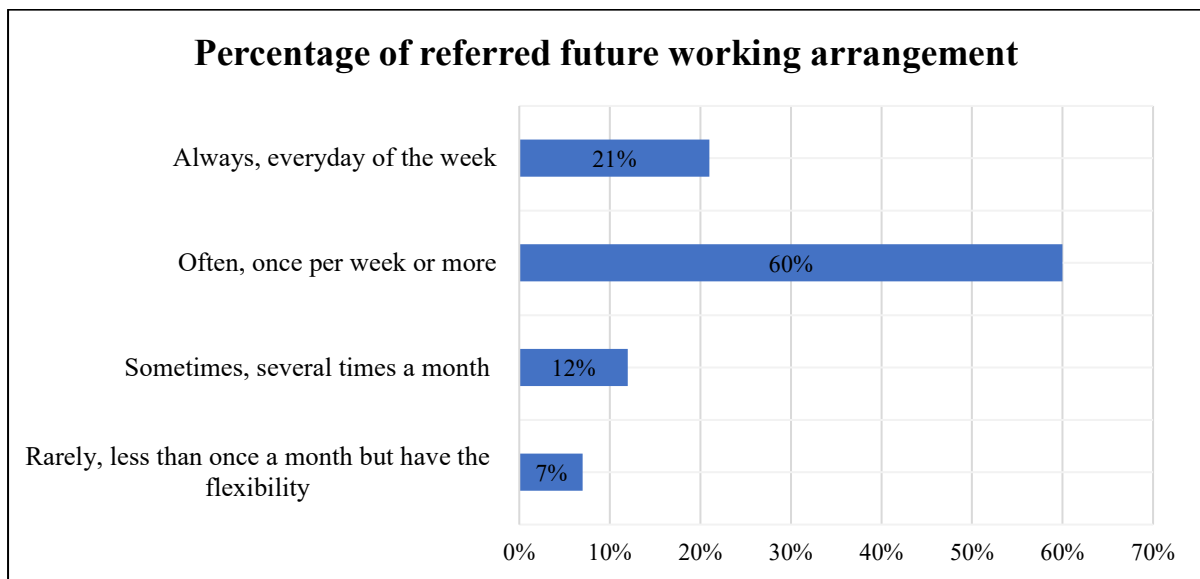


Table 10 – Preferred working arrangement



Overall, 60% would prefer a blended working arrangement, whereby they WFH once or more per week, 21% would prefer to continue WFH every day of the week, and 12% would like to occasionally WFH several times a month. 7% would prefer to WFH less frequently but have the flexibility. Overall, the results determined that respondents would prefer a blended working arrangement and continue WFH into the future.

Chapter 5. Discussion

This chapter presents the findings derived from the analysis of the impact WFH had on work-life balance, performance management and social isolation of Civil Servants in Ireland. It sets out the issues to be addressed and proposes several measures to address them.

5.1 Impact of WFH

The research explored the impact mandatory WFH had on work-life balance, performance management and social isolation of Civil Servants. This research was most opportune to examine the potential consequences of mandatory WFH. WFH is new for most Civil Servants and most had little or no experience of WFH prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. This research established that 98.5% of respondents were currently WFH and 93% were mandatorily WFH as it was compulsory due to the Covid-19 pandemic, 83% of which were WFH five days per week. The research established that 89% never worked from home prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, as the option was not available.

A gap was identified in current literature which addresses the impact of mandatory WFH on employees. Current research is focused on WFH as a voluntary entitlement to fulfil domestic obligations, improve work-life balance, or the intensification of work in exchange for flexible working arrangements, (Versey, 2015; and Kelliher and Anderson, 2009). Drawing on evidence from the results of the research conducted and the review of literature, key themes were identified and are provided here as considerations to assist employers in developing optimal working conditions for employees WFH.

The most noticeable HR challenges identified in this research are as follows.

- Adjusting current and new employees into the new working arrangements and working conditions to improve work-life balance and wellbeing.
- The limitation of human interactions and its impact on social isolation
- The implementation of remote working policies to support employees WFH now and into the future post-Covid.

5.2 Adjusting current and new employees into the new working arrangements and working conditions to improve work-life balance

The swift move to WFH forced employees to work in unsuitable conditions, using technologies in different ways, engaging with colleagues, managing virtual teams, combined with pressures of managing work and non-work life responsibilities. The level of intensification and an

examination of workers new home workstations was not addressed in current literature. The research found that only 32% of respondents had a home workspace that could be used solely for work. The largest proportion of respondents, 58% were working from bedrooms and/or living or dining rooms, which are unsuitable workstations for long-term WFH. There are health and wellbeing aspects that need to be examined to determine if a person's home workstation is physically suitable to continue WFH into the future, and if it is safe, comfortable, and free from disturbances. Current research is focused on work-life balance, however further research is required to examine if WFH improves work-life balance and if the working conditions afford the opportunity to separate work and non-work life to have a positive balance. Previous research on WFH noted that some people are willing to make sacrifices in the form of working longer hours unpaid, working harder or work intensification out of obligation to the employer, (Golden, 2007; Kelliher and Anderson, 2010; de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011; and Elsbach et al., 2012). After examination of the views of border theorists, that WFH has more business benefits than employee, WFH environment and practices of employees needs to be examined to ensure that the organisation is not benefitting more at the expense of the employee.

The Covid-19 pandemic had many implications for Human Resources Management (HRM). Organisations were forced to change their practices, manage in unprecedented territories, and adapt and change their working arrangements in physical, technical, and socio-psychological processes unfamiliar to them. HR Departments continue to face many challenges in assisting employees in adjusting to their new working arrangements. HR were required to provide ongoing support and protection. HR Departments are required to invest more time and effort into protecting employee wellbeing of those coping to adjust to the new WFH arrangements but also, the additional health and safety concerns that their new home workstations pose. The Safety Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 sets out requirements for employers to provide the same protection to employees at home as within the workplace. HR Departments cannot ignore legal responsibilities for the safety and wellbeing of those WFH.

As previously mentioned, 58% of respondents were working from bedrooms and dining rooms, which are not ergonomically suitable for long-term WFH requirements. It is likely these areas are not free from disturbances or domestic interferences and are not used solely for the employee. The difficulty in adjusting to the new working arrangements and to find suitable alternative workspaces can lead to further restrictions in the division of work and non-work life spheres. It may have an increase employees' difficulties in unplugging or disconnecting from work duties. Issues such as intensification of work and work spill-over are not limited to

employees with dependent children, and a lack of work-life balance may impact any employee's wellbeing. Homes have experienced significant changes, they have become a workplace, for those with children they became a school during restrictions, and they are also a place of relaxation and solace. It is important that the balance does not favour work-life over home-life and vice versa.

The sudden transition to WFH and virtual management of employees in response to Covid-19 saw people contending with suboptimal home workspaces and parental responsibilities. It should be noted that in normal circumstances, home-life demands can invade remote work, so managers need to be aware of this, (Larson et al., 2020). It is recommended that employers ensure employees have adequate facilities and childcare before allowing them to WFH into the future. WFH needs to be examined at the individual level to examine a person's occupational factors and their preferences, behaviours, and ability to perform effectively while WFH. It is important that further research is conducted to examine work-life balance and psychosocial challenges that remote workers face during the pandemic. It is recommended that ergonomic assessments and one-to-one sessions are conducted, to evaluate the appropriateness and safety of a person's home working capabilities. If an employee's home workspace consists of domestic distractions, dependent children and/or care giving responsibilities, it will be challenging to maintain a positive work-life balance. It could damage home-life and the solace of an employee's home.

This research has identified that most respondents experienced positive benefits WFH, such that 64% felt their work-life balance improved, and that flexible hours has allowed them to better integrate work and non-work life. However, there are many negative consequences that emerged, that need to be addressed by HR management. These findings align with the views of border theorists as outlined in the literature reviewed in chapter 2, that remote working will heighten work-home spill overs, leading to an inability to disconnect from work, work intensification and the blurring of the boundaries between work and non-work life, (Mirchandani, 2000; Crosbie and Moore, 2004; Marsh and Musson, 2008; Allen, Golden and Shockley, 2015; Felstead and Henseke, 2017; and Oakman, 2021). These emerging consequences are as follows.

- 50% of respondents agreed that they regularly perform work duties outside of normal working hours. Although this may be positive, as it indicates employees have flexibility in performing work duties, the exact hours worked per day is unknown. This is an area

that HR would need to monitor as it could lead to work burnout. Working additional hours unpaid coupled with the stress of managing a new working arrangement and pressures of managing a home-life can lead to physical and emotional stress and exhaustion.

- 57% of respondents agree that they are working longer hours at home than compared to in the workplace. This supports the previous concern, as it is evident that employees are working outside of normal working hours for longer periods than normal working arrangements.
- 34% of respondents agree that work is more demanding than normal working arrangements. The results were quite divided, with 32% disagreeing and 34% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. To compliment this finding, this research found that 52% of managers found WFH to be more challenging compared to the workplace.

To further support these findings, research conducted on 4300 respondents by Amarach (2020) for Forsa trade union, found that the second most cited disadvantage for WFH was that 51% of employees had difficulty in separating work from home-life.

This evident change in working behaviours of respondents, the subsequent working of longer hours coupled with an increase in work demands and challenges to perform their role poses significant issues. Although employees feel their work-life balance has positively improved, the results show respondents deviated from their apparent positive work-life balance. The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic continue to unfold. Covid-19 restrictions and mandatory WFH have increased the concerns for family-life, as the suspension of schools, creches and childcare facilities put additional pressures on employees to manage work and domestic duties. The increase of worry and stress relating to the safety of oneself and one's family have blurred work and family roles. For those WFH alone during the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions, face concerns relating to social isolation and loneliness. The Covid-19 pandemic and mandatory WFH is exacerbating socio-psychological issues, such as social isolation and loneliness.

5.3 The limitation of human interactions and its impact on social isolation

As outlined in the literature reviewed in chapter 2, there is a debate amongst academics as to the associated benefits of WFH. Professional isolation and social isolation and loneliness (Cornwell and Waite, 2009; and Murthy, 2017) are worrying trends present across the world. They are a common complaint from employees WFH and the loss of informal social

interactions, loss of connections with colleagues and the organisation, withdrawal from the workplace, may also result in an increase in turnover (Carmeli, 2009; Ozelik and Barsade, 2011; and Larson et al., 2020). This is a problem area for HR managers.

As identified in the literature reviewed, isolation from co-workers, the lack of connections and growing disengagement are some of the worrying trends associated with WFH, (Collins and Moschler, 2009; and Campbell and Gavett, 2021). Overall, the results relating to feelings of social isolation and disconnectedness are not a problem that is prevalent in the sample group. However, it should be addressed that the results found a trend relating to social isolation in the following areas.

- recorded in the top three challenges
- recorded in the top three disadvantages
- 29% of respondents agree that they often feel alienated from co-workers.
- 32% of respondents often feel left out of the loop.
- 37% of respondents agree that they often feel isolated when WFH.
- 76% of respondents agree that they miss being around their colleagues and work friends.

Based on these results, it is evident that social isolation and feelings of loneliness are a consequence worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent mandatory WFH arrangements. The impact could be more severe for single and childless employees WFH alone for extended periods. The social distancing measures and mandatory WFH arrangements implemented to combat the Covid-19 pandemic may have increased employees' feelings of loneliness and social exclusion. Workers are reporting less inclusion and less teamwork and cohesion. These issues pose considerable risk to their mental wellbeing and physical health, which HR managers need to address.

According to research by Amarach (2020), the biggest single negative aspect of WFH cited was that 69% of respondents lacked interaction with colleagues. Almost half of respondents found it difficult to know what is happening in the workplace and that management communicated poorly, (Mullen, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have long-lasting impacts on employees mental and physical health. These challenging and uncertain times are unique and requires HR managers to take an opportunity to develop their practices and systems to support the future of work.

Social support does decrease when WFH, and the results of this research established that 63% of respondents cited communications with team members was negatively impacted, and that 60% cited teamwork and cohesion was negatively impacted. Although the results of this research were positive in terms of the impact social isolation and loneliness had on most respondents. It cannot not ignore that 29% agree that they ‘often feel alienated form co-workers’ and 37% agree that they ‘often feel isolated when WFH’. When considering the findings of this research, it would be recommended that employers develop a balance between WFH and onsite attendance, that incorporates traditional face-to-face contact, as it may facilitate social belonging and interaction enjoyment, (Sacco, 2014). A less personalised means of contact might be for employers to stimulate virtual interactions amongst co-workers by providing robust meeting tools and technological infrastructure that streamlines collaborative methods regardless of an employee’s physical location, (Vander Elst et al., 2017).

Employers should consider creating supportive work environments that include adequate levels of social support between co-workers, employee participation in decision-making and task autonomy, (Vander Elst et al., 2017). HR managers should consider enhancing communications and supports for all employees. They should establish relationship-orientated HR systems to prevent the feelings of isolation and loneliness. Implement network development systems for single and/or childless employees that lack social companionship, which may be worsened by mandatory WFH, the current Covid-19 pandemic and/or future pandemics. Develop social platforms and networks within the organisation and frequent communication of these services may reduce employees’ feelings of disconnectedness and develop a sense of belongingness within the organisation.

5.4 The implementation of remote working policies to support employees WFH now and into the future post-Covid

The long-term implications of Covid-19 are still unfolding, and many unknown factors exist. In Ireland, the National Vaccination Programme is underway, and the numbers of vaccinated citizens and workers continues to increase. Although the situation and processes seem to be improving, the far-reaching impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic will not be short-lived and forgotten. According to experts the effects of Covid-19 are far from over and there may be further health crises in the future, (Hixon, 2020; and Desmond-Hellmann, 2020). Considering this, organisations need to be strategically forward-looking, with the mentality that these challenges faced are not an anomaly that is to be forgotten. Instead, it offers academics and practitioners an opportunity to remain attentive to improving responses to future pandemics.

This can be done through the coordination of research efforts to address challenges currently faced such as, appropriate home working conditions, technical support, development of emergency policies and guidance procedures for employees WFH in the long-term. Examine the impacts on social isolation and loneliness, and boundary management support whereby employees are managing a work and home-life in a singular environment.

It is crucial that any Civil Service policy ensures there is an equilibrium in terms of the benefits of WFH for both employee and employer. Trade unions expect the Civil Service blended working policies to reach agreements on arrangements for remote working by ensuring that health and safety issues are addressed, and its members are equipped to effectively WFH. Unions also stated that there must be fairness for all employees that opt or apply to continue WFH or blended arrangements into the future and there must be engagement and agreement between management and unions, (Mullen, 2020).

A key policy priority for employers is to develop adaptable strategies that are inclusive of all gender, family, or life-course stage, and that meet the employees needs on an individual level. Future strategies should also address situations whereby WFH is optional and those that are mandated to WFH. An important aspect to address is that those WFH do not experience negative consequences for their career or personal life i.e., continue to be afforded career opportunities, access to training and the costs associated (Daverth et al., 2016; and Kossek et al., 2018). Also, in terms of equity for the desired benefits of WFH and improved work-life balance, employees and employers must both benefit from WFH. According to research by Amarach (2020) for Forsa, 48% (or 2064 respondents) reported that they incurred costs that would not arise if they were in the workplace, (Mullen, 2020). Policies should be designed to decrease work-to-family conflict (WFC). WFH may diminish the boundaries between work and non-work life and make the psychological detachment from work at home more difficult, (Gajendran, 2007).

Should employees be required to log on and off in correspondence with normal working hours? Is this flexible to manage family-life and work-life responsibilities? WFH should allow employees to enjoy more flexibility in completing their tasks that does not require them to follow office hours, (Grant et al., 2019; Purwanto et al., 2020). Future policies should address how work roles within the domestic and recreational environments need to be facilitated and supported. It is recommended that employers provide clarity in their expectations of employees working hours and management of their work duties and/or family or home-life. Strategies

could include educating employees and leaders to develop boundaries that separate work and home-life, (Eddleston, 2017). Training of managers to deal with the new aspect of managing virtual teams and ensuring employees are supported and educated in terms of avoiding work burnout, disconnecting from work and boundaries between work and non-work duties, and work-home spill overs, (Felstead and Henseke, 2017).

Chapter 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the main conclusions and key recommendations based on the factors identified within the literature reviewed in chapter 2, and detailed consideration of the findings in chapter 4. It analyses the implications for HR managers to implement policies to support staff WFH post-Covid, and mechanisms to develop employees' and managements skills in supporting WFH arrangements. It considers the crucial elements for success and identifies areas for further research. The recognised challenges and limitations are discussed.

This research was focused on the impact the Covid-19 pandemic and mandatory WFH had on the work-life balance, performance management and social isolation of Civil Servants in Ireland. The research applied quantitative research methods to gather descriptive information on the work lives of Irish Civil Servants and how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected their work-lives.

The data obtained from the research survey confirmed that employees are continuing to maintain positive productivity levels while mandatorily WFH. Employees working activity performance does not require close monitoring, as the research has established that productivity was not hampered by virtual working. Both managers and employees can deliver objectives and accomplish goals, maintain the quality of work, and are effectively managing work performance. If the services, equipment, and supports are provided by organisations, the performance of employees should be preserved.

In relation to mandatory WFH and work-life balance, it was found that 89% of respondents never WFH prior to the pandemic, and subsequently 93% were mandatorily WFH, as it was compulsory. The Covid-19 pandemic has created new challenges for Human Resources Management (HRM), as implementing new working practices and assisting employees into a new working-life is difficult. The large-scale shift and the subsequent additional responsibilities of managing the safety and wellbeing of employees WFH is challenging. Safeguarding employee's safety and wellbeing is a priority for employers. Also, ensuring an equitable work-life balance distribution in terms of employees managing their work and non-work lives. The shift to mandatory WFH has provided Civil Servants with an opportunity to change their work practices and improve their work-life balance.

However, a review of literature identified several negative impacts of WFH. With specific reference to the blurring of the lines between work and non-work life, the inability to switch-

off and disconnect from work, working longer hours, and working in environments not suitable as a long-term home workstation. This research found that 58% of respondents were working from bedrooms and living and dining rooms, with only 32% having workstations used solely by them. Overall, 64% of respondents indicated that their work-life balance has improved and having the flexibility in conducting their work duties has improved respondents work-life balance. The research also identified that respondents could manage work duties and know when to disconnect and switch-off. As identified previously, 50% of respondents work outside of normal working hours and 57% are working longer hours at home compared to the office. HR need to provide guidance to staff and management on what it takes to be an effective homeworker, and how to maintain a positive work-life balance.

A priority issue for HR to address is the lack of adequate workstations by employees. Most respondents were working in suboptimal working spaces, that may not afford the comfort, safety and privacy required to conduct work duties. HR need to address the ergonomic compatibility of employee' home workstations to ensure they are suitable for long-term WFH arrangements.

In relation to social isolation, humans are socially innate creatures, and research has identified social isolation as a worrying trend which worsened throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, physical distancing measures and mandatory WFH arrangements. Although the results of this research were not indicative of detrimental negative impacts on employees' mental wellbeing and feelings of social isolation and alienation. If left unchecked this may worsen and require intervention from HR. This research established a trend whereby feelings of social isolation are on the rise and experienced by a considerable percentage of respondents.

To conclude, the development and implementation of a Remote Working or Blended Working policy is the most important action for HR. WFH policies need to be flexible and adaptable, as people are managing work and non-work life responsibilities in different environments and circumstances. Policies should be designed to decrease work-to-family conflict (WFC). Policies need to be flexible and adaptable, there needs to be an equilibrium in terms of benefits for employees and employer, and there must be fairness for all employees that opt or apply to continue WFH into the future.

Further Research

This study investigated the impacts WFH has on work-life balance, performance management and social isolation of Civil Servant in Ireland. The research addressed several areas of interest however, there are additional subject areas that require further research with empirical evidence. These are outlined below.

- Examine the individual preferences, behaviours and personalities, and home working characteristics and environments to work affectively from home. (Kramer and Kramer, 2020).
- Examine work-life balance and psychosocial impacts and challenges of remote workers during a pandemic. Current literature lacks contextual relevance as there will be a difference between a worker that opted for WFH and one that is mandatorily WFH. Further research is required to examine the impact WFH had on the physical and mental health of employees, and to inform the development of guidelines to support employees. Guidelines should address optimal workstations, boundary management challenges, work-home spill overs and supports for improving work-life balance and address feelings of social isolation and alienation.
- To actualise leadership theoretical developments, further research is required to understand the impact leadership styles have on virtual teams' effectiveness. This may assist organisations to know what type of leadership skills are effective in managing distant teams, to manage performance and build trust in virtual teams.

The following section addresses the recommendations for employers in order of priority.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Development of Civil Service Blended Working policy

A key policy priority for employers is to develop adaptable strategies that are inclusive of all gender, family, or life-course stage, and that meet the employees needs on an individual level. It is important that those WFH do not experience negative consequences for their career or personal life and should continue to be afforded career opportunities, access to training and the costs associated, (Daverth et al., 2016; and Kossek et al., 2018).

Considering debates made by Social Exchange theorists and negative aspects associated with remote workers, the policy should address the benefits for both employer and employee to ensure there is fairness for both. To satisfy propositions made by trade unions within Ireland, there must be fairness in terms of employees' decision to opt for remote working or blended

arrangements in the long-term, and fairness in the selection criteria. It is recommended that employers provide clarity in their expectations of employees working hours and management of their work duties and family or home-life. Include employees' expectations in the policy.

From a health and safety aspect, the policy should address employees' home workstations and homeworking set-up to inform employers of ergonomically compatible workstations. Ideally, policies should offer flexibility to employees in completing their duties, and not force employees to follow stringent work schedules, as this will hinder employees' opportunity to improve their work-life balance. Considering the complexity in developing policies, from the legal and practicality perspectives, this is a medium-term objective that could be implemented within 2 years.

6.2.2 Ergonomic Assessments

For employers to satisfy the legal requirements set out in the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, virtual ergonomic assessments should be conducted. This will satisfy the employers legal requirements under the 2005 Act, and it protects the safety and wellbeing of remote workers.

HR could procure the services of sub-contractors such as ergonomic and physiotherapy specialists to conduct virtual tours of employees' home workstations and homeworking set-up. This will also support the Blended Working policy, in terms of the selection criteria to allow employees to continue WFH post-Covid. This is a short-term objective that could be completed in 6-12 months.

6.2.3 Develop a formal guideline for employee's WFH and managers of virtual teams

Guidelines should specify minimal requirements for technology training for employees. They should address adequate homeworking conditions and best practice guidance on effective homeworking set-up should be addressed.

As WFH and virtual teams is new for most employees and managers within the Civil Service, guidance should include educating employees and leaders to develop boundary management solutions that separates work and home-life. There are boundary management workshops that provide insights as to how boundaries can be encountered and managed. This research also identified a gap in current literature to guide research on the leadership styles and behaviours that influence virtual teams' effectiveness, (Bell and Kozlowski, 2002; Kahai et al., 2010; and Ziek and Smulowitz, 2012).

Guidance is required to train managers to deal with the new aspects of virtual teams and ensuring employees are supported and educated in terms of avoiding work burnout, disconnecting from work and boundaries management between work and non-work duties, and work-home spill overs. Future HR policies should address this, as work burnout leads to increased levels of sick-leave and an increase in turnover of employees. Also, lack of boundaries between employees' work and non-work life impacts stress and work-life conflict. The previously mentioned issues in turn, can negatively impact productivity and employee wellbeing.

6.3 Implementation

It is recognised that there are implications from the findings of the research. Particularly for HR managers, the need to address employee wellbeing and work-life balance related issues is detrimental. If a balance between work and non-work is not maintained it can result in work burnout, increase of work-related stress, increase in turnover and reduced levels of productivity. Several gaps in literature were identified and further research areas have been advised. Careful planning and management of the transition to long-term WFH or blended arrangements could be successful through the effective implementation of a blended working policy and guidance documents for employees and management. It is recommended employers consider the findings in the conclusion and recommendations set out in previous section.

6.4 Implications

Financial and resources

There are obvious financial implications associated with the development and implementation of Civil Service policies. It will also involve a high concentration of work hours in terms of policy development, and involvement and engagement amongst trade unions, employees, legal specialists, and senior Civil Servants. The development of an overarching policy will provide guidance and support to all Civil Servants across all Departments, and individual Departmental policies could be implemented based on guidance within the overarching policy, to suit the individual requirements of Departments.

There are financial costs associated with conducting ergonomic assessments of homeworkers, as seen in Appendix 4. The Civil Service has approximately 40,000 employees and based on the cost per person or training of personnel to become competent ergonomic or Visual Display Unit assessors, it will be expensive. However, the legal litigation costs of failing to comply

with the 2005 Act, and possible litigation from work-related injuries from employees WFH could be consequential and bear substantial costs if no actions are taking.

6.5 Personal Learning Statement

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a challenging and complex multidimensional phenomenon, that has far-reaching impacts for all countries, employers, employees, and citizens around the world. As a current Civil Servant impacted by mandatory working from home (WFH) in response to Covid-19, my research was inspired to investigate and explore the impacts it had on other Civil Servants in Ireland.

The Covid-19 pandemic swiftly accelerated trends that were already underway such as remote working, use of virtual teams, and distance management. As WFH was new for most employees prior to Covid-19, this research was interested in examining the impacts Covid-19 had on the work-life balance, productivity, and social isolation of Civil Servants in Ireland.

As I experienced positive benefits to my work-life balance, my research was interested in examining the impacts on other Civil Servants mandatorily WFH. And, to identify their challenges and triumphs, and how they are coping and performing while WFH. It was envisaged that this research would complement the gap in current literature in relation to mandatory WFH, as current research has no contextual relevance to a pandemic.

During my research on remote working and virtual leadership literature, several findings were discovered that I had not initially considered. Although WFH offers work-life balance benefits, there are many negative aspects that can be harmful to work and family-life. If WFH arrangements are not carefully managed, it can lead to the blurring of the lines between work and non-work life, an increase in work burnout and stress, and an increase in work-to-family conflicts. The lack of inadequate home workstations poses physical safety concerns and psychosocial issues. These areas requires additional research with contextual relevance to pandemics.

During my research, I found that social isolation has worsened during Covid-19, due to the lack of interface with colleagues and physical distancing measures. Based on a review of literature, I found several gaps in research regarding the impacts mandatory WFH has on employees mental and physical health in the crucible of a crisis.

I learned that the impacts of the Covid-19 are still unfolding, and that Covid-19 is not an isolated anomaly. What resonated with me is that future pandemics are likely to reoccur, and

organisations such as the Civil Service need to be strategically forward-looking. The far-reaching impacts are yet to unfold. A trend of social and professional isolation, feelings of alienation, and disconnectedness from organisations are evident. To mitigate the impact of the above-mentioned issues, academics and practitioners have an opportunity to remain attentive and collectively work to improve responses to future pandemics and avoid responding to pandemics as full-scale emergencies.

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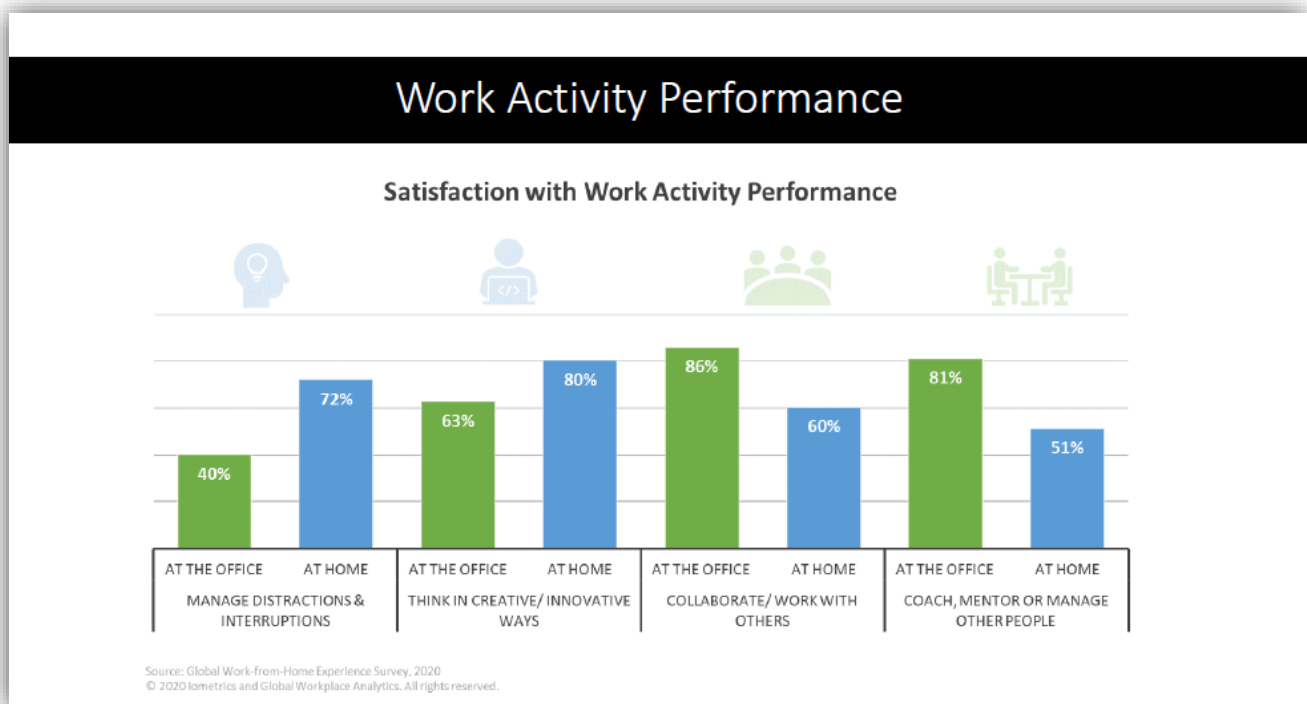
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Appendices:

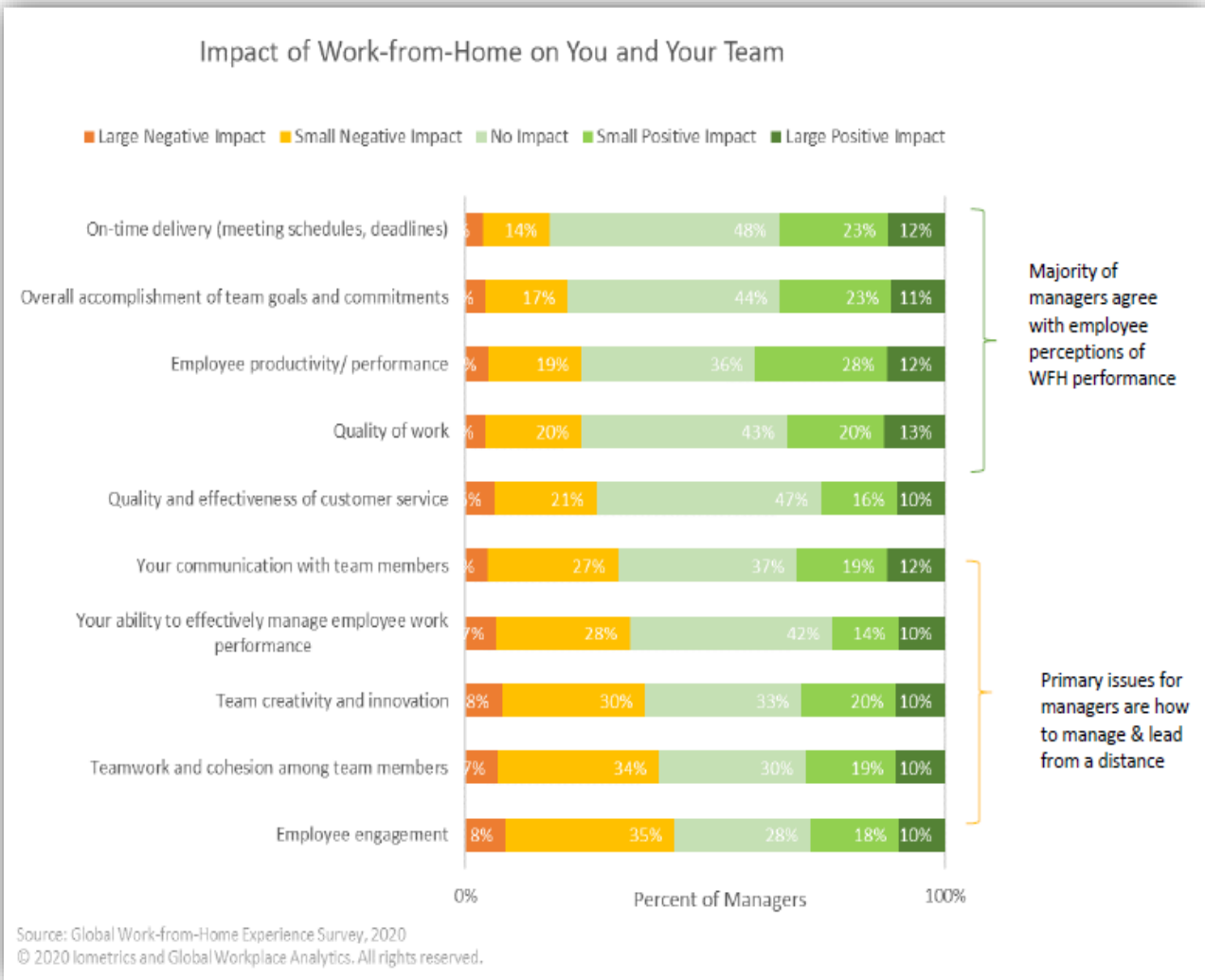
Appendix 1 - Global Working-From-Home Experience Survey results

Work activity performance



Results found that team collaboration and activities such as coaching, and mentoring are better performed ‘at home’.

Impact of WFH on Managers



Results show that activities such as communication, team collaboration and employee engagement have been negatively impacted. Also, managers ability to effectively manager employee work performance was negatively impacted.

Appendix 2 – Copy of research survey

7/24/2021

Working From Home during Covid-19 Experience Survey for Civil Servants in Ireland

Working From Home during Covid-19 Experience Survey for Civil Servants in Ireland

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study to examine the impacts the Covid-19 pandemic had on the performance management and employee wellbeing of Irish Civil Servants.

My name is Adam Curran, and I am a student in National College of Ireland, currently studying a master's in arts in Human Resources Management.

The survey should take up to 20 minutes to complete.

* Required

7/24/2021

Working From Home during Covid-19 Experience Survey for Civil Servants in Ireland

Informed Consent

Introduction and Consent

Before I start collecting data, I need to ensure that you read, understand, and agree with the following information:

1. What is the purpose of the survey?

The purpose of the research is to learn from and gain an understanding of Civil Servants experiences of Working From Home during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Which data will be collected?

Voluntary demographics such as (age/gender/number of children/education level/living status), opinions or experiences of working from home, current working situation, challenges faced, and what you would like the future of work to be post-Covid.

3. Will the data be linked to participants?

No, this survey is anonymous. No personally identifiable data is collected for example, (name/email/IP address/geo-location).

4. Do you have to take part?

Participation is completely voluntary, and participants can withdraw from the survey at any time.

5. How will the data be processed?

The research will be published as part of my dissertation. A statistical analysis will be conducted by principal researcher for scientific reports. These reports will only contain aggregate results.

6. How will the data be stored?

The results of the survey will be retained electronically. Only the lead researcher will have access until my master's degree has conferred.

7. How to contact me?

Principal researcher is Adam Curran. Queries can be issued to x19180039@student.ncirl.ie.

8. Consent

Do you confirm that you are:

- 18 years of age or older.
- You have read and understood the information above.
- And you voluntarily agree to participate in this survey.

2. Do you currently work from home in Ireland? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

3. What is your age? *

Mark only one oval.

- 18-20
 21-30
 31-40
 41-50
 51-60
 Above 60
 Prefer not to say

4. To which gender do you most identify? Please choose one of the following *

Mark only one oval.

- Male
 Female
 Non-binary
 Prefer not to say

5. What is your current grade in the Civil Service *

Mark only one oval.

- Secretary General
- Assistant Secretary General
- Principal Officer
- Assistant Principal Officer
- Higher Executive Officer
- Administrative Officer
- Executive Officer
- Clerical Officer
- Service Officer
- Other: _____

6. What is your reason for working from home? *

Mark only one oval.

- Compulsory due to the Covid-19 pandemic
- Agreement with employer in response to the Covid-19 pandemic
- Previous agreement with employer

7. How many people, including yourself, are present in your home when you work from home? Please choose one of the following. *

Mark only one oval.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 4 or more

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

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

9. If yes, how many children below 15 years of age are present at home when working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic? Please choose one of the following.

Mark only one oval.

- 1
 2
 3
 4
 4 or more

10. Do you have carer responsibilities for anyone other than dependent children? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

11. What is the highest level of education you have achieved? Please choose one of the following. *

Mark only one oval.

- Secondary Education
 Vocational Training
 Associate Degree
 Bachelor's Degree
 Master's Degree
 Doctorate Degree
 Other qualification not listed above

12. What best describes your current living situation? Please pick one of the options below. *

Mark only one oval.

- Live in my own home alone
- Live in my own home with partner
- Live in my own home with partner and children
- Live in my own home with children
- Live in my own home with house mates
- Live in a rented home alone
- Live in a rented home with housemates
- Live in a rented home with partner
- Live in rented home with partner and children
- Live in a rented home with children
- Live in my family home with parents and/or siblings
- Temporarily staying with a relative or friend

7/24/2021

Working From Home during Covid-19 Experience Survey for CIVIL Servants In Ireland

13. Are you currently working from home, or were you working from home due to Covid-19 in the past 12 months? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

14. How often did you work from home prior to the Covid-19 pandemic? *

Mark only one oval.

- Never, option was not available
- Never, option available but did not want to work from home
- Rarely, less than once a month but have the flexibility
- Sometimes, a few times a month
- Often, once per week or more
- Always, every day of the week

15. How often do you work from home now? *

Mark only one oval.

- Zero days per week
- 1 day per week
- 2 days per week
- 3 days per week
- 4 days per week
- 5 days per week
- more than 5 days per week

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Working From Home during Covid-19 Experience Survey for Civil Servants In Ireland

16. What type of worker are you? *

Mark only one oval.

- Full-time
- Part-time

17. What best describes your current working situation? *

Mark only one oval.

- Work from home all the time
- Work a blended arrangement of working from home and attendance in the physical workplace
- Returned full time to the physical workplace

Working From Home Success Factors

18. What best describes your home office or home workstation? *

Mark only one oval.

- Home office used solely by you for work
- Home office used by multiple person(s) for work
- Shared workspace
- Bedroom
- Living room or dining room
- An external space i.e. (granny flat/log cabin/shed) for your exclusive use
- An external space i.e. (granny flat/log cabin/shed) by arrangement
- An external space used by multiple person(s) ad hoc
- Other

7/24/2021

Working From Home during Covid-19 Experience Survey for Civil Servants in Ireland

19. How satisfied are you with your current working from home arrangement? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very Satisfied	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Dissatisfied

20. Compared to when you initially began working from home, are you feeling more optimistic or pessimistic about working from home in the future? *

Mark only one oval.

- Optimistic
- Pessimistic
- About the same

21. Please rate the statements below regarding how working from home impacted your work-life balance. Please select one option for each statement. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My work-life balance has positively improved.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My work-life balance has been negatively impacted	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I regularly perform work duties outside of normal working hours	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having flexible hours when working from home allows me to integrate my work and non-work life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I work longer hours at home compared to in the office/workplace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When working from home I often think about work-related problems outside of my working hours.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When working from home I know when to disconnect from work activities and switch off	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When working from home, work life is flexible and allows time off, if required	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often receive work related calls or emails outside of normal working hours	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often take or return calls and emails outside of normal working hours	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My social life is poor when

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1AesM-WXDQdQgJalqjqK2FMrGTLhrPDGxvaFMSfDprtU/edit>

7/24/2021

Working From Home during Covid-19 Experience Survey for Civil Servants In Ireland

working from home

22. What is the biggest challenge you are currently facing while working from home? Please choose one response which best describes your biggest challenge. *

Mark only one oval.

- Physical workspace
- Unplugging or disconnecting from work
- Communication and/or collaboration with co-workers
- Childcare
- Keeping a regular schedule
- Too many distractions at home
- Do not have access to the tools or information required to perform effectively at home
- Social Isolation and loneliness
- Unwell or helping others that are sick
- General anxiety about the impact of Covid-19 on health and wellbeing
- Internet connectivity
- Staying motivated

23. Please rate the statements below regarding how working from home impacted your work-life balance. Please select one option for each statement. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have the necessary equipment required to perform work at home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My employer provided the necessary equipment that facilitates working from home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a dedicated workspace where I can work from home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I keep a regular working schedule while working from home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work is more demanding than usual since working from home compared to working in the office/workplace.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working from home is more challenging than usual compared to working from the office/workplace.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

24. What are the advantages of working from home? Please choose one response which best describes your biggest advantage of working from home. *

Mark only one oval.

- Enjoy the atmosphere of home better
- Easier to get in contact with people
- Saves regular commuting time to the workplace
- Can take a break when I want to
- Not having to spend a long time in meetings
- Have no one looking over me
- Get time to focus on my work
- Cost savings in terms of transport, food, and beverages
- Less distractions than in my workplace
- Enjoy the flexibility in managing my work
- I experience no advantages working from home

25. What are the disadvantages of working from home? Please choose one response which best describes the biggest disadvantage of working from home. *

Mark only one oval.

- Miss my colleagues and interactions with other people
- Miss getting out of my home
- Do not get enough physical exercise
- Physical conditions do not afford a good working environment
- Miss food or other benefits from work
- Miss my routine
- Requires more effort than normal routines
- Feel tied to my computer
- Difficult to keep focus
- Do not know what kind of work to do
- Distractions and interruptions in my home workstation
- Feeling anxious and trapped at home
- I experience no disadvantages working from home

Team Performance and
Productivity for Managers

Please note if you do not currently manage staff,
proceed to next section.

26. Do you manage staff? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

27. Do you feel you support the needs of your team?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No
 Somewhat

28. How often are you in contact with your team?

Mark only one oval.

- Multiple times per day
 Once a day
 Multiple times per week
 Once per week
 Not regularly

29. Do you trust your team to effectively perform work activities and duties while working from home?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No
 Somewhat

30. Please rate the impact that working from home had on managing team productivity regarding the responses outlined below. Please select one option for each impact outlined below.

Mark only one oval per row.

	Large Negative Impact	Small Negative Impact	No Impact	Small Positive Impact	Large Positive Impact
On-time delivery (meeting schedules, deadlines).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall accomplishment of team goals and commitments.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employee productivity and performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communication with team members.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to effectively manage employee work performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team creativity and innovation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teamwork and cohesion among team members.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employee engagement and commitment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

31. Please choose the appropriate response to the statements provided below. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I perform more effectively from home than compared to normal working arrangements in the office/workplace.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I get less work done at home than compared to normal arrangements in the office/workplace.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have what it takes to work effectively from home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I receive regular contact from organisation while working from home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation provides training in remote working skills and behaviours.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I receive ongoing communication and support from line manager(s).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I receive regular wellbeing supports from organisation while working from home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working from home reduces my work-related stress and pressures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

32. Please rate the impact of working from home on managing your individual performance and productivity, and your connectedness with your colleagues and organisation. Please select one option for each impact outlined below. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Large Negative Impact	Small Negative Impact	No Impact	Small Positive Impact	Large Positive Impact
On-time delivery (meeting schedules, deadlines).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall accomplishment of my goals and objectives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of work completed to a high standard.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communications with team and colleagues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to effectively manage my work performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creativity and innovation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team cohesion and teamwork with colleagues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engagement and commitment to organisation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

33. In relation to the statements below, chose if you better perform at home, or better perform in the office/workplace. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	At the Office	At Home
I manage distractions and interruptions better.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am more satisfied with working activity performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I focus more for extended periods of time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think in more creative and innovative ways.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I get/give timely information/answers and decisions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have better access to work files and materials required.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am more aware of what is going on in the organisation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I collaborate more/work better with others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

34. Do you feel you are trusted by your employer/line manager to perform work activities and duties at home? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No
 Unsure

35. To each of the statements below, please provide the most appropriate response which best describes how you feel regarding loneliness and social isolation from the workplace and colleagues. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I often feel alienated from my co-workers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am satisfied with my work relationships and/or collegial friendships.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comfortable asking colleagues or management for help at any time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often feel emotionally distant from colleagues and management.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is a sense of camaraderie in the workplace and virtual workplace.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often feel isolated when working from home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My work relationships and friendships changed for the worse, since beginning working from home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I have social companionship at work even now that I work from home.

There is no one at work I can share personal thoughts with if I want to.

There are people at work that I can confide in and who take the trouble to listen to me.

I miss being around my colleagues and work friends.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1AesM-WXDQdQgJalqjqK2FMrGTLhrPDGxvaFMSfDprtU/edit>

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Working From Home during Covid-19 Experience Survey for Civil Servants In Ireland

I often feel left out of the loop in the workplace. For example, in decision making process, disconnected or distant from organisation, fear of missing out etc.

I have a sense of belonging in my organisation.

Final Question: The Future of Working From Home or blended working.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1AesM-WXDQdQgJalqK2FMrGTLhrPDGxvaFMSfDprtU/edit>

7/24/2021

Working From Home during Covid-19 Experience Survey for Civil Servants In Ireland

37. If provided the choice, would you like to continue working from home after normal working arrangements have resumed? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No
 Unsure
-

38. If yes, how regularly would you like to work from home into the future?

Mark only one oval.

- Rarely, less than once a month but have the flexibility
 Sometimes, several times a month
 Often, once per week or more
 Always, every day of the week
-

Appendix 3 – Homogeneity of Variance for Mann-Whitney U statistic

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
[Ability to effectively manage my work performance.]	Based on Mean	.003	1	127	.953
	Based on Median	.009	1	127	.926
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.009	1	126.990	.926
	Based on trimmed mean	.001	1	127	.975

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
[Team cohesion and teamwork with colleagues.]	Based on Mean	3.928	1	127	.050
	Based on Median	2.657	1	127	.106
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.657	1	125.975	.106
	Based on trimmed mean	3.805	1	127	.053

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
[Overall accomplishment of my goals and objectives.]	Based on Mean	.311	1	127	.578
	Based on Median	.047	1	127	.828
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.047	1	126.396	.828
	Based on trimmed mean	.268	1	127	.605

Test of Homogeneity of Variance

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
[Quality of work completed to a high standard.]	Based on Mean	.227	1	127	.635
	Based on Median	.116	1	127	.734
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.116	1	126.981	.734
	Based on trimmed mean	.274	1	127	.602

Appendix 4 – Cost of ergonomic assessments and/or training of Ergonomic/VDU assessors

Estimated cost of ergonomic assessments based on research of two physiotherapy-led organisations in Ireland. The names of the companies that provided the quotations are omitted for anonymity.

Ergonomic Assessments:	Company A	Company B
Price per ergonomic assessment.	€72pp	€250pp
Price per self-assessment processing – virtual Self-Assessment Questionnaire report with physio’s findings and tailored recommendations.	€2pp	€7pp
Total estimate cost	€79	€257

Cost per person to train staff to become competent ergonomic/Visual Display Unit (VDU) assessors.

Training:	Company A	Company B	Company C
Price to self-train personnel to be competent ergonomic/VDU assessors.	€320pp	€225pp	€195pp