

**Employee management in the era of ‘work-from-home’– an
exploration of benefits and challenges from an employee
perspective**

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Abstract

The basic objective of this study is to try and identify the motivational factors that prompt employees to choose to work from home instead of in a more traditional office setting and the challenges in that path to high work quality and productivity. Overall, this study aimed to develop recommendations for organizations to effectively manage employees working from home (WFH).

Using a positivistic research philosophy, this study observed the reaction of employees to the prospect of WFH through the use of an online questionnaire. The survey comprised of multiple-choice answers and was conducted among 200 WFH employees in both Ireland and India. Quantitative data analysis method and statistical tools were used to identify trends emerging from the primary data.

This study identified several perceived benefits for employees working or seeking to work from home and included elements like better work-life balance, saving on time and saving on money from not having to commute to office and less stressful experienced WFH than working in an office environment.

The study also identified several perceived challenges for employees working from home and included factors such as technical issues while working from home and possible inequalities in salaries. The study also recommended some suggestions for managers of firms that already have employees working from home or that are planning to implement such a flexible work schedule so that employees can deliver the best output.

The recommendations and outcomes of this research can be used by managers to effectively support the implementation of a WFH offering. The outcome of this study adds to the existing body of literature on WFH while also providing some practical applications for managers.

Keywords - work from home, remote working, motivations to work from home, benefits of work from home, remote working challenges

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Acknowledgement

I am delighted to present my dissertation on the topic, *'Employee management in the era of work-from-home'– an exploration of benefits and challenges from employee perspective.'*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Work from home (WFH) is not a completely new trend, it has certainly acquired momentum since the onset of the Covid-19 global pandemic. Literature discussing this aspect of working from home prior to this pandemic was mostly referred to as remote working or virtual working. However, since the Covid-19 pandemic, WFH has become more prevalent as businesses and employees have been forced to work from home more than ever. WFH is one form of flexible working offered by organisations and studies have claimed this to be a tool that is sometimes used by companies to get more output while, at the same time, reducing operational and administrative costs (Klopries ,2018).

It has been argued that employees on the other hand who choose to work from home potentially achieve a much better work life balance as they are not bound to fixed working hours. This leaves them with much greater freedom to set a schedule for the tasks that they assigned with and can be completed according to their will, if tasks are completed within deadlines and are of the requisite quality It has therefore been argued that working from home can be beneficial for both businesses and employees (Rupietta and Beckmann, 2017).

Studies have shown that a critical influencer of high-quality output from employees is peace of mind and motivation and one of the ways of achieving that is having a work life balance as desired by employees. There can be mental fatigue when a worker continues to work for long hours with little time at hand for interacting and spending time with family and friends which can have an impact on productivity. Hence, gaining work life balance by working from home could in fact ensure higher productivity and higher output quality (Tovmasyan and Minasyan, 2020).

However, those WFH also face several challenges. Working virtually is dependent on use of technology such as strong internet connections, connectivity to office-based computer systems or video conferencing and any issues in working of these technologies can not only affect productivity but also cause irritation for employees. Without the direct presence of technical experts handling such problems, technical issues can be a major disadvantage for employees working from home (Toniolo-Barrios and Pitt 2020).

Moreover, while working from home can help employees to achieve a work life balance, but the non-office environment at home can be a non-professional one which can be a source of

constant distraction for employees which in turn can affect their output. It has also been argued that employees WFH could face what is called “out of sight out of mind” phenomenon which can have impacts on career development and progression compared to those employees working from office (Mulki, 2020; Davidescu, et al., 2020).

Working from home can also be tedious mentally as they could feel isolated from colleagues and employee working from home can also develop a feeling of loneliness and alienation as they do not any opportunities for engaging in informal communication and networking with other colleagues. Therefore, management of employees working from home can be a challenge for managers in extracting the best from employees (Rupietta and Beckmann, 2017).

1.2 Research Problem

As mentioned in the previous section, the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated a shift towards WFH schedules in many businesses. Further, implementing a WFH routine is perceived to be beneficial for both employees and employers. However, there are a number of challenges that employees could face working from home which can impact the productivity as well as quality of work can be affected if the issues or challenges are not addressed while also offering the perceived benefits expected by employees working from home. It is therefore important to identify the perceived benefits and challenges of working from home from an employees’ perspective and to understand what expectations they have of their managers under this way of working.

1.3 Rationale for Research

While the initial review of literature brought out a prominent number of studies that dealt with employees working remotely, most of the studies were from prior to the current pandemic. Furthermore, such studies were also found to be related more to remote working – which included some employees working from home. However, the studies apparently stopped short of terming virtual working a ‘trend’, whereas the Covid-19 pandemic has made the prospect of working from home a regular affair or a trend that businesses and companies could follow into the future, post pandemic. While the question of whether most businesses would start offering a WFH option as a more permanent option post pandemic remains to be answered, this study attempts to add on to the existing knowledge of WFH and what motivates employees to give their best or the factors that impede it in a virtual online working context or a work WFH setting, so that companies and businesses can be prepared with employee management pathway to implement WFH.

Furthermore, an initial review of literature led this research to conclude that there was a shortage of studies in WFH phenomenon with respect to the motivations for companies and employees to adopt it and the best employee management practices in a WFH setting.

1.4 Research Questions and Supporting Research Objectives

The overarching research question for this study is “Employee management in the era of ‘work-from-home’ – an exploration of benefits and challenges from an employee perspective.”

The supporting research objectives flow from the research question to better prepare companies and businesses to work on a possible employee management pathway to implement WFH.

The aim of this research was to find out the possible elements that managers need to consider while managing employees in the era of ‘work-from-home’ in terms of the benefits and challenges from the employee’s perspective.

Based on the above the research objectives are as follows:

1. To examine the perceived benefits of working from home for employees.
2. To examine the perceived challenges of working from home for employees.
3. To explore employee's expectations of managers in a working from home context.

1.5 Research methods for current study

The basic objective of this study is to identify the motivational factors that prompt employees to choose to work from home instead of in a more traditional office setting and the associated benefits and challenges that accompany this in terms of work quality and productivity. Ultimately the study also aimed to produce a set of recommendations that managers of employees engaged in WFH need to consider and provide. This study also assumed that the impact of WFH on employees can be observed from the reactions of the employees themselves and hence the positivistic research philosophy was adopted. This allowed this study to observe the reaction of employees to the prospect of working from home and then use that primary data to explain the observations in an objective manner (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2016).

This study used the survey strategy as to allow for the greatest number of responses and participation. – A quantitative research approach was adopted where the primary data gathered was described numerically and analysed in a descriptive method using inferential statistics. For the survey an online questionnaire with multiple choice answers was designed and 200

employees engaged in WFH in both Ireland and India completed it through Google Forms. Using quantitative data analysis method and statistical tools for assistance, this study brought out trends from the primary data designed to find answers to the three research questions and then compared them with data obtained from secondary sources.

1.6 Scope of the Research

The outcome of this study is to answer the research objectives outlined with the aim of not only adding on to the existing body of literature about what motivates and de-motivates employees from working from home, the use of Theory X-Theory Y motivational theory also allowed this research to examine the better ways managers can manage WFH employees so that they can provide the best. Hence the outcome of this study can also be used in the practical business world.

1.7 Structure of Dissertation

In terms of the overall structure of this dissertation the introductory chapter will outline the research aim, relevant questions and objectives. The Literature Review will draw from relevant academic literature in relation to working from home, employee motivation in this work context referring to McGregor's X-Y theory and look at the area of employee management.

An outline of the primary research approach including sampling strategy, data analysis method, limitations and ethical considerations will then be provided in the research methodology section.

Findings from the primary research conducted will then be outlined and discussed linking back to secondary research conducted. This dissertation will then end with conclusions drawn from the overall research conducted and provide recommendations for organisations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The prevalence of working from home (WFH) in companies has grown over the past years primarily as advancements in information and communication technologies. There has also been a steady change in work context from the conventional format of working to working from home, as the flexibility that it offers to both the employees and the employers (Baruch 2000). This chapter discuss about the traditional office-based work and how it has become more flexible and evolved during the past decade. This also discusses how global pandemic (Covid-19) has impacted the work context and how WFH evolved with it.

2.2 The Changing Work Context

WFH enhances the possibility for employees to be more autonomous and independent in scheduling and organizing their work, which can help to generate a stronger intrinsic motivation to give more output. For employers, it reduces expenses of having an office as well as attracting and retaining highly skilled and hard-working employees, among others (Kiseleva, 2018). The advancements in technology have expanded the opportunities for employees to work outside of a traditional office setting and yet be able to interact with co-workers, managers. Therefore, WFH can be of great advantage specifically to large corporations as it offers flexible working hours for managing (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007).

2.2.1 Traditional Office Based Work Context

Technological advancements during the past years are one of the major factors for flexible working schedule., advancement in telecommunication made working from various locations possible. One of the earliest modes of WFH was the hiring of home-based call centre agents for cutting down on costs as well as offering WFH as an employment incentive. Additionally, the value that computers bring to business became apparent and the machines were started to be incorporated into daily employee tasks. This is also the period when the legendary Windows operating system was launched by Bill gates in 1985, which revolutionized personal and business computing forever (Onakoya, 2018).

2.2.2 Flexible Working & its Evolution over the Past Decade

Advancements in telecommunications and the 2G networks being installed in the 1990s as well as the advent of mobile phones made communication on the move a reality. The internet also provided an alternative source of communication such as through emails. It was also in this

decade that texting on mobile phones was introduced with personal digital assistants becoming popular. Aided with this was the advent of the World Wide Web which further eased communication and made remote working more achievable (Frater, 2018).

Remote communications underwent a major change in the 2000s as the third generation (3G) networks were set up which increased speed of digital communication while the mass spread of telecom into the hinterlands made remote communications cheaper. The New Millennium also saw the emergence of social media, and much better mobile communicating devices along with streaming technology, all of which combined to made communication easier and faster. Thus, it quickly evolved to enhance data transfer and connect more devices to the Internet also allowed more people to stay back at home and yet be in touch with colleagues and managers and the office and continue with office work (Tankard, 2020).

Further, with the fast acceptance and mass use of the Internet, employees were able to communicate virtually better than ever before. Companies also found it cheaper to place workers at home and save on office costs. Further, more software applications such as Slack, Hootsuite, Skype, and Asana were started which enable dispersed teams to collaborate and work from remote locations. This was also the decade when there were massive advancements in cloud-computing which also made remote teamwork more effective and accessible. This created alternative work environments (Phillips, 2020).

2.2.3 The Future of Work

That trend continued to get better through the next two decades with further advancement skin telecommuting which has changed the way individuals and businesses think about work and employment. There were more professionals who chose to adopt a more flexible work regimen with the aim of achieving a work life balance. Globally, professionals found that it was possible for them to work from anywhere in the world and remain in employment even while they were located away from office locations (Phillips, 2020). There were arguments that while flexible working allowed autonomy to employees, it also could be a challenge for monitoring and managing remotely based teams while also arguing, for example, marketing and design teams need face-to-face contact to share creative energy and facilitate information sharing that uniquely happens in-person. While many businesses accepted and prompted WFH options, a need is also being felt for finding out ways for efficient management of remotely based workers working from home. Moreover, since this is still an evolving trend, there is yet to be a widely accepted framework for efficient management of employees (Baruch 2000).

Based on this consideration, the rest of this study dwells into understanding the benefits and challenges that employees face in WFH and using those to create an acceptable employee management program so that managers and businesses are able to bring out the best from WFH employees.

2.3 Employee Motivation

In Every business organization productivity is critical which in turn is dependent on the quantity and quality of work that employees put in at work. That in turn has been related to the degree to which employees remain motivated to put in the extra effort at work. Therefore, researchers and practitioners have argued that it is possible to enhance productivity by improving levels of employee wellbeing. In the case of levels of motivation among employees being low, it can lead to reduced productivity growth and employee wellbeing (Ajayi, 2015). Over the years, the established theories and models of motivation created for individual have also been extended to include employees

2.3.1 McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y

The McGregor's theory X and theory Y which essentially presents two distinct views of human beings based on participation of workers. The first perception is negative and labelled as Theory X while the other is positive and labelled as Theory Y. This theory suggests that there are both kinds of people and they need to be motivated and managed based on the nature of the employees.

Based on the above discussions, it can be stated that motivation is the state of mind that has the ability to prompt employees to perform things with high spirits and with positivity. It is the task of the manager or leader to make sure that the individual team members are motivated and one or more of the motivation theories can be used to ascertain what motivates team members and create employee management strategies accordingly (Gannon and Boguszak, 2013).

2.3.2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The Maslow's hierarchy of needs is another of the older theories of motivation of individuals which has been extended to cover employees and workers. This theory postulates that an individual will be motivated when his needs are fulfilled – and such needs starts from the lowest level basic needs and keeps moving up as a lower-level need is fulfilled. According to this

theory the needs are classified as Physiological, Safety, Social, Self-esteem and Self-actualization. A worker attempts to first meet the physiological needs and then progressively move on to meet the rest of the needs (Nain, 2013).

2.3.3 Herzberg's Motivator-Hygiene Theory

This theory has been used widely to identify the elements at the workplace as well as the process of motivation of employees which have then been incorporated in employment management strategies. For example, this theory divides motivating factors into two categories –those have something to do with the work itself of employees and the Hygiene factors that are related to the surrounding context and environment (Crompton, 2003).

2.4 Employee Motivation and Working from Home

The Covid-19 pandemic has accentuated an already existing concept of work from home (WFH) or remote working. While there is a debate about whether this new trend of WFH will continue even after the health crisis is over, it is pertinent to examine the impact of this work model on employee management strategies. In this context it is also pertinent to start off this literature review by examining the motivations for employees and firms to support a WFH procedure as well as the potential benefits and challenges faced by employees in doing so.

“Companies get motivated to set up a routine of WFH for employees as of the potential of reduction in expenses to run offices such as expenses for such as rent, maintenance, computers, telephones, offices, utilities, equipment, etc” (Lupu, 2017, p-696). This main motivator for firms has also been supported by previous researchers who had examined trends of remote working through telecommunicating programs from homes of employees. Further, smaller savings such as reducing parking expenses for employees while an increase in productivity of the workforce from WFH have also been identified as motivators of this working arrangement (Beño, 2018).

Further explorations into the enhanced productivity motivator for both employees and employers and the impact on work flexibility, job satisfaction, and job performance from a WFH were done by authors like (Caligiuri and De Cieri,2021);(Davidescu, et al,2020); (Dubey and Tripathi,2020); (Rahman and Arif,2021); and (Raišienė, et al.,2020) and identified greater flexibility, taking care of family, better work life balance, higher job satisfaction to be the motivators for employees choosing to work from home. further some of the above authors also mentions about the opportunity to employees to have long periods of uninterrupted time

for concentration on their tasks and reduce incidents of interruptions of WFH to be main reasons for enhanced performance.

From the employers' perspective, a WFH setup can reduce reducing absenteeism as factors such as "diseases, family events, adverse weather conditions, nervous breakdown" (Lupu,2017). Another of the motivators for employees to seek WFH regimen is to reduce the possibility of contagious disease transmission especially in a health crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.4.1 Benefits of Working from Home for Employees

Past studies have identified a number of potential benefits that employees seek from WFH which in turn can act as the motivators for them choosing to adopt this flexible regimen.

One of the major benefits for WFH for employees is the flexible work scheduling options available under this arrangement (Lupu, 2017). Employees can enjoy a certain degree of autonomy in planning their daily lives and striking a balance between work and social and family life by such flexible scheduling of work. This aspect of employees being able to schedule their daily or even hourly working schedule was noted in the past by authors like Ford and (Butts,1991).

In more recent times, while explaining the potential benefits of WFH for employees noted that flexible work schedule would allow employees to be "free to sleep in and work late, starting and ending early, working forty hours in four days instead of five or six days a week, scheduling personal appointments (e.g., physician, dentist, hairdresser) during office work-hours and completing the work later in the evening without using vacation days." (Wienclaw,2019),

Further, employees would also be able to save on time as they will not need to spend time commuting to and from office. Such a benefit of time saving also comes with reduction in the stress of commuting to work daily negotiating rush hour traffic (Ford and Butts, 1991). That will also potentially result in WFH employees having more free time at hand which they can expend with families or indulge in relaxation activities (Wienclaw, 2019)

Past studies have also explored the potential financial benefits that can occur for employees from a WFH regimen with Wienclaw, (2019, p-2) noting that employees can save up on money "by dispensing with the commute to the office such as savings in gasoline and vehicle wear and tear and costs for parking or other transportation". Money can also be saved for WFH employees as they would not need to make regular purchase of appropriate office clothing and

lunches (Ford and Butts 1991). Working parents can also save on babysitting costs while those with sick or dependent parents at home can save on costs for nursing and helpers (Lupu 2017).

2.4.2 Challenges of Working from Home for Employees

Review of literature, while highlighting a number of potential benefits of WFH for employees, has also cautioned of potential pitfalls of regularization of such as flexible working system.

Employees who WFH have to depend on technology to remain connected to the company or the office as well as with other team members. There can be some technical problems that would be impossible to resolve remotely which can affect the productivity of employees working from home (Toniolo-Barrios and Pitt 2020). It's also been identified that issue of possible inequalities in salaries for employees working in offices compared to those working from home for the reason that additional benefits to office workers such as coverage for travel expenses (Mulki, 2020).

On the psychological side, working from home can be tedious mentally for employees due to a sense of isolation from colleagues which in turn can affect productivity and output (Rupietta and Beckmann, 2017). Past studies also identified potential loss of career opportunity for WFH employees as another challenge. Such studies have argued that WFH employees could face the prospect of “out of sight, out of mind” from their bosses or managers with respect to promotions and other career development opportunities (Davidescu, et al., 2020). Past studies have argued that those employees who work from offices have a higher potential for getting noticed for efforts put in at work and hence have a greater opportunity for promotions in comparison to those working home. Also under consideration for this argument are aspects of interpersonal communication skills and relationships with superiors which can be more easily expressed or exercised while working at offices (Caligiuri and De Cieri, 2021). As such WFH employees can face a negative impact on the future of their careers as managers and people responsible for their career development might not have a clear idea of the efforts, skills and abilities of WFH employees.

Further, WFH employees do not absolutely have any opportunities for engaging in informal communication and networking with other colleagues which can result in a feeling of alienation among employees while also becoming unaware of company goals and values (Klopries 2018).

2.4.3 Working from Home and its Impact on Individual Performance and Co-working Relations

One of the elements that emerged as potential benefits of working from home for an employee is the generally fewer interruptions in working. WFH employees also tend to have greater discretion in deciding how and under what conditions, and sometimes even when, they can complete a task as there is no physical monitoring of such employees (Kossek and Thompson, 2016). There is also an enhancement in employee's flexibility over work demands under such a working regimen (White et al., 2003).

This flexibility also grants greater autonomy to such employees and these factors have been previously associated with higher productivity. It's also stated that there's a potential increase in willingness to put in extra effort at work by WFH employees as an exchange for such flexibility (Morgan, 2004; Kelliher and Anderson, 2009).

But at the same time, past studies have argued about decreased control of employees in a WFH setting and the consequent possibility of work avoidance due to limited or no monitoring by managers or supervisors as well as of less feedback on errors. Other challenges which can affect individual performance of WFH employees is the appropriate functioning of remotely situated teams (Knights and McCabe, 2003). There can be uncertainties, tensions and resistance to team working by employees working from home – partly as of potentially less interpersonal networking among the team members due to social and professional isolation. These can affect the performance of the team members (Kurland and Bailey, 1999).

The daily 'horizontal exchanges' between co-workers also have an influence on employees in general which can be through social exchanges and reciprocity norms. Literature on labour processes argued in favour of strong influence of shared norms developed within team on employees as well as trust and shared experiences between team members occurring for the reason that relationships among employees or team members (Ağralı, Taşkın and Ünal, 2017). In a WFH setting these generally tend to be absent and hence the lack of these can lead to diminish the membership attitudes.

The job demands resources model stresses it is possible to enhance employee performance by building trust and shared experiences – consequently requiring less effort in maintain co-worker transactions. In a situation of exchange of critical information among employees or team members, it can be easier to execute tasks (Beauregard, 2010). Hence if such exchanges do not happen in w WFH setting, task success can be affected.

Since there is no physical monitoring of employees in a WFH setting, it is likely that errors and mistakes of WFH employees will not be corrected in real time by managers or supervisors which will require reworking – resulting in loss of time and individual output or performance (Abdelkader, 2014). (Rothmann and Baumann, 2014).

Further, while the potential benefits to employees of WFH regimen, as identified in the earlier section, can help to enhance individual performance, the challenge of lower interaction with team members or colleagues can potentially create conflict and antagonism and hence affect individual performance (Moovala, 2020).

Past studies have also pointed out the possibility of lower job satisfaction levels of WFH employees - which in turn can affect individual output. These challenges to performance of employees at the individual level in a WFH regimen therefore require adequate management of such employees so that they give their best (Rothmann and Baumann, 2014).

2.4.4 Working from Home and Teamwork Considerations

In addition to individual efficiency, team performance is also influenced by the levels of coordination, control and monitoring which is primarily the task of managers or supervisors. Such monitoring is aimed at correcting and motivating employees and influencing team behaviour via ‘vertical exchanges. Hence the extent to which a team is efficient is influenced by the assessment of managers of the performance of the team. However, this is typically achieved at the ‘costs’ of coordinating and monitoring of employees working from home (Ball, 2003).

In coordinated teams, the actions of team members are integrated and aligned. In the WFH setting, achieving such coordination can be complex and hence there is need for scheduling of interactions between remotely situated team members to ascertain coordinated tasks and roles to reduce and possibly eliminate the non-existence of regular interactions between remotely working team members. Hence special kind of management skills can be required for managing WFH team of employees (Erdem, 2003).

Managers could find it difficult to assess productivity of WFH employees as of lack of visibility of such employees and to motivate such remotely working employees. Hence past studies have suggested finding of new methods of monitoring employee team working in a WFH setting (Aropah, Sarma and Sumertajaya, 2020).

One of the options suggested is the practical use of Belbin's Theory of team roles – which has been pushed to be useful as it can be applied irrespective of physical presence of employees. This model discusses in analysing potential strengths and weaknesses of a team by evaluating the characteristics of each team member and consequently enhance team performance in a remote setting (Aritzeta, Swailes and Senior 2007). There are nine specific types of roles for team members for predicting potential success in teams of management which are stated in this model it also states that the strongest teams have a large diversity of characters and personality types. The model outlines three role categories which are cerebral, people-oriented and action oriented. According to this model, the team members should be assigned to one of the three categories and to make successful team, members should be assigned to one of the nine roles. The team leader is tasked with making assessment of behaviour and characteristics of the team members and accordingly assigns him/her roles (Kriek 2019). An ideal team also has to have a balance between the 9 team roles and should have at least one each of coordinator, plant and monitor evaluator and one or more implementers, team workers, resource investigators and/or completer finishers. Shaper and coordinator roles can be interchangeable. It is possible to use this model to create a strong virtual team by assigning of team roles (Harding and Long 1998).

2.5 Work from Home and Employee Management – A Theoretical Perspective

The discussions so far in this section pertained to the growing trends of WFH, motivations and motivational theories, the benefits and challenges of WFH employees. The wider aim of this study is to work out a suitable framework for efficient management of WFH employees. For this purpose, while the motivational theories can be used for identifying the factors that can motivate WFH employees, it is also pertinent to identify the employee management strategies that can be used in conjunction with the motivational theories for creating a comprehensive framework.

2.5.1 The Scientific Management theory

The Scientific Management theory for employee management postulates replacing the use of the "rule of thumb" principles in managing employees or the use of simple habit and common sense. Instead, this theory proposes to use scientific methods for examining a task or a work and then ascertaining the best and the most efficient way to complete tasks. The theory focuses on managers to match the attributes of motivation among employees with their capability for completing jobs for improving employee efficiency and constant monitoring of employee performance (Klikauer, 2015).

This theory of employee management has four basic principles:

- Replacing "rule of thumb" for determining the most efficient way of performing specific tasks
- Refraining from random job assignment to employees and focusing to match employees with specific work on the basis of their potential and levels of inspiration of individual employees to job attributes – in addition to training if needed (Klikauer, 2015).
- Constantly monitor employee while providing assistance for their performance, and directions so that employees can use effective ways to work.
- Allocation of tasks appropriately between managers and employees so that managers have enough flexibility for planning and training employees while employees continue to focus on the task at hand (Zelnik et al. 2012).

This theoretical model is however criticised for simply promoting the idea of just "one right way" of managing employees when there can be many depending on the particular situation and setting. This model also completely opposes other established management models for employees such as the Management by Objectives, Continuous Improvement, and Business Process Reengineering (Becker, Antuar and Everett, 2014).

2.5.2 The Contingency Management theory

This study also considered the Contingency Management theory for management of employees which is opposite to the Scientific Management theory, and this is considered to be one of the best ways to lead a firm and a team due to existence of many external and internal constraints.

This researcher believes that this theoretical model well compliments the Belbin's team role model and therefore can be aptly used for WFH employee management. Some researchers have also claimed this theory to be complementary to the Scientific Management Model as it takes into account different scenarios or situations and proposes employee management according to a particular situation at hand for choosing the best course of action (Hall 2016).

This theory postulates that the situation at hand and the complexity of a scenario or task determines the style of employee management. This model also highlights on the 'if and 'then' approach wherein 'If' is an independent variable while 'then' is the dependent managerial technique which managers adopt and implement for a specific situation. Take for example, 'if' employees have strong physiological needs, 'then' supervisors need to focus on offering financial motivators (Waters 1984).

This theory therefore suggests the non-existence of any universal employee management principle or no best method or formula for managing employees.

This theoretical approach also is focused on external variables and the existence of multiple variables within the organization. Thus, managers can effectively manage employees under dynamic conditions which would also include the WFH setting.

But critics of this theoretical concept argue that it does not follow the ‘universality of principles’ concept and hence can prove to be costly for firms in terms of time and money if no definite solution to an issue is not devised by managers and therefore spend more resources and time in evaluating alternatives to come to the right choice. Critics also argue that it might not be possible for managers to determine all the factors linked to a situation which can lead them to make faulty decisions (Shukla et al. 2018).

2.5.3 Employee Management, and Team Management in Working from Home Context

Considering the above models and theories of leadership, teamwork, and employee management, it was estimated that the X and Y theory of employee and team management as developed by Douglas McGregor apparently includes most of the elements and models mentioned above (Yang and Ok Choi 2009).

The Theory X part of the theory assumes a pessimistic view of employees as assumed by managers wherein it is assumed that employees are naturally not motivated enough to work or do not generally like to work. As a result, it is believed that the best way to manage employees is to prompt, reward or punish them so as to assure that the tasks are completed by employees (Donaldson, Qiu and Luo 2012).

On the other hand, Theory Y assumes a rather optimistic and positive picture of employees which induces managers or supervisors to use a decentralized and participative style of employee management. Under this concept, the managers or supervisors are prompted to create a more collaborative and trust-based relationship with employees or team members to complete tasks (Yang and Ok Choi 2009).

It has been argued a large number of companies have the tendency to follow Theory X which encourages firms to use tight control and supervision as central strategies of employee management. These strategies assume that employees are typically resistant to organizational changes (Matsunaga, 2016). The strictness of this modal does not consequently does not encourage innovation.

But those companies that have strategies that are based on Theory Y, have employee management policies that create and encourage a work environment that offers opportunities to and prompts employees to take initiatives and self-direction. Such strategies prompt managers to allow enough flexibility to employees such that they are able to contribute to organizational well-being. One of the characteristics of Theory Y is decentralization (Yang and Ok Choi 2009). This concept of employee management also promotes teamwork and participative decision making within a team or an organization. This concept also encourages seeking out and identifying ways which allow the employees to make significant contributions to a company. The model is also focused on harmonizing and matching the needs and aspirations of employees with those of the organizational needs and aspirations.

Based on the above discussions, the theory X is more of an authoritarian model while Theory Y is a predominantly participative model of employee management. The Theory X-Y is also considered to be a situation-based model according to which managers can use an authoritarian style of employee and team management and leadership in the case they feel that employees are de-motivated and dislike their work. This form of employee management involves micromanaging the work of employees to ensure that they do their tasks properly (Matsunaga 2016).

On the other hand, if a manager is of the opinion that employees take pride in their tasks and responsibilities and sees the tasks as challenges to overcome, a participative style of management needs to be adopted by managers provided that the managers have the belief that employees will take ownership of their tasks and will themselves take measures to do the tasks efficiently.

In the context of this research, it is important to highlight the attributes of both Theory X and Theory Y with respect to employees so as to determine the most appropriate working environment is offered to employees who are working from home and the best management practices are identified for them keeping in mind the benefits and challenges to employees in a WFH setting.

Assumptions about employee characteristics under Theory X: (Matsunaga 2016)

- A disliking for their work
- Avoids responsibility
- Needs constant directions
- Requires constant supervision at every step
- Possess little or no incentive or ambition to work
- Need to be enticed and motivated through rewards to achieve goals

Assumptions about employee characteristics under Theory Y: (Polley and Ribbens 1998)

- Employees are happy to work on their own initiative
- Are often closely engaged in decision making
- Tend to be self-motivated in completing tasks and allocated roles and responsibilities
- Like to take on ownership of tasks allocated
- Seek out and accept responsibility
- Needs little direction
- Sees work and tasks to be fulfilling and challenging
- Take initiatives for resolving problems creatively and imaginatively

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The theories and models discussed as well as the review of literature conducted on the benefits and challenges of working from home for employees, the conceptual framework for this research was formulated and represented in the diagram below:

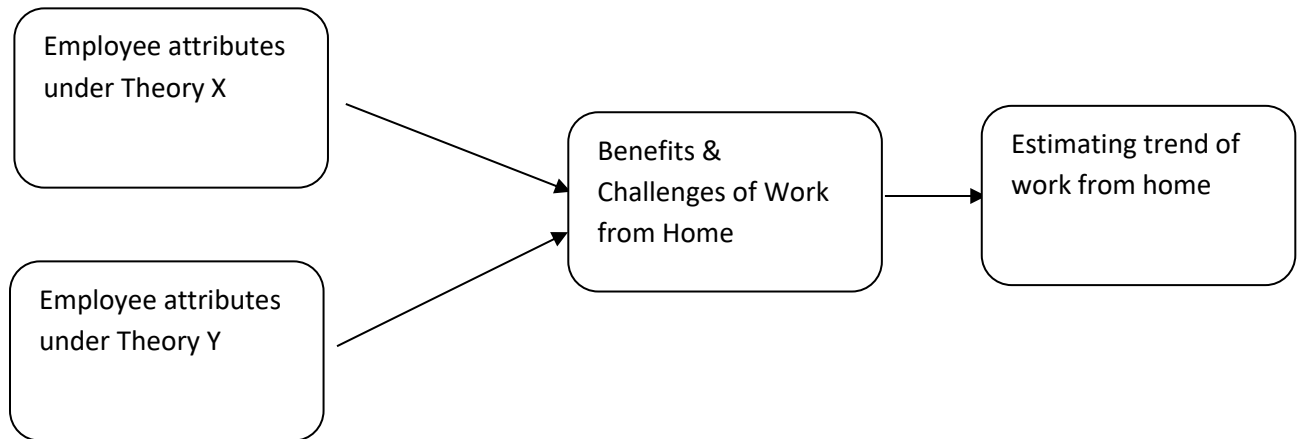


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework (Source: Author)

2.7 Summary

The literature review chapter highlighted the issues that the new trend of WFH presents for employees and for employers about managing such WFH employees and remotely based teams. This chapter essentially highlighted the McGregor's theory X and theory Y of motivation as well as a number of employee management models. This review also created a theoretical framework for WFH employee management and for gathering of primary data.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides details of the approaches, methods and techniques used for to conduct primary research to address the research question posed. Those included revisiting the research objectives and questions, the choice of a positivist research paradigm, the survey research strategy, and the quantitative research method adopted for this study. It also includes the questionnaire based primary data collection method, the simple random sampling strategy and the quantitative data analysis method while also providing details of the reliability and validity of the study outcome. This chapter also outlines the ethical standards adopted and the limitations faced in the study.

3.2 Research Aims

This study aims to explore the following research question:

Employee management in the era of ‘work-from-home’ – an exploration of benefits and challenges from an employee perspective.

The supporting research aims are:

1. To examine the perceived benefits of working from home for employees.
2. To examine the perceived challenges of working from home for employees.
3. To explore employee's expectations of managers in a working from home context.

3.2 Research Paradigm

When considering research there are two main paradigms. These are interpretivism and positivism.

3.2.1 Interpretivism v Positivism

Interpretivism is related to the philosophical position of idealism and is put to use for grouping together multiple and diverse approaches which includes social constructivism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics (Collins, 2010). The use of interpretivism in research also helps a researcher to appreciate differences between people, their views, and thoughts (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012). According to interpretivist paradigm, this is suitable for studies that are focused on meaning and may employ multiple methods in order to reflect different aspects of the issue (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012).

In positivism studies the role of the researcher is limited to data collection and interpretation in an objective way. In these types of studies research findings are usually observable and quantifiable.

Positivism of a research on the other hand is dependent on quantifiable observations which results in statistical analyses. Positivism suits the empiricist view that knowledge stems from human experience and assumes that events and elements that are observable and determinable can be used for studying (Myers, 2008). In this paradigm, a research is independent form the study with little or no human interest within the study. Moreover, positivism relates to the viewpoint that a researcher is required to be focused on facts and not on the inherent meanings (Crowther and Lancaster, 2008). This paradigm therefore entails a researcher being able to maintain minimal interaction with the research participants while carrying out the research (Wilson, 2010).

This study aimed to understand what employees think and feel about working from home and the impact it can have on areas such as team working and productivity at the individual and team level. This means that the primary focus was on the psychology of the employees when placed in WFH regimen instead of working from an office. This study also assumed that the impact of WFH on employees can be observed from the reactions of the employees themselves. These considerations prompted this study to adopt the positivist research paradigm or philosophy. This paradigm or approach helped this researcher to not only observe the study phenomenon – how the employees reacted to WFH regimens primary data collection, but also helped in explaining the attitudes of employees in an objective manner (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Using the positivist approach, this researcher was also not required to intervene in the phenomenon under investigated. This approach also meant that minor manipulations to the variables of the study could be made without significantly affecting the outcome of the study.

Additionally, this paradigm also allowed predictions to be made based on the past experiences and observations about WFH and thereby conclude whether the observations made during this research were predictable and potentially replicable under similar conditions under which the researcher had made the observations (Avison, Baskerville and Myers, 2001).

3.3 Research Strategy

There are a number of research strategies that can be adopted for a study such as surveys, interviews, experiments, use of focus groups, case study-based ones, action research and observations.

3.3.1 Survey's

Surveys essentially comprises questioning individuals on a topic or topics and then describing their responses (Jackson, 2011). Surveys are used primarily when the target population for a study is very large, used in studies that are empirical in nature and to test concepts and reflect the attitude of a large number of participants so that the general trend among the participants is established. While surveys can be used for qualitative studies as well, it is primarily best used in quantitative ones.

3.3.2 Case Studies

Researchers can also make use of case studies in business area research. These are aimed to analyse specific issues within the boundaries of a specific environment, situation or organization. Further, based on the nature of a study, case studies can be explanatory, descriptive and exploratory (Denscombe, 2010).

Another strategy for employed in studies is the use of focus groups which are essentially group discussions conducted with the participation of a group of participants – usually numbered between 7 and 12. The aim is to capture the experiences and views of the participants in some detail regarding specific issues of a study. Those studies that require use of multiple perspectives for a single issue or problem is apt to use focus groups (Denscombe, 2010).

3.3.3 Observations

Observation is another strategy and is a way of gathering data through observing participants are and taking notes and/or recording. Conducting experiment is another strategy used mainly by physical and behavioural researchers and used to analyse cause and affect relationships. And lastly, action research is another strategy in which a researcher and a client collaborate to find out solution to the research problem (Jackson, 2011).

This study used the survey strategy as the possible number of participants were huge – all the WFH employees, and therefore use of other strategies described above would not have worked well. This also helped in gathering data from a relatively large size of participants within a short period of time through the use of a questionnaire. It also allowed members of the sample group to remain anonymous.

Compared to the other strategies, a survey using questionnaires was found to be considerably cheaper for primary data collection while also presenting the opportunity of generating large amount of data. However, one of the limitations of this research was that it was not possible for ensure greater depth of the data as is possible in interviews or focus groups.

3.4 Research Approaches

There are three main research approaches – quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.

3.4.1 Quantitative Approach

Quantitative research is one where the phenomenon being studies can be described numerically and the data gathered can be analysed in descriptive method using inferential statistics (Ajayi, 2015). This method is used primarily to find answers to specific questions or to test hypotheses. This method allows working with large sample sizes and had statistical validity and is able to reflect the views of the target population more or less accurately. However, it is argued that this method only provides a superficial understanding of thoughts and feelings of the participants (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012)

3.4.2 Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research on the other hand is used where the study phenomena can primarily be described in a narrative fashion and analysed using identification of major schemes or patterns such as from a set of interviews. This method is used for studies with broad, thematic concerns and provides rich and in-depth data and a narrative description of sample. But this method is applicable only to a small sample and is generally not generalizable to the population at large (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012).

3.4.3 Mixed Methods Approach

Mixed methods of research advances systematic integration as it uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods for data gathering and analysis as this mixing helps in achieving a more complete and synergistic utilization of data compared to the single use of quantitative or qualitative method.

3.4.4 Rationale for Chosen Research Approach

This study chose to adopt a quantitative approach as this study aims to gather data directly from a large number of employees in numerical data format and then use the numerical data gathered for analysis. Further, the positivist research paradigm supports the use of quantitative research method. Dealing with such large quantities of data also mandated use of quantitative method

which also allowed for greater accuracy and ease of analysis such primary data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016).

3.5 Data Collection Method

The literature offers as suggested qualitative & quantitative data collection methods e.g., to collect quantitative data options include sampling, interviews, questionnaire observation, and document review as the most common. Examples of qualitative data collection methods include focus groups, observation, written records, and individual interviews. This study made use of a questionnaire-based survey where in the questionnaire had multiple choice answers. The survey was conducted among 200 WFH employees 100 in Ireland and 100 in India as the researcher is Indian origin. Due to the current global pandemic, it was anticipated that face to face interactions with research participants could be challenging. Therefore, online platforms were used. For the purpose of this research social media platforms, primarily comprising of users of Facebook, and some from Twitter and Instagram were used for approaching potential participants. This process comprised of making 9 appeal posts during a period of 15 days on the social media platforms and called on employees to participate in the study. It also involved this researcher identifying a number of groups and networks on social media platforms where users discussed employment issues. The appeals contained purpose of the study along with the criteria for inclusion – which was WFH status. Moreover, the own circle of friends in Ireland and India. The survey participants were from accounting, Digital, healthcare, consulting and Telecom Industry were also explored by this researcher to appeal top potential participants. However, preference was given to participants from the social media platforms to reduce choice bias. Questionnaires will be shared electronically while the answers were also received electronically Google forms.

The questionnaire comprised of 23 questions where most of the questions were designed according to the Likert scale with a value attached to each of the options of the answers for each question.

3.6 Sampling Strategy

Sampling is one of the most important elements of any research since the accuracy of samples for a study is crucial in dictating the outcome of a study. This becomes more important for quantitative studies as one has to select a sample from a large target population (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Furthermore, as has been suggested in literature, this study was very focused on ensuring a representative nature of the sample so that the outcomes of the study

could be generalised for all of the members of the target population – the WFH employees. This process was ensured by setting inclusion criteria of all participants being an employee who currently is or has the choice of working from home. Since the sample was potentially very large – running into millions, therefore a small sample from the target population was selected through careful selection of the potential participants was critical for obtaining the best results for the survey (Fowler and Lavrakas, 1988).

Industry Type	No. of participants	Country
Telecom	40	Ireland
Consulting	60	Ireland
Healthcare	30	India
Digital	40	India
Accounting	30	India
TOTAL SAMPLE SIZE	200	

Table 1: Breakdown of Sample Distribution (Source: Author)

This study used the simple random sampling technique for selecting the participants, 20 known participants were selected from India and Ireland, further 10 participants on their behalf were selected thus total 200 participants 100 in Ireland and 100 in India as this sampling technique theoretically gave every member of the target population an equal chance of being selected in the sample. This also helped to significantly reduce and potentially eliminate personal bias of this researcher in the selection process - which in turn enhanced the creating a representative sample (Cohen, Welkowitz and Lea, 2011).

3.7 Data Analysis Method

There are basically two main methods of data analysis – qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative data analysis is used for large amounts of qualitative data – usually obtained from interviews or focused group discussions and is narrative in nature. The methods used primarily comprises of coding and creating themes from the qualitative data.

On the other hand, quantitative data analysis is apt for large amounts of data that is gathered quantitatively, and which can be easily transformed into numerical or statistical form. This data analysis is done primarily through statistical means to find trends for each of the answers. This research used quantitative data analysis method and used statistical tools for assistance. Data analysis comprised of extracting data from the survey using values attached to the answers which were transformed into statistical form and put up on an Excel sheet document for statistical analysis. The main purpose of using statistical tool for analysis was to uncover trends within answers and aided this researcher to get comparable data and answer the research questions. The data that was analysed was presented in the form of graphs. Such techniques were used for input of data and for the tabulation of the survey results to enable as accurate an interpretation of the data as possible (Kruger, Mitchell and Welman, 2005). Excel was used for compilation and analysis of primary data for this research.

3.8 Reliability & Validity

This study ensured the validity and reliability of this study was linked directly to the validity of the sample selected for this study. As already mentioned, the selection of a representative sample is critical for getting the best outcome for a study which can then be easily generalised for the entire target population (Cohen, Welkowitz and Lea, 2011). In this context this study used online sample calculating software for checking the validity of sample size – which in this case had a confidence interval of 13.67 at 95% confidence level. The confidence interval in sampling – which is also known as the margin of error, for this study was at 13.67. This number denotes a range for the portion of the actual population who would most likely have picked the same answer as the respondents. The sample confidence level denoted the level of ‘surety’ of the answers in context of the entire target population – which in this case was found to be at 95%. Therefore, the sample size of 200 with a 13.67 confidence interval ensured that 90% of the target population would have most probably also chosen the same answer as the respondents within the range indicated by the confidence interval (Ding and Lee, 2013).

3.9 Ethical Considerations

This study followed all of the established ethical standards for academic research and was primarily related to primary data gathering and data protection. The nature and purpose of the study and the survey were clearly stated to the participants while assuring them of adequate data protection measures for the data they provided. The data protection measures included safe keeping of the data gathered in the personal computer of this researcher and appropriate software used to prevent theft or hacking. Participants were assured of their data being erased

permanently after 6 months or until publication of the study whichever was earlier. This study also accorded adequate credit to the authors of all work used in the study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016).

3.10 Limitations

The primary limitation of this research was the small sample size compared to the potential size of the target population which could raise doubts about the generalizability of study results. The primary research was conducted in limited connectivity.

The research was conducted in limited sectors like Accounting, Digital, Telecom, Consulting and healthcare. Other limitations included shortage of resources of time and finances which could otherwise have helped in obtaining a larger sample.

3.11 Summary

The approaches, methods and techniques outlined in this chapter were based on careful evaluation of the available method choices while also considering the research nature and the desired outcome. The choice of research paradigm, method and strategy were critical in prompting the rest of the methodological choices.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

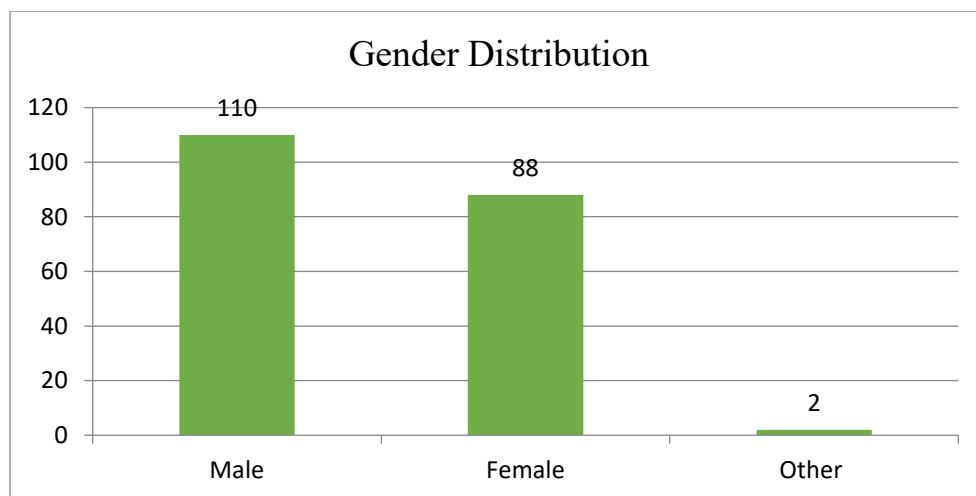
This section of the study provides an analysis of the primary research conducted including the response of the participants of the online questionnaire designed and administered to 200 employees 100 in Ireland and 100 in India. The survey was comprised of employees who were fully office based, fully working from home and those who were working under a combination of office based and work from home. The responses of the participants of online questionnaire are provided below.

4.2 Sample Context

To provide context the participants this section outlines their gender, current work context and work experience. This is important to note as this determines the background of the participants.

4.2.1 Gender

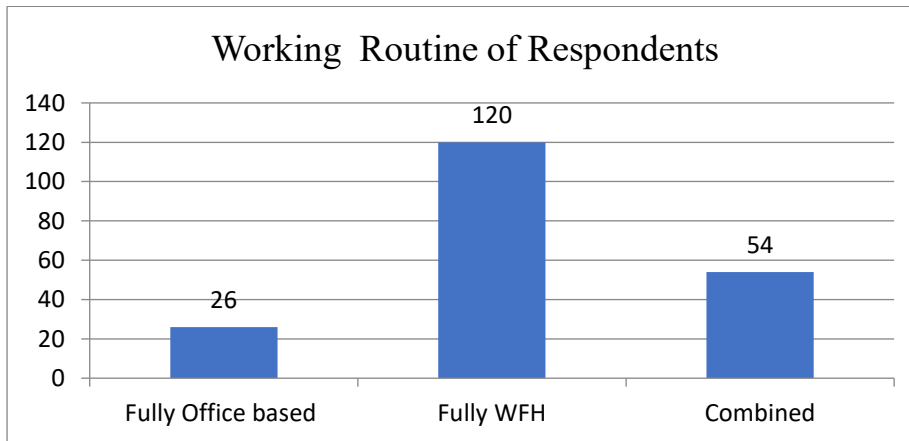
The following chart provides a description of the gender of the respondents



Graph 1: *Gender distribution of respondents (Source: author)*

4.2.2 Work Context

The above frequency chart shows that most of the respondents were males while a lesser number were females and those from the 'other' gender.

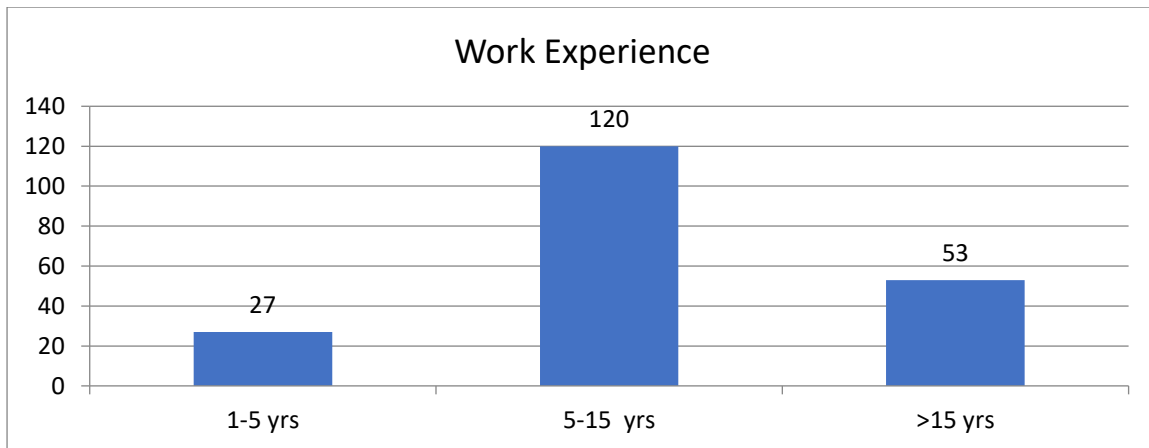


Graph 2: *current working routine of respondents*

The above chart shows that the largest group of the respondents were completely working from home (60%) while 13% were still office based (after pandemic restrictions were removed) while 27% followed a combination of office based and WFH. Based on the above data it can be said that the majority of the respondents should be well informed to provide insights about the benefits and challenges of WFH and even those who are still under a completely office based working schedule would be able to comment on their perception of benefits and challenges of WFH.

4.2.3 Work Experience

The data in the below chart shows that the majority of the respondents (60%) had mid-range work experience (5-15yrs) while 26.5% had less than 5 years of working experience and 13.5% had more than 15 years of work experience.



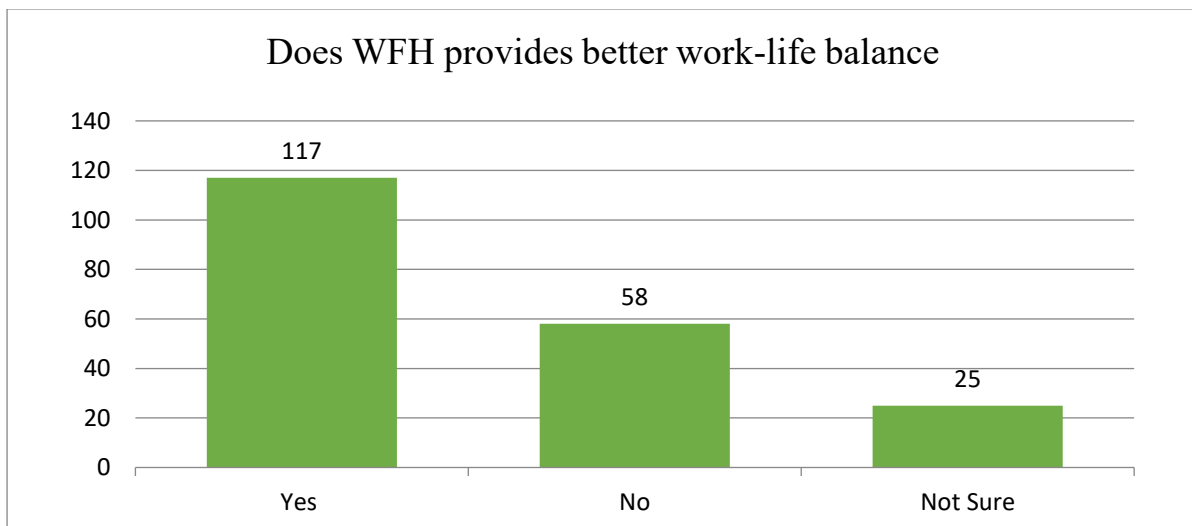
Graph 3: *Work experience distribution among respondents*

The data in the above chart shows that the majority of the respondents (60%) had mid-range work experience (5-15yrs) while 26.5% had less than 5 years of working experience and 13.5% had more than 15 years of work experience.

4.3 Findings Regarding Working from Home

This section outlines the benefits that employees had while working from home and challenges and problems employees faced while working from home.

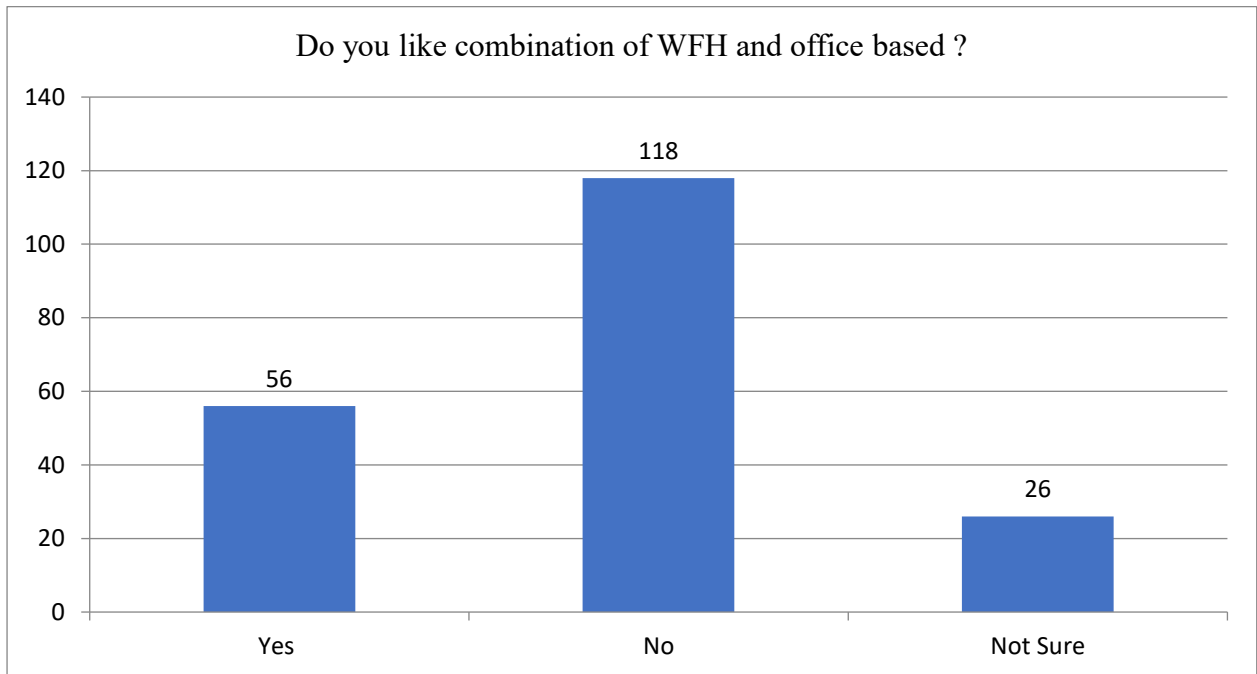
4.3.1 Benefits of Working from Home



Graph 4: *Does WGFH provide better work-life balance*

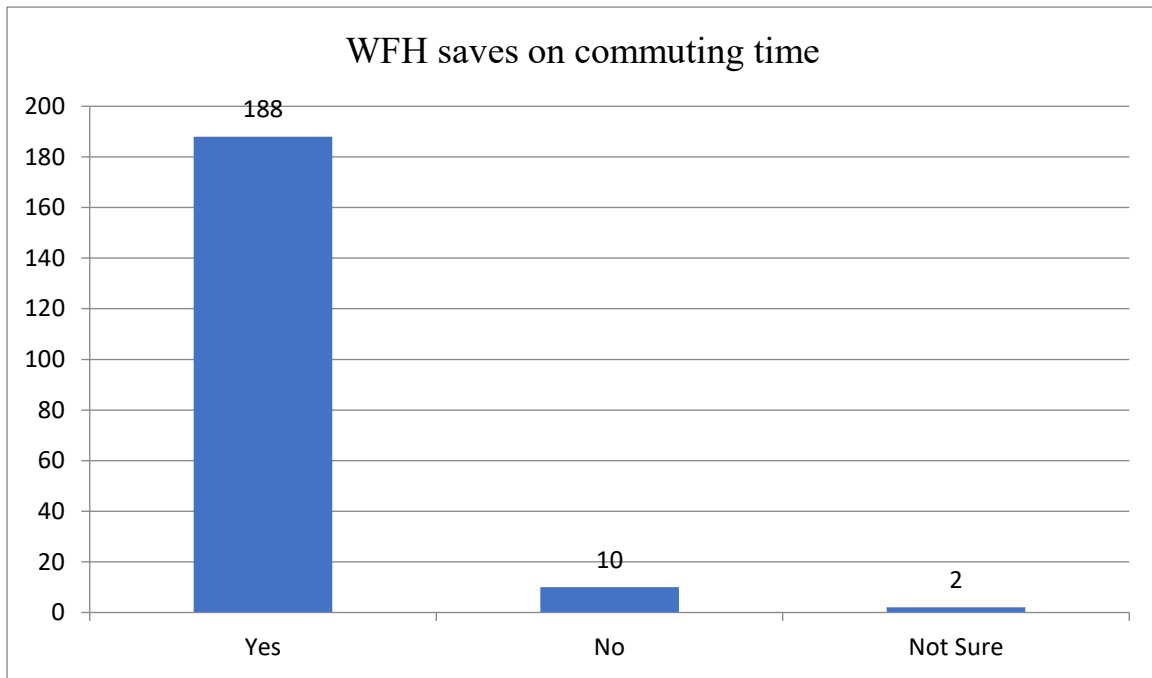
The data presented above shows that most of the respondents (58%) believed that the WFH can provide a better work-life balance while only 29% said no and 12% were unsure. This data therefore shows that WFH can be a better due to work-life balance for employees as they can spend more time with their family while also potentially providing the same level of output

possible with working at the office. These findings were supported by secondary sources as well, employees believed they are motivated to WFH due to increased flexibility towards work which can result in better work life balance and higher job satisfaction according to (Davidescu et al.,2020).



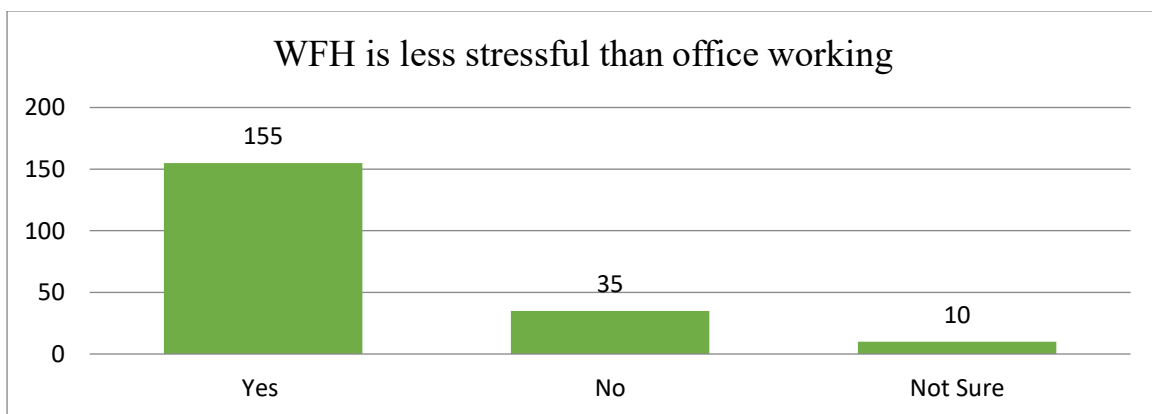
Graph 5: Responses to option of combination of WFH and office based

The above chart outlines data in relation to respondent's opinion to a combination of WFH and office-based work. It shows that the majority of the respondents (59%) do not like to work in a combination of office and home-based work while 28% said they would like it, 13% were unsure. This was supported by secondary data as well employees preferred to fully WFH instead of a combined or blended working approach as it provided a better work life balance (Caligiuri and De Cieri,2021).



Graph 6: WFH saves time on commuting

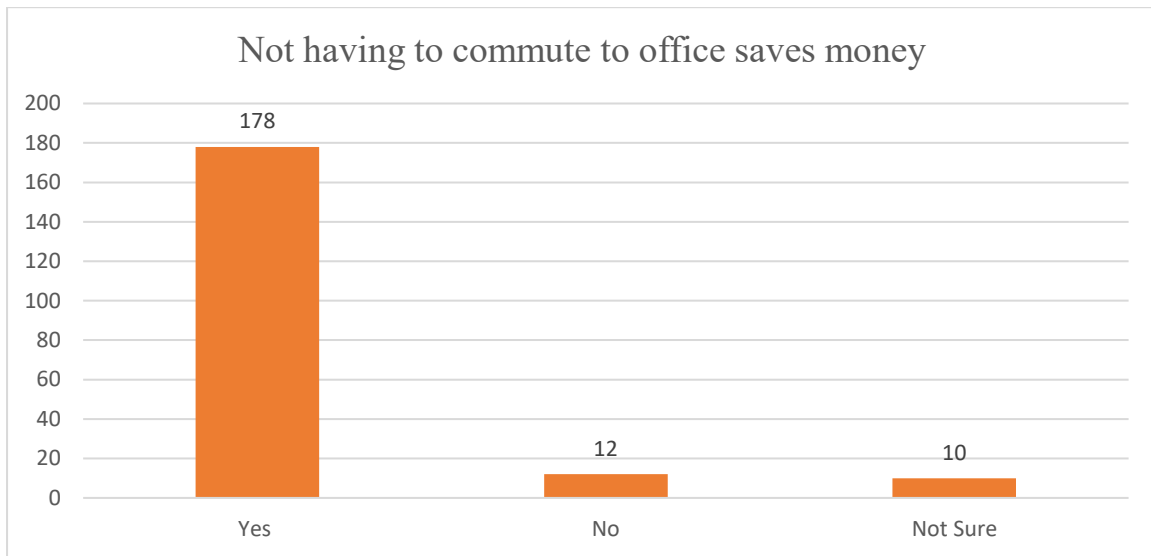
Data presented in the above frequency chart shows that almost all participants (94%) believe that they can save commute time to office by WFH and that it is benefit that could encourage them to choose WFH while 5% disagreed. Just 1% of the respondents were unsure. Therefore, this was beneficial for employees working from home as they were able to save time by avoiding daily travel to workplace in rush hours and it helped in reduction of stress (Ford and Butts, 1991).



Graph 7: WFH is less stressful than office working

The above frequency chart shows that a vast majority of the respondents (72.5%) find it WFH to be less stressful than working from office while 17.5% disagreed and 5% were unsure. This data set shows that there is less stress while working from home and it is one of the benefits of employees preferring to work from home. One major reason for stress was travel during rush

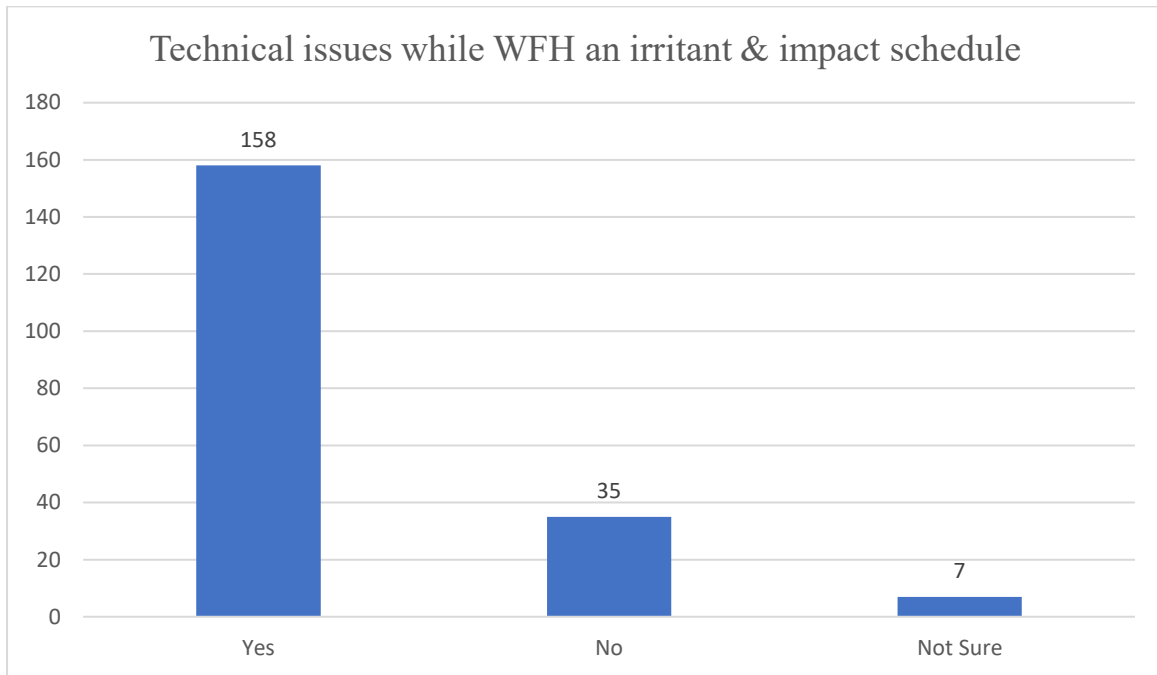
hours and pressure of reaching office at time, just by avoiding daily travel employees found that WFH was less stressful as they had more leisure time (Wienclaw, 2019).



Graph 8: *Not having to commute to office saves money*

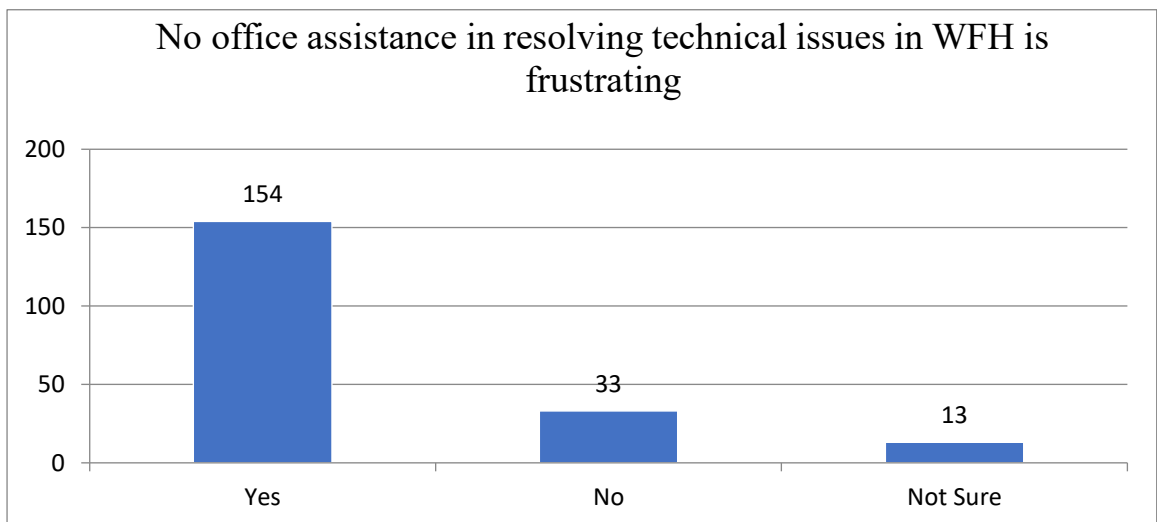
The data presented in the chart above shows that a vast majority of the respondents (89%) believe that not having to commute to office and working from home saves them money while only 6% disagreed and 5% were unsure. This data set shows that the employees saved money working as they didn't have to travel to the workplace every day. This was supported by secondary research as well as employees found that by WFH they were able to avoid travel cost, cost for buying office cloths (Ford and Butts 1991).

4.3.2 Challenges of Working from Home for Employees



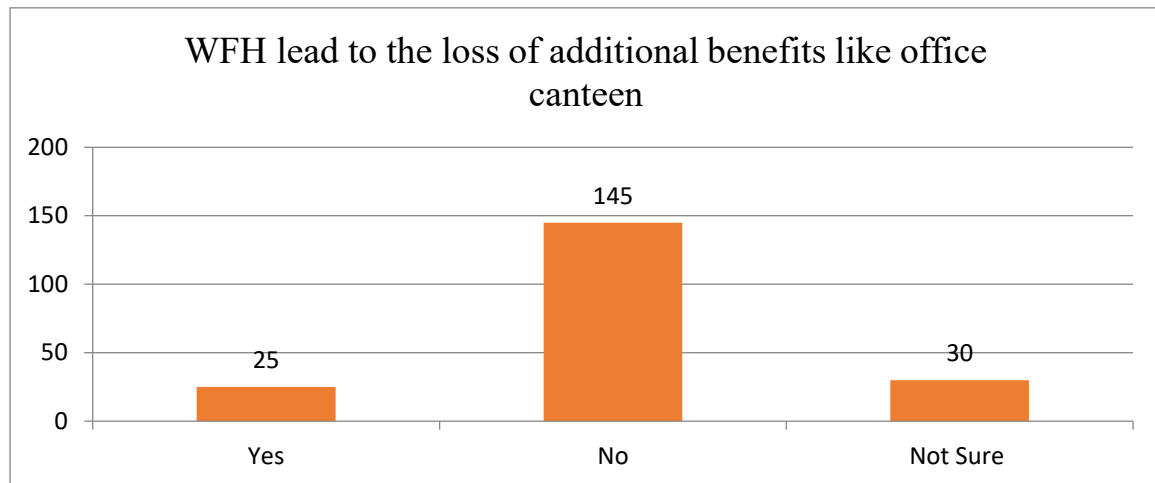
Graph 9: *Technical issues while WFH an irritant & impact schedule*

This data presented in the chart above shows that a vast majority of the employees (79%) believe that technical issues while WFH is a major irritant and can affect their work schedule while 17.5% disagreed and 3.5% were unsure. This was also supported by secondary research, technical issues continue to worry employees, and this emerges as one of the major challenges that employees face while they are working from home, and which can affect their output (Toniolo-Barrios and Pitt 2020).



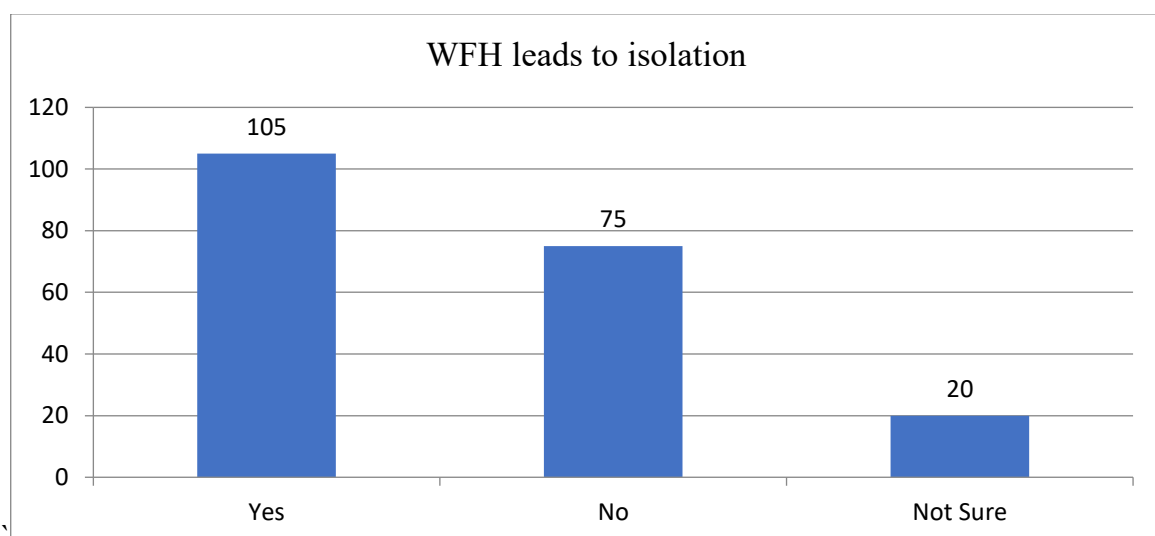
Graph 10: *No office assistance in resolving technical issues while WFH is frustrating*

The data presented above in the frequency chart shows that a majority of consumers (77%) of the respondents believed that if they do not get office assistance from experts for resolving technical issues faced while WFH is frustrating while only 16.5% disagreed and 6.5% were unsure. Technical issues can be frustrating and can be one of the impediments for employees WFH and could discourage them from choosing WFH (Toniolo-Barrios and Pitt 2020).



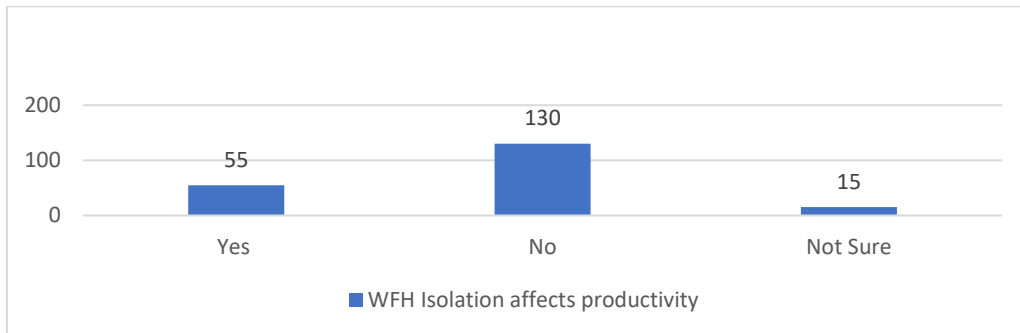
Graph 11: *WFH lead to the loss of additional benefits like office canteen*

The above chart shows that a vast majority of the employees participating in the survey (72.5%) did not agree that WFH could lead to the loss of additional benefits i.e., eating at office canteen while only (12.5%) disagreed and 15% were unsure. It can therefore be concluded that this factor is not an important one for employees choosing WFH and it is not a challenge for companies in convincing employees to WFH.



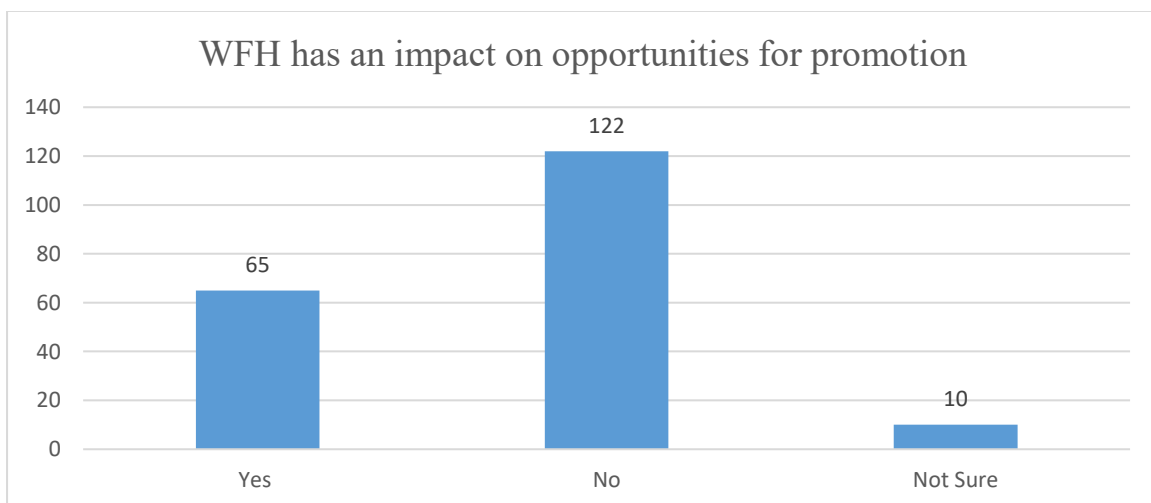
Graph 12: *WFH Isolation affects productivity*

This above chart and data shows that just over half of the employees participating in the survey (52.5%) agreed that working from home can lead to a feeling of isolation and loneliness. However, a significantly large proportion of the employees (37.5%) disagreed and 10% were remained unsure. The analysis shows mixed reaction among the employees about them feeling lonely and isolated from working from home. At the same time however over half of the respondents agreed to the statement means that is can be a challenge for employees for working from home and is something that they need to be fixed.



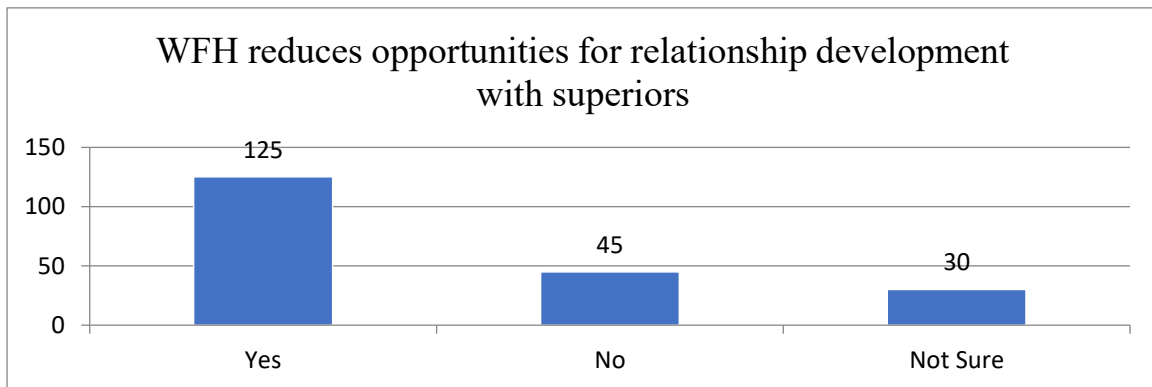
Graph 13: Does WFH provide better work-life balance

This above chart and data shows that a vast majority of the employees participating in the survey (65%) agreed that working from home can lead to a feeling of isolation and loneliness which can in turn affect the overall productivity of the employees. However, a significantly large proportion of the employees (27.5%) disagreed and 7.5% were remained unsure. The above analysis shows a somewhat mixed reaction among the employees about their feeling isolation from working from home leading to lower productivity but since the majority of the respondents agreed to it, it can be concluded that this is one of the challenges for WFH employees and is a matter of concern that companies need to address.



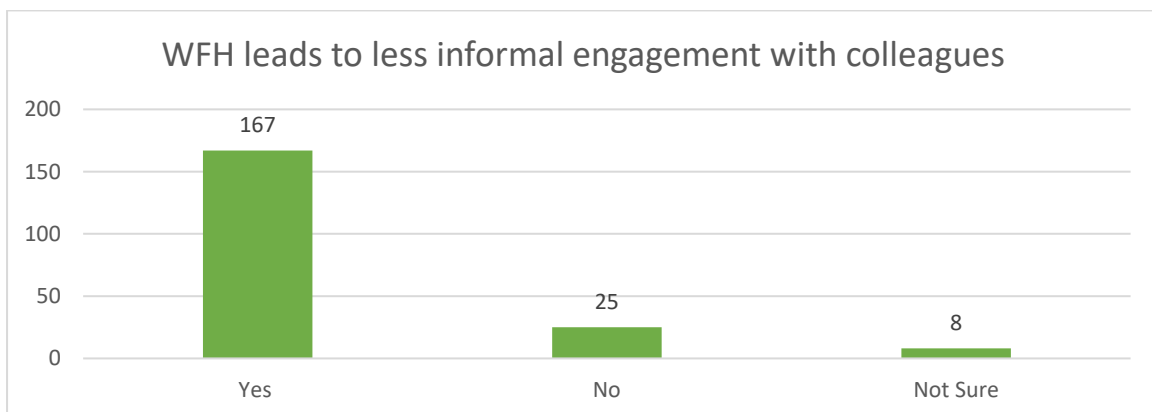
Graph 14: WFH has an impact on opportunities for promotion

The data presented in the above chart shows that majority of the respondents (61%) feel that their opportunities to promotions and career advancements could get affected by WFH while a significantly large number of them (32.5%) disagreed and 5% of them were unsure. This element therefore emerges as one of the drawbacks of WFH according to employees and hence one of the challenges of working from home.



Graph 15: WFH reduces opportunities for relationship development with superiors

Data presented in the above frequency chart shows a majority of the employees (62.5%) believes that WFH reduces their opportunities of relationship development with superiors for the reason that the so-called effect of ‘out of sight – out of mind’ while 22.5% said otherwise. 15% of the respondents were unsure. This therefore also emerges as one of the major challenges or areas of concern for WFH employees.



Graph 16: WFH leads to less informal engagement with colleagues

The data presented in the above frequency chart shows that a vast majority of the respondents (83.5%) feel that they would miss out on informal engagement with colleagues by working from home while just 12.5% disagreed and 4% were unsure. As employees faced challenging having no or little interpersonal communication and relationships with superiors and colleagues

which can also lead to disadvantages for career development and learning (Caligiuri and De Cieri, 2021). Hence, this can also be regarded as one of the major challenges for employees who work from home

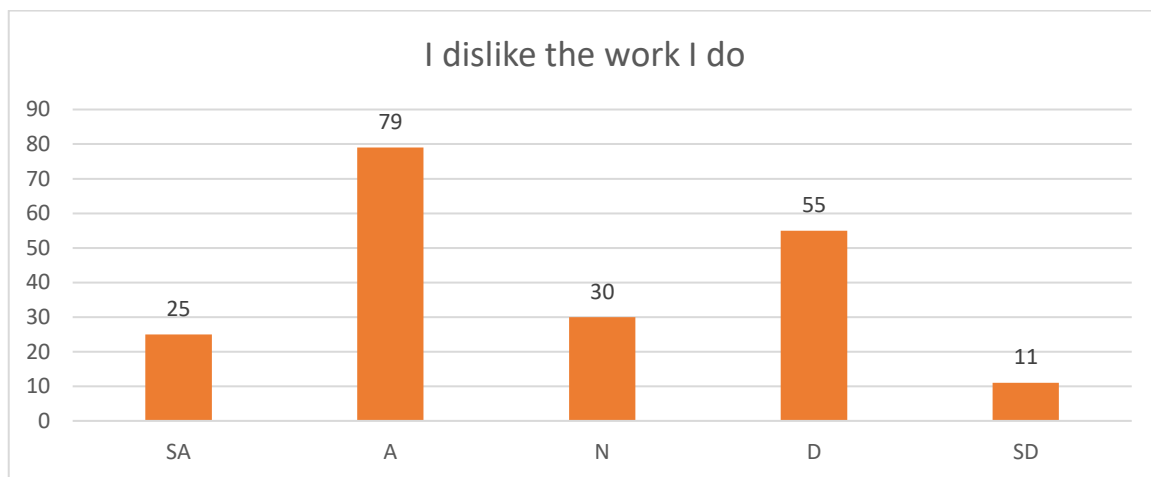
4.4 Work Tendencies

This section discusses about the behaviour of employees while working from home. McGregor's Theory X-Theory Y analyse the tendencies of the employees towards taking responsibilities, tendencies towards initiatives and their like and dislike towards the tasks they are assigned and analyse the directions employees need from management.

The following section questions were based on McGregor's Theory X-Theory Y as outlined in Chapter 2 Literature Review. The questions were designed according to the Likert Scale and carried five options for the participants to choose from ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. The following abbreviations are used in the following charts:

(SA – strongly agree, A – agree, N – neutral, D – disagree, SD - strongly disagree)

4.4.1 Working Tendencies under Theory X

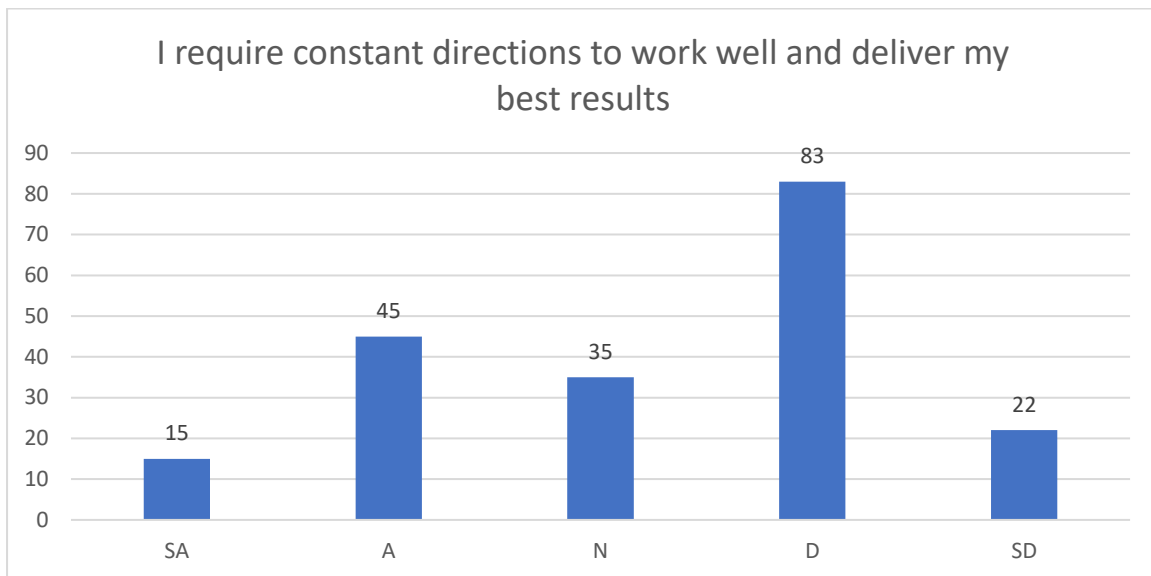


Graph 17: *I dislike the work I do*

The graph presented above shows that the largest section of the respondents (52%) either agreed strongly agreed with the statement while a significant number of the participants (33%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Also, a notable number of the respondents (15%) also chose not to say anything. The results show that a large section of the respondents either disliked the work they did or were at least unsure about whether they liked the work they do. This data set

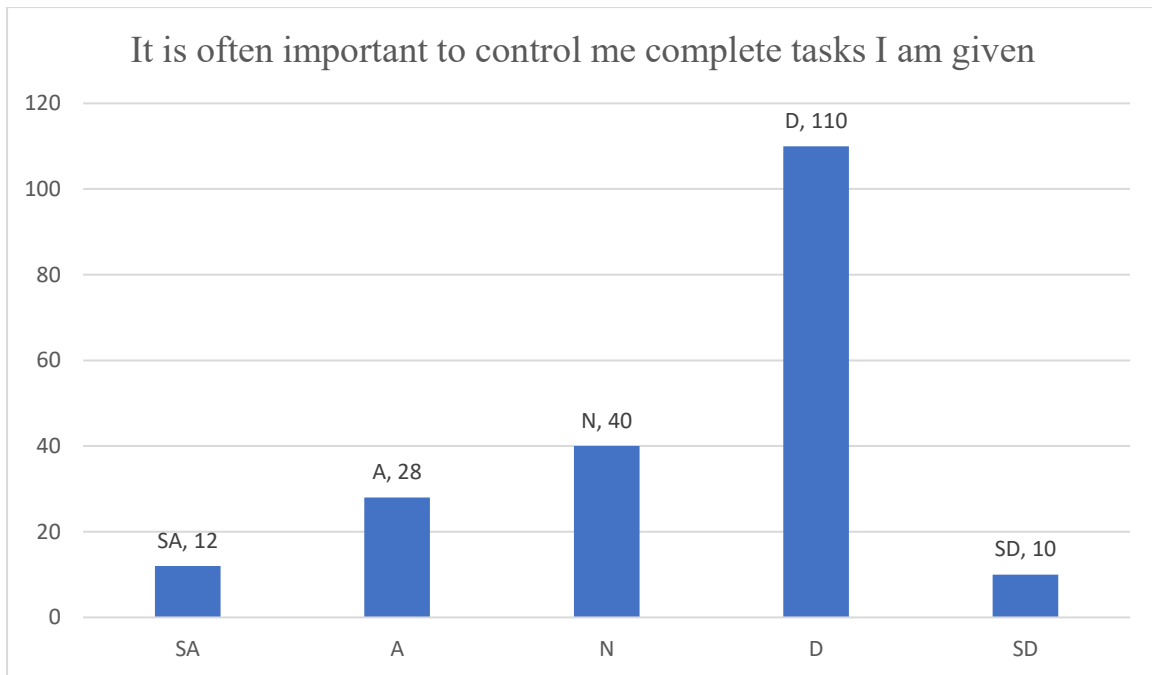
assumes importance as if employees are not happy with the work they do, it is also unlikely to change in a WFH set up. However, there are other factors that can create a good working environment in a WFH atmosphere, so the best out of every employee is brought out – which is presented in the rest of this section.

Statement: *I require constant directions to work well and deliver my best results*



Graph 18: *I require constant directions to work well and deliver my best results*

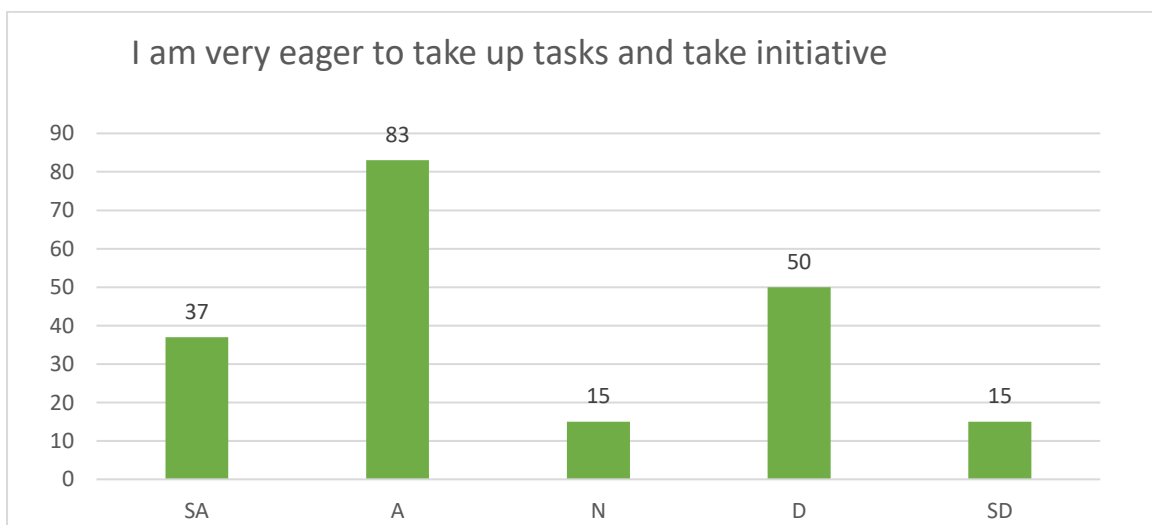
The data presented in the above chart shows that a majority of the respondents (52.5%) of the respondents disagreed to the statement while a lower proportion of the participants (30%) agreed to the statement. It is however notable that 17.5% of the respondents chose not to say anything. This analysis suggests assumes importance in a WFH setting since more than half of the employees do not require constant directions from seniors or managers which mean that most are able to work on their own without much supervision. But at the same time, since a significant number of the employees (30%), also considering the 17.5% who were unsure, also said they require constant supervision which means that the managers and companies need to focus on such employees in a remote working setting.



Graph 19: *It is often important to control me to complete tasks I am given.*

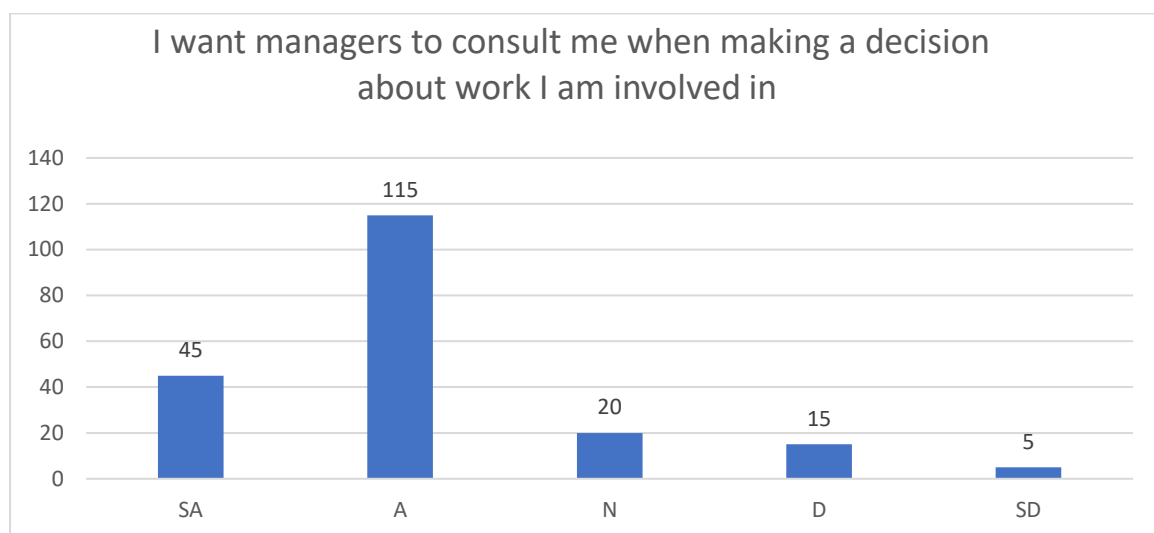
The data analysis presented in the graph above shows that a vast majority of the participants (60%) disagreed to the statement while 20% of the participants agreed and a similar number of them chose not to say anything. This data set shows that a large proportion of the employees in the survey can work by themselves and do not have to be coerced into working. This is supported by secondary research as well employees do not prefer constant monitoring and control this was an interference in their work (Singh, 2020). Employees with only necessary monitoring showed more efficiency in work (Ball, 2003).

4.4.2 Working Tendencies Under Theory Y



Graph 20: *I am very eager to take up tasks and take initiative*

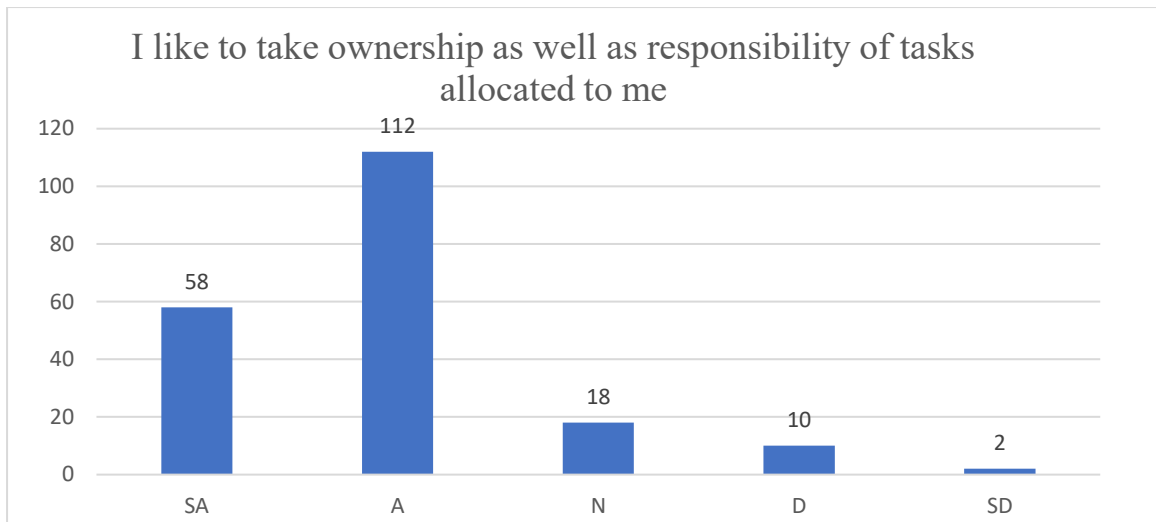
The graph presented above shows that a vast majority of the respondents of the survey (60%) agreed with the statement which means that this set of employees was always eager and proactive at taking on responsibilities and initiatives at work. However, a significantly large number of the respondents (32.5%) disagreed and only 7.5% chose not to say anything. This data set bears importance as it indicates that an almost one third of the employees were not eager to take up initiatives at work while. Therefore, for managers and companies planning to or already have a WFH needs to manage these set of employees to be proactive while working from home to bring out the best from them.



Graph 21: *I want managers to consult me when deciding about work I am involved in*

The data presented in the graph above shows that a majority of the participants of the survey (80%) agreed to the statement while just 10% disagreed and a similar proportion of them could not make up their minds. This data set shows that most of the employees working from home wants to be a part of the decision-making process especially with the work that they are involved in and is an indicator of how managers and companies can help them to work at their full potential.

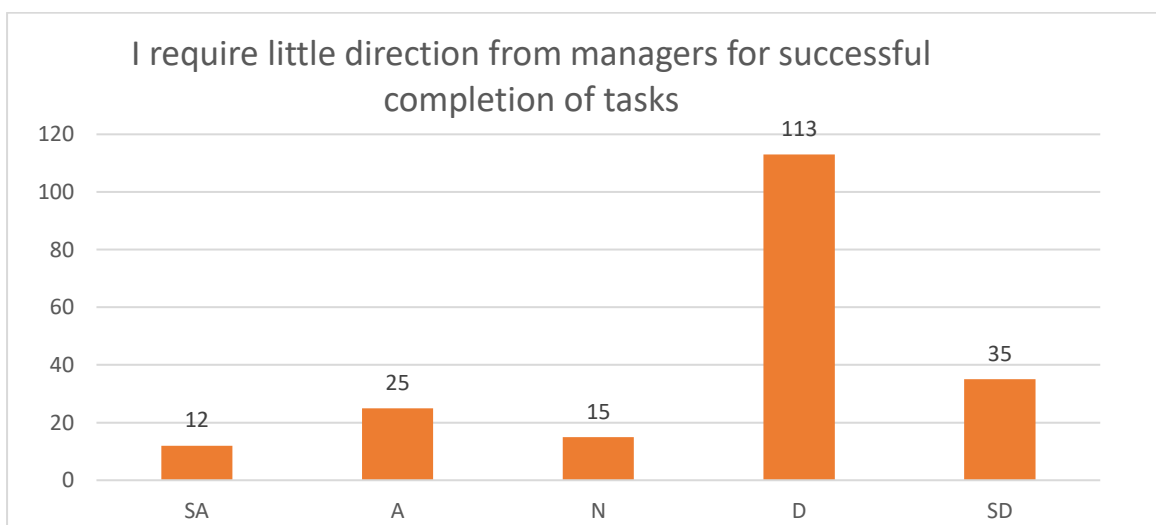
Statement: *I am mostly interested in taking ownership and responsibility of tasks given to me*



Graph 22: *I am mostly interested in taking ownership and responsibility of tasks given to me.*

The data in the graph presented above shows that a vast majority of the employees participating in the survey (85%) agreed to the statement meaning that they were mostly willing to own up to a task outcome and responsibility of the work given to them. However, there were some employees (6%) who disagreed while 9% of the respondents chose not to say anything potentially as they were unsure. This analysis shows that most of the employees are dedicated enough to make themselves accountable and therefore open to take responsibilities. Managers and companies with their employees working from home therefore need to work on the accountability of the remaining 15% (including those who chose not to answer the question).

Statement: *I require little direction from managers for successful completion of tasks*

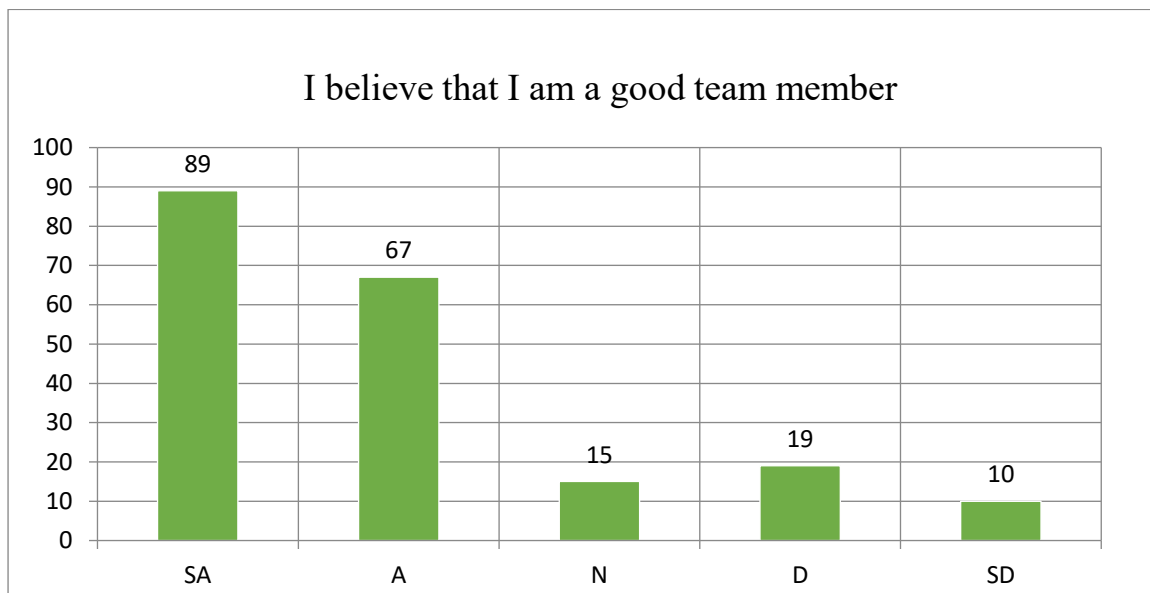


Graph 23: *I require little direction from managers for successful completion of tasks*

The data in the graph presented above shows that a vast majority of the respondents of the survey (74%) agreed or strongly to the statement while a notable 20% of the participants of the survey disagreed. 7.5% of the respondents chose to say nothing, the data therefore indicates a majority of the employees to do not seek or require any direction from managers and supervisors to complete their assignments while working from home but more than a quarter of them expect some form of direction to be given to them. This was supported by secondary research as well, Employees who just had minimal and necessary amount of monitoring and control from managers had higher efficiency and higher motivation to work (Ball, 2003).

4.4.3 Teamwork

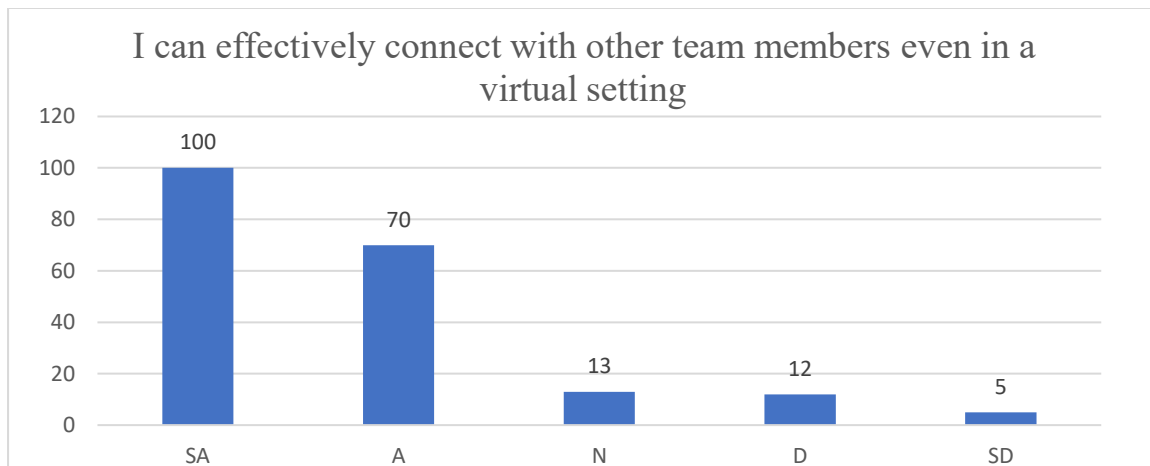
Statement: *I believe that I am a good team member*



Graph 24: *I believe that I am a good team member* (Source: Excel)

The data presented through the graph above shows that a vast majority of the respondents (78%) agreed or strongly agreed to the statement while a notable 19.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed. 7.5% chose not to say anything. This data shows that most of the employees considered themselves to be good team members – which is an important factor for WFH teams in virtual settings. However, the significantly notable number of more than a quarter do not consider themselves to be good team members and therefore it would require some training imparted to them to function as a team or identify and give them work that does not require team participation.

Statement: *I can effectively connect with other team members even in a virtual setting*



Graph 25: *I can effectively connect with other team members even in a virtual setting*

The survey data presented in the graph above clearly indicates that a very large majority of the participants in the survey (85%) agreed or strongly agreed to the statement while a small number (8.5%) disagreed, and a still smaller number of respondents (6.5%) chose not to say anything. This revelation can help to reduce the challenge of teamwork emerging from the previous question as this ability can be utilised for developing good team members from those who currently believe they are not. By analysing the relative strengths and weaknesses of a team by evaluating the attributes of each team member and consequently enhance team performance in a remote setting (Aritzeta, Swailes and Senior 2007).

4.5 Limitations

Sample for this research was around based solely on connections. For reason the research was based on findings from Accounting, Digital, Consulting, Telecom and healthcare sectors as opposed to focusing on one sector to get in-depth detail on findings.

The primary research for this study was conducted during the global pandemic so employees were in a situation where they were forced to WFH. This may have affected the findings as those surveyed were in a situation where they were forced to WFH as opposed to having chosen this option.

In relation to secondary research, finally, a limitation also connects to the sample as they were non managerial level. Future research could focus on manager level insight.

4.6 Summary

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that data collected from both primary research and secondary were supporting each other. Majority of the employees stated working from home can provide a better work life balance and allowed employees to have less stressful atmosphere. Employees were able to give more output with minimal and necessary monitoring from the management rather than constant control over their work. One major challenge that employees faced while working from home was the technical issues which was difficult for them to solve. However, it gives insights how employees can be managed while working from home and expectation of employees from the organization

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the results obtained from the primary research conducted and relates these to the data gathered from secondary sources to examine whether the research objectives have been achieved and research questions answered.

The findings from primary and secondary research are discussed according to the research objectives so will discuss the perceived benefits and challenges of working from home for employees and to explore the findings in relation to employee's expectations of managers in a working from home context.

5.2 Employees Perceived Benefits of WFH

In relation to findings around the perceived benefits to employees of WFH, one of the suggested motivating factors from a company perspective the emerged from the secondary data was the potential of reduction in expenses to run offices such as expenses for “*rent, maintenance, computers, telephones, offices, utilities, equipment, etc*” (Lupu, 2017, p.696). From an employee perspective they are motivated to WFH due to increased flexibility towards work which can result in better work life balance and higher job satisfaction according to (Davidescu et al. (2020). Connected to work life balance the secondary data also showed that one of the major benefits for WFH from an employee perspective is the option of flexible work scheduling which gives them the opportunity to enjoy a certain degree of independence in planning their daily lives and striking a balance between work and social and personal life. Hence employees were “*free to start and finish at their own pace, working forty hours in four days instead of five or six days a week, scheduling personal appointments (e.g., physician, dentist, hairdresser) during office workhours and completing the work later in the evening without using vacation days*” (Wienclaw, 2019, p-2). These findings from secondary sources were supported by findings from primary research conducted as more than half of the survey participants (58%) stated that WFH can provide a better work-life balance. Primary research also found the majority of respondents (73%) also felt that working from home is less stressful than working in an office environment.

According to secondary research conducted another benefit from an employee perspective was the opportunity to have long periods of uninterrupted time for concentration on assigned tasks and reduced incidents of interruptions which was a major beneficial factor while working from home.

Another benefit for employees working from home was the time they were able to save from avoiding daily travel to workplace in rush hours and it helped in reduction of stress (Ford and Butts, 1991) which gave employees more free time at hand which they were able to utilise with families or indulge in relaxation activities (Wienclaw, 2019). Further, employees are also able to save money by working from home as they are not necessarily making regular purchases of office clothing and lunches (Ford and Butts 1991). This was supported by primary research as 89% of respondents stated they were able to save money by not having to commute to an office. Findings from primary research support this as 94% of respondents stated they save time from not having to commute to office. Additionally WFH allows working parents to save on babysitting costs and take better care of sick or dependent parents at home – which can also save on costs of nursing and helpers (Lupu ,2017).

Having outlined the findings, both primary and secondary in relation to working from home. Therefore, these were the main perceived benefits for employees in relation to employee perspective on the benefits of working from home. The following section explores the challenges.

5.3 Employees Perceived Challenges of WFH

In relation to findings around the perceived benefits to employees of WFH Secondary sources also brought out a host of challenges that employees could potentially face while working from home. For example, secondary data showed that some technical problems while working from home could be impossible to resolve remotely by employees which can affect their productivity (Toniolo-Barrios and Pitt 2020) while the issue of possible inequalities in salaries for employees working in offices compared to WFH ones such as coverage for travel expenses could also turn out to be a de-motivator for WFH for employees (Mulki, 2020). Working from home can also be tedious as employees could feel isolated from colleagues (Rupietta and Beckmann, 2017) while the possibility of loss of career opportunity for WFH employees was also identified as another challenge for employees as of the prospect of “out of sight, out of mind” from their bosses or managers (Davidescu, et al., 2020). WFH employees could also face the challenge of having no or little interpersonal communication and relationships with superiors which can also lead to disadvantages for career development and learning (Caligiuri and De Cieri, 2021). Secondary data analysis also found that WFH employees could also suffer from a feeling of alienation among employees as they do not any opportunities for engaging in informal communication and networking with other colleagues (Klopries 2018).

These aspects were also well brought out in primary data. For example, a vast majority of the employees participating in the survey (79%) identified the problem of resolving technical issues to remain connected to the office while working from home can be a major irritant and affect their work schedule. This is for the reason that they may possibly have no office assistance in resolving technical issues while WFH which can be frustrating (77%). Primary data also revealed that majority of the participants (73%) were not very concerned about financial loss by working from home – which was not very explicitly available from secondary data, from sources such as eating at office canteen. However, primary data partially agreed with secondary data about the psychological challenges for employees' form working from home. For example, only about half of the survey participants (52%) said they would feel or do feel isolated while working from home while a notable number of them (38%) said they would or do feel isolated while working from home. Further, majority of the survey participants (65%) also felt that working from home can lead to a feeling of isolation and loneliness which can in turn affect the overall productivity of the employees despite a notable number (28%) saying otherwise. This shows that not of the employees working from home would suffer from this challenge – contrasting secondary data finding which claimed that this was a challenge for almost all of the people working from home.

This was also a trend in primary data with respect to WFH potentially having an impact on opportunities for promotion and career development as more of the participants believed WFH systems do not affect their opportunities for career development. This finding was incongruent with secondary data findings as almost all the authors considered in secondary data seemed to suggest that this was a universal feeling among WFH employees. Similar incongruences with secondary data were also found with respect to the perception of employees and WFH reducing their opportunities for relationship development with superiors. However, almost all of the participants in the survey (84%) felt that working from home leads to less informal engagement with colleagues. Hence, it can be seen that in terms of the challenges faced by employees from WFH, not all of the findings from secondary data were a match with findings from primary data.

5.4 Employees Expectations of Managers In a Working From Home Context

In terms of finding out what WFH employees expected from managers, McGregor's Theory X-Theory and Theory Y was used as the main theoretical framework. While this theoretical framework is mostly used for understanding how to manage employees, in this case it was used

to identify the elements that employees working from home expected from their managers or supervisors to support them so that they could give the best output.

Primary data showed that more than half of the participants (52%) disliked the work they did which meant that managers needed to provide them with more interesting tasks in order to bring out the best from them in a WFH setting. Furthermore, primary data also showed that a notable proportion of the respondents in the survey (30%) said that they required constant directions to work well and deliver their best results, which is one of the management aspects that managers need to keep in mind while dealing with WFH employees. This was closely related to 20% of the survey participants agreed that they needed managerial control and directions to complete tasks given. However, since majority of the employees did not want to be controlled, it can be assumed that too much controlling and directing employees could become an issue in terms of their productivity while working from home.

Furthermore, primary data also showed that most employees (60%) were generally eager to take up tasks and take initiative however at the same time about 33% were not, which means that managers need to motivate that one third of employees WFH to be proactive in taking up initiatives while working from home – for example to try and resolve technical issues that could crop up while working or be proactive in keeping in touch with team members.

One aspect of employees' expectations from managers that emerged very strongly from primary data was their aspiration to be consulted by managers when making an important decision about work in which they are involved. This meant that managers need to discuss work related issues with WFH employees so that such employees remain motivated and provide their best. Such strong trends about WFH employees being mostly interested in taking ownership and responsibility of tasks given to them were also noticed from primary data analysis. While this is not an expectation of WFH employees that managers need to fulfil, it certainly is an added advantage for managers working with WFH employees. It also indicates that WFH employees are mostly aware of their responsibilities – potentially as they do not have a physical presence at the office and therefore possibly feel more responsible and accountable towards their work. This could be an outcome of WFH employees desiring to be consulted and not be directed or commanded all the time by managers – as these expectations also require them to be more responsible and accountable for their tasks.

This was also evident in primary data as majority of the employees (74%) said that they required little direction from managers for successful completion of tasks while working from

home which reflects previous expectations of not being directed and commanded as well as being mostly accountable and responsible for their task. And yet since about a quarter of the WFH employees indicated their expectations of being directed by managers for successful completion of their tasks, therefore this is one aspect that managers need to consider. Managers dealing with WFH employees could identify those who require and expect constant direction and provide them such while refraining from doing so for others,

In terms of teamwork, more than three fourth of the WFH employees believed they were good team members which makes managing virtual teams much easier for managers. It also indicates expectations of WFH employees of being included in team working tasks even in a virtual setting by managers. This confidence of the WFH employees flowed from their confidence of them being able to effectively connect with other team members even in a virtual setting (85%) which makes the work of managers easy in terms of managing virtual teams of employees working from home.

5.5 Summary

Based on the above discussions, it can be concluded that primary and secondary data were mostly congruent with each other in terms of the perceived benefits of employees from working from home. However, there were some differences in perception of employees in primary data about potential challenges faced from working from home compared to what was found in secondary data analysis. The discussions above also highlighted the specific expectations of WFH employees from their managers – which reflects on the way how such employees needed to be managed while working from home.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

In this concluding chapter of the study examines whether the research questions that this study started off to find answers to have been answered through use and analysis of primary and secondary data. It is therefore pertinent to revisit the research initial research question of this study as stated below.

6.2 Overall Conclusions

The overarching research question for this study was “*employee management in the era of ‘work-from-home’ – an exploration of benefits and challenges from an employee perspective*”.

The answer to the above research question was sought to be answered by finding answers to three supporting research questions as listed in the Introduction chapter.

With respect to the first supporting research question, this study managed to identify a number of perceived benefits for employees working or seeking to work from home. There was also a wide degree of congruity between secondary and primary data in this regard. This study can conclude that the perceived benefits can be broadly segregated into two categories – financial and psychological benefits, with the latter dominating the benefits. The specific perceived benefits have been discussed in the discussions chapter. It is worth mentioning at this point that the perceived benefits can also be considered to be motivators for employees to choose to work from home. This study can conclude that most of the perceived benefits are related to psychological factors which can ultimately deliver peace of mind for employees working from home and thereby can be crucial in them performing better.

With respect to the second supporting research question, this study also managed to identify a number of perceived challenges for employees working from home and primary and secondary data more or less were congruent in this matter. The identified challenges showed that while there were some technical challenges of working from home, employees mostly talked about psychological barriers or challenges – that originate from them working alone at home and not within colleagues. These mostly psychological challenges could also be viewed as demotivators for employees working from home – which can lead to poor performance. However primary data found that the WFH employees were *not very concerned about financial loss* by working from home - not explicitly available from secondary data.

This makes it important for managers to be aware of these benefits and challenges while trying to manage employees working from home.

With respect to the third supporting research question, this study used the Theory X-Theory Y to assess what employees WFH expect to get from managers – which can be a clue about how such employees can be better managed.

Based on primary data, as a manager one has to remember that more than half of the WFH employees disliked the work they did and therefore such employees will be expecting *more interesting tasks* to help them feel interested in a WFH setting. Data also showed a sizable number of WFH employees also needed *constant directions to work well* which could be possible through constant interactions. WFH employees seek a certain degree of autonomy and therefore do not want to be controlled. Some employees were also found not to be too eager to take up tasks and take initiative. The managerial elements that were brought up through the Theory X-Theory Y could also be considered to be challenges but from the viewpoint of managers tasked with managing WFH employees. These elements therefore have to be considered while dealing with such employees. These managerial elements can also be considered to be elements that WFH employees would want to be delivered to them or would not like their companies or managers to impose upon them.

The use of Theory X-Theory Y for finding out the managerial implications of managing WFH employees so that the best output is got from the employees also could be equated with what managers need to do – or offer employees in a WFH setting, while also trying to avoid those that such employees detest or do not want. These managerial elements have been combined with the perceived benefits and challenges for employees in a WFH setting to offer recommendations for efficient management of such employees.

6.3: Recommendations

6.3.1 Recommendations for WFH Employee Management

The recommendations from this study are for the managers of firms that already have employees working from home or that are planning to implement such a flexible offering. The recommendations are based on the data gathered in answering the set research objectives.

- Managers need to ensure that WFH employees always have technical backup to resolve any technical issues faced while working.

- It is also important to set appropriate deadlines for tasks for WFH employees so that they are able to avail of the perceived benefits of WFH which prompted them to take up WFH such as having a work life balance, taking care of families and the sick, and personal appointments, etc.
- Create a framework which can be used to measure the productivity of WFH employees and assure such employees about equal career opportunities such as for promotions, equality of raise, etc.
- Identify employees who need constant directions through tasks to bring out the best from them while not trying to be too controlling all the time
- Managers and firms also need to regularly consult and seek the views of WFH employees about task related decisions that involves them.
- Managers should provide enough opportunities to WFH employees to work in team projects

6.3.2 Recommendations For Future Research

This study leaves some scope for further research in this topic. The number of participants in this study was relatively low compared to the huge number of employees working from home or looking to work from home and the research conducted was based only on participants from Accounting, Digital, Consulting and Healthcare sectors. Future research could focus on a wider selection of sectors or focus in-depth research of a particular sector. Furthermore, in order to gain more insight future research could also look to conduct qualitative research such as through interviewing of WFH employees. There are also opportunities for using the outcomes of this study to conduct research on better WFH employee management from the perspective of managers and understand what their viewpoint is about efficient management of WFH employees.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

Employee management in the era of ‘work-from-home’– an exploration of benefits and challenges form employee perspective

This survey is focused on Working from Home (WFH) & is being conducted as part of research for a dissertation as part of a Master of science in Management with the National College of Ireland.

The objective of this survey is to assess the benefits and challenges that employees face while working from home.

Disclaimer

This survey consist of 23 multiple choice questions & will take approximately 5-minutes to complete. Participation in this survey is voluntary & responses are anonymous. All the answers collected will be treated confidentially & destroyed once the thesis is finished.

If you have any questions, please contact the researcher directly at: x19180012@student.ncirl.ie .

SECTION – A: Introductory Information

1. Gender

i. Male ii. Female iii. Other

2. Which of the following describes your current work situation?

fully office based fully WFH Combination of office based & WFH.

3. Work experience

1-5 years 5-15 years >15 years

SECTION – B: Trends of Employees Working from Home

Please ✓ for the answer that matches with you.

(For the questions/statements below put a tick mark on the option you feel correct)

Benefits of Working from Home

1) Are you currently working from home?

Yes	
No	
Sometimes	

2) Does working from home provide you with a better work life balance?

Yes	
No	
Not Sure	

3) Would you like having the option to work from home some days in the working week & the option to go into the office on other days?

Yes	
No	
Not Sure	

4) Is time saved from not having to commute to office is a benefit that you would prompt you to choose WFH?

Yes	
No	
Maybe	

5) WFH is less stressful than working in the office.

Yes	
No	
Not Sure	

6) Not having to commute to an office is saving money.

Yes	
No	
Not Sure	

Challenges of Working from Home for Employees

7) Technical issues while WFH is a major irritant & can affect my work schedule.

Yes	
No	
Not Sure	

8) Do you feel frustrated at having to resolve technical issues yourself while WFH instead of assistance from office experts?

Yes	
No	
Not Sure	

9) Has WFH lead to the loss of additional benefits e.g., office canteen etc.?

Yes	
No	
Not Sure	

10) Do you feel WFH can make you feel lonely and isolated?

Yes	
No	
Not Sure	

11) Is loneliness and isolation as mentioned in the previous question affecting your productivity?

Yes	
No	
Not Sure	

12) Do you think WFH has an impact on opportunities for promotion?

Yes	
No	
Not Sure	

13) Do you think WFH significantly reduces opportunities of developing relationships with superiors due to the “out of sight, out of mind” factor?

Yes	
No	
Not Sure	

14) Do you feel you are missing out on engaging in informal communication with colleagues while WFH?

Yes	
No	
Not Sure	

Working tendencies under Theory X

Please rate the following statements on the scale provided from ‘Strongly Agree’ to ‘Strongly Disagree’.

15) I dislike the work I do.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

16) I require constant directions to work well and deliver best outcome.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

17) It is often important to control, force me to complete tasks I am given.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Working tendencies under Theory Y

18) I am very eager to take up tasks and take initiative.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

19) I want managers to consult with me when making an important decision about work in which I am involved.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

20) I am mostly interested in taking ownership and responsibility of tasks given to me.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

21) I require little direction from managers for successful completion of tasks.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Teamwork

22) I believe that I am a good team member.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

23) I am mostly able to effectively connect with the other team members even in a virtual setting.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Thank you for your time.