MA HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The effects of remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic on the work-life balance and employee satisfaction of employees in the Republic of Ireland

NATIONAL COLLEGE OF IRELAND

Maria Butt

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Abstract

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic brought many changes to our day-to-day lives in the Republic of Ireland. A significant such change being the move to a remote-working model for the majority of workers in Ireland in order to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus. In this paper, the impact of this change on work-life balance and employee satisfaction was investigated using quantitative methods in the form of an online questionnaire. Data was collected using Google Forms and responses from 150 participants were analysed. This study found an overall improvement in the work-life balance of workers whilst remote-working during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to before the introduction of remote-working measures. However, no statistically significant change to employee satisfaction was observed after the introduction of remote-working.

Peripheral findings of the research including the impact of remote-working during the COVID-19 pandemic on working parents and across male and female workers. Additionally, the demand for remote-working in the Republic of Ireland was also investigated and has been outlined in this study.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the lecturers and staff in the National College of Ireland for their teaching and guidance throughout the Masters program.

Additionally, I would like to express my appreciation for my fellow classmates for their constant support, despite the circumstances of studying this program completely remotely throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Fearghal, for his pragmatic and logical advice and support throughout my thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family, who have been a constant source of support, encouragement and advice throughout my Masters, particularly my mother, Ayesha, who has instilled in me a passion for learning and education and it is due to her continued support that I am capable of achieving this goal.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

Job satisfaction, now commonly referred to as employee satisfaction can be defined as any combination of psychological, physiological, and environmental circumstances that cause a person to be truly satisfied with their job (Hoppock, 1935). Dayal and Verma (2021) similarly described employee satisfaction as 'how much an employee is satisfied with their work and work environment'. While historically, factors that have influenced employee satisfaction may include compensation, benefits, growth opportunities, progress, recognition and the nature of the work itself, in recent times, a new variable that may have an effect on employee satisfaction has been introduced into the world of work – remote working. The multi-dimensional nature of employee satisfaction as outlined by Hoppock (1935) is of great importance for employers to consider, as it provides a holistic and actionable definition of employee satisfaction. For the purposes of this study the factors in Hoppock's definition were considered whilst investigating the impact of remote working on work-life balance and its statistical relationship with employee satisfaction.

Additionally, for prospective employees, work-life balance is a highly sought after attribute of a desirable workplace (White et al., 2021), particularly for the millennial generation. Previously, organisational practices such as compressed working weeks, flexible schedules as well as remote working opportunities have been used as strategies to help employees manage their work-life balance (Hyatt and Cosler, 2018). Now, with the introduction of permanent remote-working or hybrid working environments in various organisations such as *Deloitte* (The Independent, 2021) and *Twitter* (Washington Post, 2020), it is a topic of interest for many organisations as to whether these new modes of working are the solution to achieving a greater work-life balance.

While the world of work was already moving at a slow but steady pace towards a more flexible work environment throughout the late 2000s to 2019 (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018), the COVID-19 pandemic, which became prominent in the Republic of Ireland in March 2020, greatly accelerated this change in the country. With public health guidelines resulting in employees working from home where possible, there are far more employees in Ireland

who have experienced long periods of remote working than ever before (RTE, July 2020). As a result of this significant change in the way Irish employees work, and in turn the way Irish employees balance work and life, more research was required to understand the statistical relationship between work-life balance whilst remote working and how it affected employee satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Republic of Ireland.

1.2 Outline and Structure

This paper is divided into 7 chapters. The introductory chapter presents an overview of the research topic and summarises the research question. Chapter 2 provides a critical review of the existing literature on the topics relevant to this paper, namely, employee satisfaction, remote working and work-life balance as well as providing a summative background on the governmental response to the COVID-19 outbreak in the Republic of Ireland. This is followed by Chapter 3 & 4 which focus on the research question and research methodology, respectively, including the outline of the research method and philosophy used as well as their justification. Finally, Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the findings of the research followed by Chapter 7 which concludes the paper alongside relevant recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will examine and critically analyse the existing literature on the topics of employee satisfaction, work-life balance and remote working. Background on the COVID-19 global pandemic will also be provided as well as a brief summary of the public health restrictions placed nationwide within the Republic of Ireland in response to the pandemic. This chapter will conclude with a brief analysis of the existing literature reviewed as well as comments on the interdependence of the three topics listed above.

2.1 Ireland's response to the COVID-19 global outbreak

On March 12, 2020, former An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar announced a national quarantine action plan to slow down the spread of COVID-19, a new virus that had not previously been seen in humans, first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019 (Gov.ie, 2020). These measures included the closing down of schools, colleges and childcare facilities as well as

various other measures to limit social interaction. The aim of limiting social interaction was predominantly to prevent the spread of the virus to protect the Irish population. However, a more immediate danger that this virus posed due to its transmissibility was the burdening of the national healthcare services (Gov.ie, 2020) that would otherwise potentially lead to avoidable deaths.

These stringent measures included advice to all workers in Ireland to "work from home" wherever and whenever possible (Merrion Street, 2020) to limit the spread of the virus in workplaces. Over the next two years, many restrictions eased and then resumed, such as the closing of bars and restaurants, the limit on numbers for gatherings of various types and cross-county travel. This ease of restrictions was, at times, due to a natural decline in the incidence of the virus in the nation due to long periods of social distancing and restrictions and eventually due to the introduction and uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine (HSE, March 2022). However, throughout the majority of this time, the work from home directive continued to be largely adopted by workplaces. These circumstances resulted in a large proportion of the Irish workforce experiencing long periods of working remotely, a phenomenon that had not been witnessed before.

2.2 Remote Working

Di Martino and Wirth (1990) defined remote working as "a flexible work arrangement whereby workers work in locations, remote from their central offices or production facilities, the worker has no personal contact with co-workers there, but is able to communicate with them using technology". It is interesting to note that this definition is still largely applicable and relevant today, 32 years later, despite the great advances in technology and the different ways we work. Whilst the prevalence of remote working has increased exponentially since Di Martino and Wirth defined it (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018), in the last decade particularly, there has been much debate as to whether remote-working in practice, truly benefits employees or puts them at a disadvantage in terms of focus, job satisfaction, work environment and growth. Additionally, factors associated with remote-working that may affect the total effectiveness of the overall organisation, such as

productivity, efficiency and output, have also been of great interest to both researchers and corporations.

Historically, there have been numerous conflicting studies regarding the total effectiveness of remote working. Whilst some researchers praise its flexibility, freedom and unmatched impact on work-life balance, others find it somewhat impractical and at times unprofessional. Marsh and Musson (2008) found that there were a number of difficulties surrounding 'working from home'. While some of these obstacles have since been resolved with the fast adoption of technology and better than ever connectivity, some of the psychological difficulties outlined in this study still remain. One such obstacle is the issue of the working world colliding with one's personal life. This issue in particular was exacerbated during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic when creches and schools in Ireland closed. This resulted in working parents taking calls, attending online conferences and completing day-to-day work related tasks in the presence of their children, oftentimes being required to multi-task childcare responsibilities concurrently with the demands of their work.

Another such difficulty highlighted by Marsh and Musson was the inability to 'switch off' after working hours, negatively affecting work-life balance. While for many employees, before the pandemic, there may have been a clear physical differentiation between their 'work environment' and 'home environment', the collision of both these environments may blur the psychological boundaries of when the working day actually ends (Chen and Nath, 2005). A third disadvantage that can be drawn from this study was that employees felt an overall detachment from the organisation. This may be due to a variety of factors including lack of social contact with their peers, lack of support from their manager and less brand loyalty due to lack of office presence. It is important to consider that the impact of each of these factors may range from one employee to the next depending on the nature of their work and practices put in place by their organisation via remote working. Bavik et. al (2020) found that workers who receive more social support from work suffer less from loneliness and online social interactions can meet their need for social belonging. If employers adopted a strong social support strategy whilst implementing remote-working such as regular online team catch-up meetings, virtual events and virtual coffee breaks, the risk of

feeling a detachment from the organisation as well as from their peers may be lessened to a great extent.

Mudditt (2020) found some major practical disadvantages to remote working that coincide with the psychological challenges outlined by Marsh and Musson. These practical difficulties included inappropriate workspace and office equipment, subsequent financial burden, a negative impact on workplace relations, insurance ambiguity regarding workplace accidents and lack of eyewitnesses, as well as an increase in cyber risk. While it may be argued that some of the disadvantages highlighted by Mudditt such as insurance ambiguity and an increase in cyber risk may not affect individual contributors in the organisation, the disorganisation and frustration resulting from these factors may trickle down to all parts of the organisation having an impact on the overall work culture and subsequently employee satisfaction. Difficulties such as unsuitable workspace and office equipment is a disadvantage many may face due to limitations within their own homes to find appropriate space to place high-quality, heavy office equipment that one may find in typical work environments. However, if the workplace does not provide suitable equipment due to logistical or financial reasons, workers may find themselves in a position where they feel they have to self-finance better quality equipment which may cause financial strain and subsequently may negatively impact the worker's perception of their organisation.

On the contrary, there have also been a number of studies that have found statistically favourable outcomes of remote working. In one such study in 2017, Felsteade and Henseke found that 70.5 percent of remote workers agreed or strongly agreed that they would not move to another organisation for higher pay compared to 62.5 percent of conventionally sited workers. This result may indicate a greater sense of organisational loyalty in remote workers. Chengedzai and David, (2013) found organisational loyalty to be a key indicator of employee satisfaction which suggests that the remote workers in this study seem to have higher employee satisfaction than conventionally-sited workers.

Whilst remote working has often been criticised to negatively impact productivity and performance citing reasons such as procrastination, longer breaks and social media usage (Wang et. al, 2020), a study in 2015 by Bloom et. al found the opposite result. The study

compared the performance of 994 call-centre workers and found that the performance of at-home workers significantly outperformed those working in the traditional workplace. The workers who were working remotely not only logged more time on the system but also answered more calls per minute than their counterparts at the office.

Hilbrecht et. al (2013) found a gender-specific advantage and highlighted that remote working better facilitated motherhood practices for female workers. The nature of remote working brings a greater sense of job-autonomy which allows female workers, in most cases, to schedule their working time and breaks in a manner that best suits themselves and their families. However, interestingly, the same study found that this advantage limited recreational activities for women, indicating that for working mothers, the move to remote working may be somewhat of a double-edged sword.

Aside from the direct advantages to the remote-working employee, there are a number of environmental and economic advantages to remote working (Rañeses et al, 2022). Companies no longer need large offices to hold all the workers in their organization, reducing expenses for rent, maintenance and parking as well as reducing the physical limitation to the amount of employees a company can have. Remote work could also improve traffic congestion from private vehicles used to commute, which subsequently leads to air pollution, making it a more sustainable way of working. Additionally, public-transportation related emissions produced by buses and trains would also be substantially reduced due to the reduced usage of transportation services. The positive environmental impact of remote working leading to a more sustainable work culture could potentially tie-in with the company's corporate responsibility agenda, positively affecting the organisation's brand. An organisation's environmental footprint is becoming something of increasing importance as found by the 2020 Deloitte Global Millennial Survey, which found that a third of respondents completely stopped or reduced relationships with businesses due to the organisation's perception to be harming the environment.

2.3 Work-life Balance

Kossek and Lautsch (2018) define work-life balance as 'employment-scheduling practices that are designed to give employees greater control over when, where, how much, or how continuously work is done'. The definition provided by Kossek and Lautsch provides an actionable description of work-life balance from the perspective of the employer who establishes the 'employment scheduling practices', however it can be argued that in the remote-working environment these practices themselves are generally established by the employee due to the absence of the employer in the work environment, which allows the employee more autonomy. Agha et. al (2017) found that whilst enhanced work-life balance increases job satisfaction, poor work-life balance resulted in poor job satisfaction as well as poor performance. It is apparent that as a result of these studies good work-life balance is a priority for not only employees themselves but also for employers in order to maintain employee satisfaction and retain employees. A number of diverse factors have been identified in existing literature which impact work-life balance.

A study conducted in Chennai by Pandu (2013) found that the most influential factor that impacted work-life balance was 'feelings about work' with positive feelings about work and in turn higher employee satisfaction resulting in a better work-life balance. A similar result concerning the 'feelings about work' impacting work-life balance was found by Manivannan et. al (2022) who found occupational stress to negatively affect work-life balance. The study explored that occupational stress can be caused by a variety of job-related stressors such as work overload, lack of time frame for work as well as unstable working hours. It is possible that remote-working may have had an effect on these stressors particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in inconsistent working conditions for many due to the nature of the changing pandemic restrictions as discussed in 2.1.

Gupta et. al (2022) conducted a study identifying the most significant factors affecting work-life balance amongst female workers. While 6 factors were identified in this study, "time for self-care and socialization" and "flexibility options at work" were two factors that were of particular interest to the research that was carried out for this paper, due to the impact remote working may have on these factors. Other factors that were noted in the study included "gender equality at work" and "infrastructure support at workplace for health

issues" as well as "average working hours per day". The inclusion of these three factors indicate that work-life balance is not only impacted by the general assumption that it consists of the ability to balance life outside work with work, but also that practices within the workplace itself can contribute to a good work-life balance. This result mirrors that of the studies by Pandu (2013) and Manivannan et. al (2022) discussed above, which both respectively noted 'feelings about work' being the most influential factor on a worker's work-life balance, with the factors listed by Gupta et. al contributing to positive feelings about work.

Interestingly, the third most important factor listed in the study by Gupta et. al was "family support in sharing responsibilities". It is important to note that whilst this factor is unrelated to any workplace practices that could contribute to this factor, it ranked fairly high on the list of what the women participating in this study deemed important for work-life balance in this study. The inclusion of this factor introduces two important points in relation to work-life balance. The first being that work-life balance can sometimes be impacted by factors that are outside of an organisation's control. The second point to consider is the question that if responsibilities at home are increased such as by having children, does the introduction of remote-working have a different effect on the work-life balance of working parents than the general population? Sallee et. al (2016) carried out a study on faculty members in relation to parenting and academic careers with a focus on work-life balance. It was found in the 2016 study that faculty members with children appreciated the flexibility of their academic career as it allowed them to devote more time to their children. The flexible nature of their work allowed them more autonomy in work-scheduling practices leading to better work-life balance.

Upon critical analysis of the aforementioned literature, it can be concluded that that a multi-layered approach is the most favourable route to ensuring a good work-life balance with a variety of factors both inside and outside the workplace impacting the overall employee perception of work-life balance. Work-life balance continues to be a highly sought after attribute of a desirable workplace, for both employees and employers (White et al., 2021). Previously, organisational practices such as compressed working weeks, flexible schedules as well as remote working opportunities have been used as strategies to help

employees manage their work-life balance (Hyatt and Cosler, 2018). Now, with the introduction of permanent remote-working or hybrid working environments in various organisations such as *Deloitte* (The Independent, 2021) and *Twitter* (Washington Post, 2020), it begs the question whether this will be all that is needed to ensure a good work-life balance.

2.4 Employee Satisfaction

Employee satisfaction remains a top priority for most forward-thinking organisations. Tien et al (2021) found that employees who are satisfied with their work will willingly contribute more to the organisation, increasing overall productivity and organisational effectiveness. Similarly, Khan and Inayat (2021) also found a positive correlation between employee satisfaction and effectiveness at work as their study confirmed that the performance of satisfied employees was more effective than that of their dissatisfied counterparts. These studies indicate that organisations stand to gain more from satisfied employees that would be more productive and effective for the overall business.

Additionally, employee satisfaction is also a key indicator of the quality of overall Human Resource Management within an organisation, a factor which leads to better employee retention and loyalty (Eliyana et. al, 2019). The need to retain skilled employees has increasingly become a topic of interest in the world of HR, particularly following an unprecedented rate of employee turnover following the COVID-19 pandemic that was subsequently termed by economists as "The Great Resignation" (Langdon and Bosacki, 2022). In this period, a high rate of employee turnover was experienced by multiple organisations across almost all major industrial sectors. The constant and rapid loss of skill and intellect within organisations as a result of high employee turnover is not only costly but fatal to the efficiency of the organisation itself (Chatzoudes and Chatzoglou, 2022). Providing training to new employees as well as upskilling remaining employees to prematurely fill senior roles puts a strain on existing resources. The positive impact on employee retention highlighted by Eliyana et. al indicates that employees who are more satisfied can be retained for longer periods of time, resulting in overall cost-saving for the

organisation as the associated cost of high employee turnover reported by Chatzoudes and Chatzoglu would be prevented.

Employee satisfaction can be broken down into smaller components that contribute to how satisfied a worker is with their job. Werner (2001) presented five key facets of employee satisfaction which consist of:

1. The Job Itself –the day-to-day tasks, duties, responsibilities and pace of the work being carried out by the employee
2. Quality of Supervision –the attentiveness, assistance and communication from management within the organisation
3. Relationship with Co-workers – the general comradery, agreeableness and team-work ability between co-workers
4. Promotion Opportunities – the opportunity for career growth and compensation increase
5. Pay – the compensation for the role not including benefits

It is important to note that remote working may have both positive and negative effects on some of these components. Quality of supervision may be impacted by the remote working environment due to the lack of physical observation that would otherwise exist in the office setting. Managers can no longer pick up on physical indicators that an employee may require assistance with their work and as a result the work itself, as well as the manager-employee relationship, may suffer (Hartner-Tiefenthaler et al., 2021). A breakdown in manager-employee relationships may lead to more interpersonal conflict which may result in employee turnover. This indicates that it is important to put in practical measures that can strengthen the manager-employee relationship whilst keeping micro-management to a minimum.

Relationships with co-workers may be another factor that may be impacted by the remote working environment. Employees may find it harder to build new relationships with colleagues as well as maintain already established work relationships due to the absence of

a shared workspace. Workers who are socially disconnected from their peers may have poorer job performance as their minds can be pre-occupied thinking about their family and friends whilst at work (Al-Haidan et. al., 2022). Similarly, due to the dramatic decrease in opportunity for informal conversation while working remotely, it is possible that promotion opportunities may be impacted as well. Informal conversations are essential to the formation and maintenance of work relationships. Interactions such as casual coffee breaks and 'watercooler moments' have turned into virtual calls which oftentimes require notice, planning and lack the spontaneity that an in-office setting brings. As a result the ease with which many of us once communicated with our peers within the workplace, has been in most cases partially or wholly replaced with structure, hesitancy and anxiety (Baym et al, 2021). The multi-faceted approach to understanding employee satisfaction as presented by Werner was considered whilst investigating the effects of remote working on employee satisfaction.

2.5 Conclusion

It is indicated from the literature analysed above that some degree of interdependence may exist between remote working and work-life balance, which is a priority for most employees in the current workforce (White et. al, 2021). Based on the reviewed literature, there are compelling arguments both against and in favour of remote working as a means to achieve better work-life balance and higher job satisfaction. It was the objective of the research carried out for this paper to determine how work-life balance is affected by remote working and what is the subsequent outcome of this way of working in relation to employee satisfaction, particularly in the Republic of Ireland.

Chapter 3: Research Question

As discussed, there are a number of factors that may influence employee satisfaction including pay, benefits, growth opportunities, progress, recognition, work environment, flexibility as well as the nature of the work itself. The aim of this study was to focus on one of these factors - remote working, and its effect on employee satisfaction and work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the

majority of workers in the Republic of Ireland being required to work remotely. With a limited number of studies done on this topic in Ireland, research was required in this area to understand the impact of this change on employee satisfaction and work-life balance and its subsequent outcomes. The following research question and research objectives encapsulate the purpose of this study.

3.1 Research Question

How has remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the work-life balance and employee satisfaction of employees in the Republic of Ireland?

3.2 Research Objectives

This research was focussed on gathering primary data from workers in Ireland regarding their remote working experience during the pandemic. This research aims to inform organisations on the effects of remote working in regards to employee satisfaction, work-life balance and its subsequent demand in the Irish workforce.

Objective 1:

To gain insight on the effect of remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic on employee satisfaction

Objective 2:

To explore the relationship between remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic and work-life balance

Objective 3:

To investigate the demand for continuing to work remotely in the Republic of Ireland

3.3 Hypotheses

1. Remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic has increased employee satisfaction
2. Remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic has improved work-life balance in the Republic of Ireland
3. There is a demand for the continuation of remote working in the Republic of Ireland

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

This chapter will explore the research strategy options that were available for this paper and will provide the rationale behind the quantitative approach chosen for this study. Research philosophy concepts will also be explored and justification for positivist and interpretivist approach will be provided. Additionally, the data collection process will be explained in depth as well as the associated ethical considerations and research limitations.

4.1 Research Strategy

Agarwal (2015) defined research methodology as "a scientific procedure of systematic and thorough investigation in a field of knowledge to discover certain facts or establish certain principles envisaged by experience, theorization or observation". The procedure of investigation highlighted in Agarwal's definition can be categorised in two divisions – qualitative research or quantitative research.

Qualitative research focuses on generating and analysing non-numerical data usually in the form of verbal data, textual data or visual data (Quinlan et al., 2019). It aims to investigate individual human experiences and interpretations individuals have of their own experiences. Qualitative data is diverse in the forms it can be obtained. It can be obtained in the form of an in-person interview or video interview which is usually recorded and transcribed. The interviews can be either semi-structured or unstructured from which the researcher must draw data to extract conclusions. It can also be obtained through naturally-occurring conversations, observations, research diaries or audio and video recordings.

Quantitative research on the other hand, can be described as the collection of data that can be analysed using mathematical methods (Creswell, 1994). These methods can take the form of surveys, questionnaires, experiments, case control studies as well as cluster sampling which generates numerical data or data that can be easily coded numerically (Quinlan et al., 2019). Whilst both research methods are robust, reliable and established in the collection of worker data, the method that will be used for data collection for this research will be quantitative. Creswell (1994) noted that when in order to reach the objective of the research, data gathering and statistics must be heavily relied upon, a

quantitative approach works well. The research method has also been adopted by those who investigated similar topics such as Inayat and Khan (2021) who studied the effect of job satisfaction on employee's performance in the private sector in Peshawar, Pakistan using a quantitative method of investigation – a questionnaire. Similarly, the 2009 study by Russell et al. which researched the effect of flexible working on work-life conflict, as well as the 2017 study by Felstead and Henseke which investigated the growth of remote working on effort, well-being and work-life balance, both use quantitative methods of research in their respective studies. As the aforementioned studies are very closely related to the research carried out for this paper, this provides the justification of using a quantitative approach over a qualitative approach for this type of research.

4.2 Research Philosophy

Research Philosophy as defined by Quinlan et al. (2019) is the "belief and assumptions about the development of knowledge". Saunders et al (2012) likened the process of reaching the most suited strategy for research to that of an onion, peeling away layers to get to the most appropriate approach. Research philosophy can take the approach of ontology and epistemology. Ontology refers to the assumptions about reality. Epistemology refers to assumptions about knowledge and how this knowledge can be expressed to others. Whilst ontology is a more abstract approach, epistemology is more obvious. Epistemologies such as archival research, autobiographical accounts and fictional literature can also be included in research when taking this approach. Different types of epistemological assumptions can be used depending on the type of research to be carried out. These assumptions can take the form of interpretivism, positivism and realism with each form having its own strengths and limitations discussed below.

Positivism

The positivist philosophical position, as outlined by Saunders et. al, is based on observable and measurable facts. Casual explanations as well as predictions contribute to what is considered acceptable knowledge within this research philosophy. The methods used within this philosophical approach are generally highly structured with the method of data

collection being quantitative. Positivists are expected to remain neutral and detached from the research in order to be able to objectively analyse findings and avoid influencing results.

Interpretivism

Interpretivism focuses on narratives, stories and perceptions with worldviews and personal understandings weighing in on the analysis process. Whilst this form of research philosophy is most suited to qualitative methods of analysis such as interviews, investigations or observations, the philosophical approach can be applied to a range of data that can be interpreted. The researcher is a part of what is researched and the findings are considered subjective (Saunders et. al, 2012).

Realism

The realist philosophical approach to research is based on historically situated knowledge. Facts are considered to be social constructions with the researcher acknowledging that bias may affect the analysis resulting from world-views, cultural experience and personal life experiences. The researcher aims to minimise such biases by being as objective as possible.

The research paradigm is the framework that outlines the philosophical approach to the research (Colis and Hussey, 2008). For this study, the researcher chose a predominantly positivist approach whilst analysing the data in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, the analysis was discussed using a combination of positivism and interpretivism.

4.3 Data Collection Process

Primary data was collected via the research instrument which was a self-administered online questionnaire formulated on Google Forms. The questionnaire was largely distributed via internal workplace team forums, the social media website *LinkedIn* as well as word of mouth. The questionnaire was introduced with a brief summary about the purpose of the research, learning objectives and practical information such as the approximate duration of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was based on the following previously tested and approved questionnaires sourced from APA PsycTests: Work-Life Balance Scale

(Brough et. al, 2014), Employee Satisfaction Measure (Jung and Yoon, 2013). The Work-Life Balance Scale measured responses using a 5-point Likert scale and similarly the Employee Satisfaction Measure measured responses using a 7-point Likert scale. The data collected was completely anonymous and participants were required to give informed consent prior to beginning the questionnaire. The questionnaire was available online and accepting responses for over 4 weeks until a total respondent count of 181 participants was reached.

Secondary data was collected largely from academic journals to help contextualise the theories and themes that developed whilst reviewing the current literature. As the COVID-19 pandemic is a very recent occurrence and responses from organisations have also developed more recently, some relevant citations were in the form of governmental websites as well as news sources.

4.4 Sample

The sample population were randomly-selected employees over the age of 18 with at least 6 months' work experience overall and who had experience working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic for at least 3 months, ordinarily residing in Ireland. Responses from participants outside this inclusion criteria were excluded from the results. The sampling method used was non-probability convenience sampling as the questionnaire was accessible publicly to anyone who chose to take part in the survey.

The questionnaire received 181 responses in total. 8 participant responses were removed from the sample as they did not ordinarily reside in Ireland. 2 further participants were removed as they had less than 6 months of work experience. 3 more participants were removed as they were self-employed. 18 additional participants we removed as they did not work remotely for more than 3 months during the pandemic. As a result of these participants who were outside of the inclusion criteria for this study, being removed, there was a total of 150 responses used for analysis. This sample size is similar to that used by Inayat and Khan (2021) of 180 participants. Out of the 150 responses considered for the analysis of this paper 88% of respondents worked in the private sector and 12% worked in

the public sector. The gender distribution of respondents was 41.3% male and 58.7% female. The respondents were aged from 21 to 59 years of age, with the average age of respondents being 34 years of age.

4.5 Ethical Considerations and Research Limitations

As with all research projects there are a number of ethical considerations and limitations to the research that was undertaken.

Ethical considerations for this paper included compliance with the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). The data was gathered anonymously and was used for the sole purpose of this paper. No personal identifiers such as email addresses, name, address or workplace names were collected to protect the anonymity of the participants.
A research limitation to this body of research was the timing in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. The data collection for this paper was carried out in June 2022, a considerable amount of time after the majority of COVID-19 imposed restrictions had eased. As a result of this, the data collected relied on memory recall as opposed to the more ideal data collection method which would have been gathering data at two different time-points - during the pandemic restrictions and after pandemic restrictions, and then comparing both sets of data.

Another such limitation is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic itself on factors such as anxiety, workload, stress, childcare and their possible subsequent effect on the perception of remote working. Due to the unprecedented nature of the pandemic, employees also could have concurrently been dealing with situations in their personal lives that arose from the pandemic itself such as illness, bereavement, risk of unemployment or reduced working hours that could have resulted in negative feelings that may have impacted their perception of the situation thus negatively affecting their view of remote working, overall employee satisfaction and work-life balance.

Chapter 5: Research Findings and Analysis

This chapter will evaluate the data gathered and its statistical relevance to the research objectives. Both salient and peripheral findings will be highlighted and compared to the findings from existing literature. The data analysis was carried out using a combination of Microsoft Excel and SPSS software.

5.1 The relationship between remote working and work-life balance

One of the primary objectives of this research paper was to investigate the effect of remote working DURING the COVID-19 pandemic on work-life balance. Participants were asked 4 questions that measured work-life balance recalling how they felt *before* the introduction of remote-working due to pandemic restrictions and *during* remote-working in the COVID-19 pandemic. Work-life balance was measured using a 5-point Likert scale (Brough et. al, 2014), with a high score indicating a good work-life balance and a low score indicating poor work-life balance. A dependent variable t-test was performed to measure the statistical relationship between remote-working and work-life balance (Appendix 2). The work-life balance results *before* the introduction of remote working due to pandemic restrictions (*M* = 11.21, *SD* = 4.23) and results *whilst* remote-working *during* the COVID-19 pandemic (*M* = 14.84, *SD* = 4.14) indicate that there was a statistically significant improvement in work-life balance whilst remote-working during the COVID-19 pandemic, t(149) = -6.755, p = < .001. This result demonstrates a better work-life balance during remote-working due to pandemic restrictions than before the introduction of remote-working.

5.1.1 Gender

Participants overall had an improved work-life balance whilst remote-working during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to before the introduction of measures, a peripheral finding of this research was the distribution of this improvement between male and female participants. Using an independent variable t-test, it was found that before the introduction of remote-working due to COVID-19, the work-life balance of men (M = 11.08, SD = 4.26) and the work-life balance of women (M = 11.40 , SD = 4.20) was statistically similar, t(148) = -.461, p = .646. This similarity in work-life balance remained consistent even after the

introduction of remote-working due to COVID-19, as the work-life balance of men (M = 14.95, SD = 4.105) did not differ significantly compared to the work-life balance of women (M = 14.68, SD = 4.215), t(148) = .403 p = .688. This result shows that the work-life balance score of male participants did not statistically differ from female participants neither before nor after the pandemic.

This result contradicts the finding discussed in 2.2 by Hilbrecht et. al (2013) who found a gender-specific advantage to remote working for female workers, highlighting that remote working better facilitated motherhood practices resulting in more autonomy and a more substantial improvement in work life balance compared to men.

5.1.2 How did remote working affect the work-life balance of working parents?

As discussed in 2.2, the study by Sallee et. al (2016) indicated that faculty members with children appreciated the flexibility of their academic career as it allowed them to devote more time to their children. As a result, it was a point of interest, to investigate whether or not, the work-life balance in the Republic of Ireland was higher for working parents after the introduction of remote working compared to their counterparts without children.

Using an independent variable t-test, it was found that before the introduction of remote-working due to COVID-19, the mean work-life balance of workers who had children (M = 11.08, SD = 4.350) and the mean work-life balance of workers without children (M = 11.30 , SD = 4.164) was statistically similar, t(148) = -.307, p = .760. This similarity in work-life balance remained relatively consistent even after the introduction of remote-working due to COVID-19, the work-life balance of working parents (M = 15, SD = 3.805) did not differ significantly compared to the work-life balance of workers without children (M = 14.73 , SD = 4.365), t(148) = .385, p = .700.

It can be concluded from this result that working parents did not gain a statistically significantly better work-life balance from remote-working during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to their counterparts who did not have children. Whilst the indication by Sallee et. al (2016) outlined above may still hold true in terms of the appreciation working parents

may have for a more flexible work-environment, this study did not find this to significantly affect their work-life balance score in comparison to workers without children.

5.1.3 Commute time before the pandemic restrictions

A peripheral finding of this study was the time consumption of the daily commute before the introduction of remote working. This study found that 39.3% of participants had a total commute time of 1-2 hours and 15.3% of respondents had a total commute time of 2-3 hours. The introduction of remote working has eliminated the time spent getting to and from work resulting in individuals having more time to do other non-work activities.

5.2 The relationship between remote working and employee satisfaction

Employee satisfaction was measured on a 7-point Likert scale, with a high score indicating high employee satisfaction and a low score indicating low employee satisfaction (Jung and Yoon, 2013). Participants were asked 8 questions that measured work-life balance recalling how they felt *before* the introduction of remote-working due to pandemic restrictions and *during* remote-working in the COVID-19 pandemic. A dependent variable t-test was performed to measure the statistical relationship between remote-working and employee satisfaction (Appendix 3). The work-life balance results *before* the introduction of remote working due to pandemic restrictions (M = 39.50, SD = 9.29) and results *whilst* remote-working *during* the COVID-19 pandemic (M = 39.07, SD = 9.25) indicate that there was no statistically significant improvement in employee satisfaction whilst remote-working during the COVID-19 pandemic, $t(148)$ = .510, p = .611.

This result indicates that the mean employee satisfaction score was similar before the introduction of remote working and whilst remote working, despite the statistically significant increase in work-life balance, as discussed in 5.1. As a result of this finding we reject the hypothesis outlined in 3.3 stating "Remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic has increased employee satisfaction".

5.2.1 Quality of Supervision and employee satisfaction

Werner (2001) noted that "Quality of Supervision" was a key facet in ensuring employee satisfaction. Whilst there are multiple factors that constitute good quality supervision, one

such factor is the ease of which workers can communicate with their managers. Hartner-Tiefenthaler et al. (2021) noted that an effect of remote-working is that managers can no longer pick up on physical indicators that an employee may require support with their work, which may affect the quality of supervision. In a remote-working environment, employees were required to reach out to their managers by way of virtual means. Participants were asked if their line manager was easy to reach during remote-working in the COVID-19 pandemic – 86% of participants answered that their manager was easy to reach whilst 21% of participants found it difficult to reach their manager. This is an interesting result in light of the findings of the study of Hartner-Tiefenthaler et. al (2021). Despite managers no longer having the physical indicators of communication, employees still found it easy to reach their managers.

An independent sample t-test was used to investigate whether the ease of access to the manager impacted the employee satisfaction score. It was found that workers who found it easy to reach their managers (M = 39.89, SD = 8.667) had a statistically significantly higher employee satisfaction score than workers who found it difficult to reach their managers (M = 34, SD = 11.198), t(148) = -2.766, p = .006. This results indicates that the accessibility of managers in a remote working setting, which is a contributor to the quality of supervision, has a significant impact on employee satisfaction.

5.2.2 Social interaction and employee satisfaction

The change in the quantity and quality of social interaction with colleagues is a major change that resulted from the introduction of remote working. In this study, 78% of participants answered that they "missed the socialising aspect of being in an in-person setting, whilst working remotely" despite 82% of participants "finding it easy to reach their peers". As discussed in 2.4, Al-Haidan et. al. (2022) found that an important indicator of employee satisfaction was workplace relationships noting that workers who are socially disconnected from their peers may have poorer job performance as their minds can be pre-occupied thinking about their family and friends whilst at work, subsequently affecting the worker being "present" in their daily tasks.

Using an independent sample t-test it was investigated whether the ability to reach peers easily whilst remote-working during the COVID-19 pandemic had an effect on employee satisfaction. Workers who found it easy to reach their peers (M = 40.07, SD = 8.549) had a statistically significantly higher employee satisfaction score than workers who did not find it easy to reach their peers (M = 34.52, SD = 11.012), t(148) = - 2.890. The ability to reach peers easily whilst remote working had a statistically significant impact on employee satisfaction

5.2.3 How did remote working affect the employee satisfaction of working parents?

A total of 40% of participants had children and an independent variable t-test was performed to investigate the effect of remote-working on the employee satisfaction of working parents compared to that of workers who did not have children. The mean employee satisfaction score of working parents (M = 42.02, SD = 8.404) was statistically significantly higher than the mean work-life balance score of workers who did not have children (M = 37.10, SD = 9.309) whilst remote-working during the COVID-19 pandemic, t(148) = -3.293, p = <.001. Parents were found to have a better employee satisfaction score than that of their counterparts without children whilst working remotely during the pandemic.

It is interesting to note that whilst the work-life balance of working parents was not statistically significantly higher than their counterparts without children (5.1.2) the opposite is true when it comes to employee satisfaction.

5.3 The demand for remote working in Ireland going forward

Perhaps the most interesting result of this study and possibly the one that will be of the utmost importance for employers to consider is that a staggering 95.3% of respondents would prefer to either continue working fully remote or within a hybrid work model. This result shows that there is a strong preference in the sample to have some element of remote working in their employment. However, it is important to note that only 30.7% of respondents would prefer a fully remote environment resulting in the remaining 64.7%

preferring a hybrid model as seen in Appendix 5. This result is discussed further in 6.3 below.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This chapter will elaborate on the analysis outlined in Chapter 5 in relation to objectives of the study as outlined in section 3.2. The findings will be critically analysed in light of existing literature on remote-working, work-life balance and employee satisfaction examined in Chapter 2 taking into consideration the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic itself. Additionally, this chapter will offer additional insights and explanations regarding the results of the study from the perspective of the researcher.

6.1 Remote working improved work-life balance

This study found the employees had an improved work-life balance after the introduction of remote-working due to the COVID-19 pandemic than before. The effect of a number of demographical factors such as gender and having children were investigated in Chapter 5 above. The impact of these demographical factors is discussed below.

6.1.1 Gender had no effect on the improvement in work-life balance due to remote working

Hilbrecht et. al (2013) noted gender-specific advantages and disadvantages of remote working for female workers. The 2013 study noted that remote working better facilitated motherhood practices for female workers however limited recreational activities for women. However, the results of this study found no gender-specific difference in the improvement of work-life due to remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic between men and women in the Republic of Ireland (5.1.1). A contributing factor could possibly be the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic being a shared experience regardless of gender with the implications affecting both working men and working women. As well as this, advantages such as reduced commuting time, more free time to do non-work activities and increased productivity as highlighted by Bloom et. al (2015) may be advantages shared across the workforce regardless of gender. In a family-setting, perhaps this uniform experience is due to the decrease in gender-roles within families in modern society with childcare responsibilities which resulted from the closure of schools and creches being shared fairly between parents due to the home being a shared place of work.

6.2 The relationship between remote working and employee satisfaction

A surprising outcome of this study was that remote-working during the COVID-19 pandemic had no statistically significant impact on employee satisfaction of workers in the Republic of Ireland. It may be possible that the 5 primary factors that contributed to employee satisfaction as discussed in Chapter 2 remained for the most part unchanged despite the introduction of remote working. It may be that due to the exponential advances in technology in recent times that many of these factors may not have been affected by the introduction of remote work. Factors such as day-to-day tasks, duties and responsibilities may have remained the same for many, as if it were the case that their duties could not be carried out remotely, perhaps they would have been required to come into the workplace on special request or be made redundant as was seen in many professions that could not facilitate remote working such as restaurant workers, bar staff and other professions deemed "non-essential" as discussed in 2.1. The aspects of Werner's definition such as "quality of supervision" and "relationship between co-workers" are discussed in detail in sections 6.2.2 and 6.2.3 below and while these factors impacted employee satisfaction overall, more research is needed to measure these factors before and after the introduction of remote working.

It can be concluded from this result that remote-working is not the "cure-all" solution for employee satisfaction and that the other facets of employee satisfaction need just as much attention as before despite workers working remotely.

6.2.1 Improved work-life balance had no impact on employee satisfaction

Whilst the findings of this research indicated that remote working resulted in an improvement in work-life balance as outlined in 6.1 above, it is interesting to note that this did not translate into an improvement in employee satisfaction score for employees.
This finding is contrary to that of Agha et. al (2017) and Pandu (2013) who both found that a good work-life balance resulted in good job satisfaction and conversely a poor work-life balance resulted in poor job satisfaction. The result of this study, which found no improvement in employee satisfaction with the introduction of remote working, despite a

better work-life balance, contradicts the findings of the existing literature. It is possible that the findings of this paper could be reflective of other circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and not just the remote-working factor, discussed further in section 6.4, outlining the opportunities for further research.

6.2.2 Quality of communication with management whilst working remotely impacts employee satisfaction

While this study did not investigate whether the overall quality of supervision (Werner, 2001) had been impacted due to the nature of remote working, it was a peripheral finding of the study that the ease of which workers could communicate with their managers in a remote setting, had a statistically significant impact on the employee satisfaction score.

This study found that despite the physical distance introduced by remote-working, 86% of participants found it easy to reach their manager. This facet of worker-manager communication proved to significantly increase work employee satisfaction as workers who found it easy to reach their managers had a statistically significantly higher employee satisfaction score than their counterparts who reported it to be difficult to reach their manager.

6.2.3 Maintenance of social interaction is a key contributor to employee satisfaction whilst working remotely

This study found that 82% of participants found it easy to reach their workplace peers. This is contrary to the finding by Baym et. al (2021) who noted that remote-working had replaced the ease with which many of us once communicated with our peers with structure, hesitancy and anxiety. Perhaps the overall societal change in communication, accelerated by the uptake of technology in our day-to-day lives and the social distancing guidelines as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Republic of Ireland, is what contributed to the ease of communication. With texting, instant messaging, voice calls and video calls overtaking in-person communication in our personal lives as a result of the pandemic, perhaps the adaptability of humans resulted in this change being quickly accepted in the workplace as well.

However, the social aspect of relationships between co-workers may still have suffered due to the introduction of remote working with 78% of participants answering that they "missed the socialising aspect of being in an in-person setting, whilst working remotely" (5.2.2). It is interesting to note that while a statistically significant percentage of participants missed the socialising aspect of an in-person setting, 82% of participants overall found it easy to reach their workplace peers. This indicates that whilst verbal communication can be accessed with ease via virtual methods, employees still feel the absence of the physical presence of their co-workers and the related in-person socialisation. While these results are of value from a workplace relations point-of-view, the absence of the socialising aspect did not result in a decrease in the employee satisfaction score after the introduction of remote-working.

However, what did in fact impact the employee satisfaction score was the ease with which workers could reach their peers at work. Workers who found it easy to reach their peers at work had a higher employee satisfaction score than that of their counterparts who found it difficult to reach their peers. This result mirrors the findings of the manager-worker ease of communication discussed in 6.2.2, indicating that employers must ensure that steps are taken to ensure ease of communication within the workplace, whether between peers or between workers and management.

6.3 The effect of remote-working on workers with children

Existing literature such as the study by Sallee et. al (2016) and Gupta et. al (2022) indicated that remote working may have a more pronounced effect on working parents than on their counterparts without children. Appreciation for more time to devote to parenting practices, reduced stress of managing work and home responsibilities and increased autonomy in work-scheduling practices were cited as reasons for this. Whilst employee satisfaction was statistically significantly higher in working parents whilst remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to their counterparts without children, interestingly, the same result was not mirrored when it came to work-life balance.

This research paper found that the mean work-life balance score of working parents whilst remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic did not significantly differ from that of their

counterparts without children. This could perhaps be attributed to the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions themselves which resulted in the closure of schools and creches meaning increased childcare responsibilities at home which perhaps resulted in working beyond specified work hours in order to balance childcare responsibilities and work commitments. This could potentially contribute to the blurring of the psychological boundaries of when the working day actually ends, as outlined in the 2005 study by Chen and Nath, negatively impacting work-life balance. These drawbacks of remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic could counteract the positive impacts outlined by Sallee et. al (2016) and Gupta et. al (2022) resulting in the statistically similar work-life balance scores between workers with children and those without.

6.4 The demand for remote working in Ireland going forward

This study found 95.3% of 150 participants preferred having some element of remote-working in their current roles, with the majority having a preference for a hybrid work model. This result serves to provide some hope to both organisations and HR professionals that not all is lost when it comes to the appreciation and importance of an in-person employment experience. The preference for a hybrid working model (5.3) together with the lack of impact of remote working on employee satisfaction suggest that the existing HR practices focusing on factors contributing to employee satisfaction, as outlined by Werner (2001) such as the job itself, quality of supervision, relationship with co-workers, promotion opportunities and pay all need to continue to be prioritised. Whilst remote working has indeed added a new component to the average employee experience, the importance of continuing established best practices to improve employee satisfaction must continue.

6.4 Opportunity for Future Research

As this major change in the way we work has occurred so recently and was adopted at an unprecedented pace due to the seriousness and global health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it would be interesting to study the long-term implications of such a drastic change in the working environment. The effect of remote-working, whether full-time or in a hybrid model, could be researched in many contexts. From a HR point of view its long term implications on workplace relationships, promotions, productivity, brand loyalty and employee retention could be explored. Additionally, whether the opportunity to work

remotely remains a priority for workers in 3-5 years or not would also be an area of interest for employers.

As the nature of remote working is intertwined with both our professional and personal lives, it would be interesting to discover the effect on personal relationships. Will remote-working improve or worsen relationships between spouses, co-habitants and parents with their children? This study found that 80% of respondents felt that their work-life balance improved (Appendix 4) whilst working remotely during the pandemic however, it will be fascinating to investigate whether remote-working will continue to improve work-life balance or whether the line currently drawn between 'work' and 'home' whilst working remotely will blur as time goes on and as this way of working becomes the norm.

Chapter 7: Conclusion & Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an unprecedented situation to the world. With an immediate risk to life, governments across the globe were required to respond with urgency and effectiveness. The Republic of Ireland responded, like many countries, with practical measures to slow the spread of the virus as much as possible. As a result of this, the majority of workers in Ireland were required to begin working remotely. One would assume that this major change in the standard working environment for workers in the Republic of Ireland was bound to bring significant impact to the work-life balance and employee satisfaction of workers. The aim of this paper was to explore and analyse this impact.

Work-life balance was statistically significantly improved across both male and female workers in the Republic of Ireland. This improvement was reinforced by the continued demand to work remotely with 95.3% of workers preferring some element of remote-work in their jobs. Interestingly, the majority of these workers preferred a hybrid-working model. As a result of this finding, it would be of great benefit to organisations to ensure workers are given flexibility in terms of their working environment, leveraging both remote-working and in-person settings. Additionally, organisations should continue to invest in offices, workplace facilities as well as recreational facilities as workers wish to have some in-person element to their jobs. Concurrently, perhaps organisations can take advantage of some environmental and economic benefits that remote-working brings as suggested by Rañeses

et al (2022). Office space big enough to accommodate full capacity is no longer required, resulting in the opportunity for downsizing and saving on costs such as rent, electricity, parking and other maintenance costs. Another opportunity is presented for organisations to reduce their carbon footprint in line with their corporate responsibility initiatives, by offering a remote or a hybrid working model, which would result in a reduced usage of transport by their employees. This reduction in the usage of transport, whether private or public, to get to and from the office, would reduce related carbon emissions on an individual level as well as a company-wide level.

Whilst an improvement was seen in work-life balance after the introduction of remote-working, the same was not seen in employee satisfaction. Employee satisfaction scores did not statistically significantly differ after the introduction of remote-working measures during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to before. As a result of this, other facets of employee satisfaction such as pay, day-to-day tasks, benefits and promotion opportunities (Werner, 2001) need to continue to be prioritised by the employer to keep employees satisfied. The quality of supervision continues to be an important factor in employee satisfaction and the remote-working environment needs to adopt practices that allow for ease of communication between the worker and the manager despite the physical distance. Employees who found it easy to reach their manager scored higher in employee satisfaction than their counterparts who found it difficult to reach their manager. To ensure workers can reach their managers whenever needed, organisations should leverage business communication platforms such as *Microsoft Teams, Slack* or *Skype for Business*, especially since the physical indicators of communication as outlined by Hartner-Tiefenthaler et al. (2021) are no longer present in the remote-working world.

Keeping in touch with peers in the workplace whilst working remotely also significantly impacted employee satisfaction. Workers who found it easy to reach their peers scored higher in employee satisfaction than their counterparts who found it difficult to reach their peers. However, despite this, 78% of participants answered that they "missed the socialising aspect of being in an in-person setting, whilst working remotely". Managers should adopt strong social support strategies to help to keep their team in touch. These strategies could include organised coffee breaks, virtual team meetings, monthly team events or regular

team catch-ups. The advantage of such activities is not only enhanced employee satisfaction but also better team performance (Al-Haidan et. al., 2022)(Bavik et. al., 2020).

Existing literature provided compelling arguments both for and against remote-working, however, this study found an overall improvement in the work-life balance of employees in the Republic of Ireland whilst remote-working during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a significant demand for this way of working going forward. Whilst employee satisfaction scores did not differ statistically significantly as a result of this, certain practices within organisations such as the maintenance of workplace relationships highlighted above, can continue to maintain employee satisfaction in the remote-working world. The effect of remote-working on work-life balance can continue to be leveraged for more productive and efficient employees (Bloom et. al, 2015), by offering a hybrid working model.

Implications of Findings

As outlined in Chapter 7, the move to a remote working environment can provide opportunity for a number of cost-saving measures such as the major advantage of potentially downsizing existing office spaces. However, there are also a number of costs associated with the move to remote working, whether it's a fully remote-model or a hybrid model, outlined below.

1. Cost of setting up a home-office – employers will need to consider the cost of setting up a home office environment for workers as highlighted by Mudditt (2020), who found that the lack of suitable office equipment was a major disadvantage for remote workers.

   The associated costs may include the provision of a monitor, keyboard, mouse, office desk and chair as well as potential miscellaneous items that may be required depending on the nature of the role itself. The total cost of setting up a home-office can vary from €400-€700 (August, 2022). To reduce the burden on HR teams of sourcing and delivering office equipment, organisations can instead provide a stipend of a fixed amount to new employees, to cover these costs or allow

employees to purchase the items required and then reimburse. If the latter option is chosen, consideration should be given to implementing an expense policy relating to setting up a home-office, to ensure that new employees are given a guideline as to reimbursable amounts per item to avoid misuse.

2. Training – managers will require upskilling on management skills in a remote-working environment to ensure adequate support is provided to employees (Werner, 2001). This training can be provided in-house or by consulting houses specialising in workplace trainings such as *Deloitte, PwC* or *EY*. The costs of these trainings can vary depending on the level of training required and the chosen provider.

3. Business Communication Platforms – as this study found considerable evidence of the benefits of the 'ease of communication' within the remote-working environment, the use of business communication platforms is highly recommended. The costs of leveraging this technology can vary depending on the platform chosen. For example, the costs of using *Microsoft Teams for Business* ranges from €3.40-€10.50 per month per user (Microsoft, August 2022). The total cost for the organisation will depend on the organisation's size and subscription option chosen.

The financial implications outlined above intend to be a guideline, based on the findings of this study, for HR professionals to consider whilst implementing the move to fully remote or hybrid work environments.

Personal Learning Statement

I found this research paper to be a deeply enriching educational experience. I learned unsurmountable knowledge about remote working and its associated advantages and disadvantages as explored by researchers in this subject area. I had the opportunity to explore its effect on employee satisfaction and on work-life balance. In addition to these primary themes, I also gained an insight of several peripheral issues that can be affected by remote working which I did not initially consider such as its impact on workplace relationships, employee retention as well as the future demand for remote working in the current workforce.

As I also had my own personal experience of remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic, analysing the data obtained from 150 participants gave me a new perspective on the new working environment that has resulted from the pandemic. I was not only challenged on my own unconscious biases in relation to remote working but also expanded my horizons on the different factors that affect employee satisfaction and how they can often be dependent on one's own personal situation.

Personally, I found the use of SPSS software and the process of analysing the data to be the most challenging part of this paper, but also the most rewarding. Prior to undertaking this research, I had never engaged with this software before and although I work within the field of Human Resource Information Systems, I had, until now, never been tasked with sorting through data and deriving results. As a result of this, I've gained a valuable new skill that was not only beneficial for this paper but it is an invaluable skill I can bring into my professional career within HR.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire – Google Forms

Introduction

My name is Maria and I'm currently completing my Masters in Human Resource Management in NCI. My research topic is on the effects of remote working on the employee satisfaction and work-life balance of employees within the Republic of Ireland. This questionnaire is designed to gather data on this topic for my dissertation.

The questionnaire is split into 2 sections.

The 1st section will measure the work-life balance and employee satisfaction BEFORE the introduction of remote-working measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 i.e pre-March 2020.

The 2nd section will measure work-life balance and employee satisfaction DURING the remote-working measures applied for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data gathered will be anonymous and confidential and will be used solely for the purpose of this dissertation. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at x20154348@student.ncirl.ie

The questionnaire should take approximately 5 minutes.

Thank you so much in advance

Consent

By ticking this box you agree that you are at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this questionnaire. If you do not wish to continue, you may exit this survey or close your browser.

Introduction

Do you ordinarily reside in the Republic of Ireland?

Yes/No

Do you have 6 months or more of work experience?

Yes/No

Are you self-employed?

Yes/No

Which sector are you employed within?

Public

Private

Please choose which of the industries below applies most to your job

Technology

Finance

Education

Consulting/Professional Services

Healthcare

Retail

Insurance

Pharmacy/Biotech

Other

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

What is your age?

Did you work remotely for 3 months or more during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes/No

Do you have any child(ren)?

Yes/No

What is your religion?

Islam

Judaism

Christianity

Hinduism

None

Other

Your experience BEFORE the introduction of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19
Please answer the following questions relating to your experience BEFORE the
introductions of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 i.e before March 2020

Before the pandemic restrictions, how much time daily did you spend commuting to and from work?

Under 1 hour
1-2 hours
2-3 hours
3+ hours
Other

The following 4 statements measure work-life balance BEFORE the introduction of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Please evaluate each statement below recalling how you felt before the introduction of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 i.e before March 2020.

(The below questions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale)

BEFORE the pandemic work-from-home restrictions (pre-COVID), I had a good balance between the time I spent at work and the time I had available for non-work activities
BEFORE the pandemic work-from-home restrictions (pre-COVID), I had difficulty balancing my work and non-work activities
BEFORE the pandemic work-from-home restrictions (pre-COVID), I felt that the balance between my work demands and non-work activities was about right
BEFORE the pandemic work-from-home restrictions (pre-COVID), overall, I believed that my work and non-work life were balanced

The following 8 statements measure employee satisfaction BEFORE the introduction of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Please evaluate each statement below recalling how you felt before the introduction of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 i.e before March 2020.

(The below questions were measured on a 7-point Likert scale)

BEFORE the pandemic work-from-home restrictions (pre-COVID), my job was enjoyable
BEFORE the pandemic work-from-home restrictions (pre-COVID), I felt a sense of pride in doing my job
BEFORE the pandemic work-from-home restrictions (pre-COVID), my supervisor was quite competent in doing their job
BEFORE the pandemic work-from-home restrictions (pre-COVID), my supervisor showed little interest in the feelings of subordinates
BEFORE the pandemic work-from-home restrictions (pre-COVID), I felt I was being paid a fair amount for the work I did
BEFORE the pandemic work-from-home restrictions (pre-COVID), I felt satisfied with my chances for salary increases
BEFORE the pandemic work-from-home restrictions (pre-COVID), I felt appreciated by the organisation when I thought about what they pay me
BEFORE the pandemic work-from-home restrictions (pre-COVID), in general, I liked working with my co-workers
Did you have a suitable space in your home for work?

Did you find it easy to "switch off work mode" at the end of your working day?
Did you miss the socialising aspect of being in an in-person setting, whilst working remotely?
Overall, was it easy to reach your team leader(s) whilst working remotely?
Overall, was it easy to reach your peers whilst working remotely?

Your experience working remotely DURING the COVID-19 pandemic
Please answer the following questions relating to working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic i.e after March 2020
Did you have a suitable space in your home for work?
Yes/No
Did you find it easy to "switch off work mode" at the end of your working day?
Yes/No
Did you miss the socialising aspect of being in an in-person setting, whilst working remotely?
Yes/No
Overall, was it easy to reach your team leader(s) whilst working remotely?
Yes/No
Overall, was it easy to reach your peers whilst working remotely?
Yes/No

The following 4 statements measure work-life balance whilst remote working DURING the COVID-19 pandemic. Please evaluate each statement below recalling how you felt remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic

(The below questions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale)

DURING the pandemic work-from-home restrictions, I had a good balance between the time I spent at work and the time I had available for non-work activities
DURING the pandemic work-from-home restrictions, I had difficulty balancing my work and non-work activities
DURING the pandemic work-from-home restrictions, I felt that the balance between my work demands and non-work activities was about right
DURING the pandemic work-from-home restrictions, overall, I believed that my work and non-work life were balanced

The following 8 statements measure employee satisfaction whilst remote working DURING the COVID-19 pandemic. Please evaluate each statement below recalling how you felt remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic

(The below questions were measured on a 7-point Likert scale)

DURING the pandemic work-from-home restrictions, my job was enjoyable
DURING the pandemic work-from-home restrictions, I felt a sense of pride in doing my job
DURING the pandemic work-from-home restrictions, my supervisor was quite competent in doing their job
DURING the pandemic work-from-home restrictions, my supervisor showed little interest in the feelings of subordinates

DURING the pandemic work-from-home restrictions, I felt I was being paid a fair amount for the work I did

DURING the pandemic work-from-home restrictions, I felt satisfied with my chances for salary increases

DURING the pandemic work-from-home restrictions, I felt appreciated by the organisation when I thought about what they pay me

DURING the pandemic work-from-home restrictions, in general, I liked working with my co-workers

Do you feel your work-life balance has improved by working remotely?
Yes/No

Do you feel more satisfied with your job whilst working remotely?
Yes/No

Would you prefer to work remotely or in-person post COVID-19?
Yes, I would like to continue working fully remote
No, I prefer to be in my place of work e.g office
Both, I would prefer a hybrid working model

Appendix 2 – Dependent t-test on work-life balance before and during remote-work

Paired Samples Test

| | | Paired Differences | | | | | | | Significance | |
| | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | | |
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1 Total Work Life Balance (Before) – Total Work Life Balance (After)	-3.627	6.576	.537	-4.688	-2.566	-6.755	149	<.001	<.001

Appendix 3 - Dependent t-test on employee satisfaction before and during remote-work

Paired Samples Test

| | | Paired Differences | | | | | | | Significance | |
| | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | | |
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair Total Employee Satisfaction (Before) – Total Employee Satisfaction (After)	.433	10.416	.850	-1.247	2.114	.510	149	.306	.611

Appendix 4 – Do you feel your work-life balance has improved by working remotely?

Do you feel your work-life balance has improved by working remotely?

N = 150

20%

80%

■ No ■ Yes
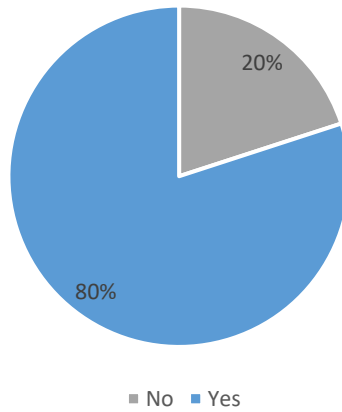
Appendix 5 – Would you like to continue working remotely?

Would you like to continue working remotely?

4.7%

30.7%

64.7%

■ Yes, I would like to continue working remote

■ Both, I would prefer a hybrid model

■ No, I would prefer to be in my place of work e.g office