

**Are there generational differences in Employee  
Engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic and the  
ensuing blended working environment in the Irish Civil  
Service as assessed through communication and job  
satisfaction?**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

Employee engagement (EE) is associated with an employee's level of commitment to their organisation, and a drive to help the organisation succeed. The Working From Home (WFH) environment, the new norm since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, has impacted organisations EE practices and in turn has impacted employees job satisfaction and effective communication within organisations. Currently there are four different generations working together in the majority of organisations. The aim of the current research was to investigate potential generational differences in relation to EE, with a specific focus on job satisfaction, communication and managerial roles in the current blended working environment which has arisen in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Irish Civil Service (ICS). This research was conducted through an online survey which was distributed to members of the ICS. Differences between the generations became apparent when job satisfaction, communication and managerial roles were assessed. Generation Z reported a more negative impact of WFH in relation to job satisfaction and communication than Generations X or Y. Baby Boomers reported a negative impact of WFH on their ability to perform their managerial role effectively, which was not reported by Generations X or Y. These findings suggest that there are generational differences across a number of areas of EE in the ICS which are apparent in the blended working environment. It is therefore proposed that this research should be used in order to create a more effective blended working policy which will enhance EE for the ICS.

# Declaration

## Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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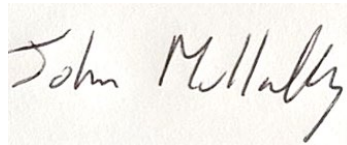
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## List of Abbreviations

DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
EE	Employee Engagement
Gen	Generation
ICS	Irish Civil Service
WFH	Work/Working From Home
WHO	World Health Organisation

# **Chapter 1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

The aim of this research is to investigate the impact of this novel blended working approach on EE in the ICS. More specifically, the impact of blended working will be explored through the examination of job satisfaction, communication and managerial ability to perform effectively. The ICS, through the delivery of public services to the citizens of Ireland, serves the State and the people of Ireland, making it an integral component of the Republic of Ireland. Therefore, it is important that the impacts of this new working environment on its employees are explored. Due to the existence of four distinct generations in the workforce it was deemed important that any difference between the generations and their response to the blended working environment also be explored in terms of EE.

## **1.2 COVID-19**

In 2020 the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 to be a global health emergency and characterized it as a pandemic (World Health Organisation, 2020). Following this announcement many countries across the world, including the Republic of Ireland, went into various forms of lockdowns, leading to a mandatory WFH environment in most organisations, including the ICS. As most countries have now removed mandatory lockdowns employers are facing a new working environment. Recent research has found that there are some employees who wish to return to the office, while other employees would prefer to continue WFH (Appel-Meulenbroek *et al.*, 2022). This finding is echoed across many different organisations and has led to the development of blended working, in which a mix of on-site and WFH is adopted by organisations. As this is a relatively new approach to the work environment it is important that research is carried out in order to assess the impact of the current policies which may be in place, and to identify where there may be challenges and areas for improvement.

## **1.3 Irish Civil Service**

The ICS is made up of 40,000 staff members across multiple departments within the State. The role of the ICS is to provide support for the Government by policy implementation, it assists the State by preparing/drafting new legislation and finally works with the Government in the running of the country according to legislation that was passed in the Oireachtas. The ICS has a Renewal Strategy which intends to modernise it by delivering evidence informed policy and

services, harnessing digital technology and innovation practices and finally, building the ICS to be a workplace of the future (DPER, 2021).

#### **1.4 Employee Engagement**

According to Khundu and Nag, EE measures the employee's level of commitment to and participation in their organisation's goals and objectives (Khundu and Nag, 2021). EE according to Kahn, (cited in Breugh, 2021) is the extensive feeling of being involved in one's labour in an organisation. The definitions highlighted suggest that staff that hold beliefs in their organisation, have a desire to continuously improve in their performance and are engaged in the organisation, can lead to staff exceeding their general competencies in an effort to help the firm achieve their organisational goals.

#### **1.5 Current Generations in the Workforce**

Strauss and Howe (cited in Joshi *et al.* 2010) defined four groups in the workforce, which can be viewed as different generations: Traditionalists, Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y (Millennials). More recently, a fifth cohort, Generation Z, have been added (American Psychological Association, 2018). As Traditionalists have been defined as being born between 1900 and 1945, they are generally aged out of the workforce through retirement (Wiedmer, 2015) and therefore will not be included in this study.

The level of openness in employer-employee communication has been argued to be directly related to employee job satisfaction, with a greater level of openness associated with greater job satisfaction (Jablin and Krone, cited in Mehra and Nickerson, 2019). Job satisfaction has been found to differ across generations, with some studies arguing that job satisfaction declines with successive generations (Beutell and Wittig-Berman, cited in Mehra and Nickerson, 2019). Furthermore, Mehra and Nickerson argue that organisational communication is positively related to job satisfaction, and that the category of generation modulates the relationship between these two factors (Mehra and Nickerson, 2019).

#### **1.6 The Current Study**

A quantitative questionnaire was designed in order to investigate the hypotheses outlined in Chapter 2. Data collection obtained 160 responses during the duration of the survey, which began on 17<sup>th</sup> of May and finished on 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2022. Current Irish Civil Servants across several Departments within the Republic of Ireland were invited via email to take part in the

research. Networks such as the Administrative Officers Network were utilised in order to encourage participation and increase the number of Civil Servants reached with the invitation. Due to the Blended Working environment which currently exists as a result of COVID-19, there is the need for further research into EE during this time. Furthermore, due to the number of different generations working together in this new environment, it is proposed that it is of utmost importance that any effects this environment may have on communication between the different working groups and any ramifications this may have on job satisfaction require investigation. Additionally, manager support was also explored as it has been shown that leadership plays a role in positive EE. The current proposal aims to assess the impact of WFH on EE, and any generational differences which may arise in the ICS. Through the use of questionnaires distributed to members of the ICS, it is the goal of this research to investigate this. This research may inform continuous improvement objectives within communication strategies, which may need to be tailored to the different working groups within the ICS.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected EE in most organisations due to the nature of WFH whereby staff can feel isolated and disengaged (De-la-Calle-Durán and Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2021). As the pandemic gained momentum in early 2020, most organisations including the ICS had to enforce mandatory remote working to protect the health and safety of its workforce (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2020). Engagement involves physiological as well as physical presence in performing an organisational role (Kahn, 1990) and therefore this move to a remote working environment may have a negative impact on engagement, as the physical presence component was removed. Furthermore, EE activities from a Human Resource (HR) perspective are intended to be proactive in improving communications between organisation and staff (Matthews, 2013), which may become more challenging in a remote working environment. Chaudhury *et al.* put forward that regular communication between employees and leaders is important for employees to receive proper support (Chaudhury *et al.*, 2021) and it is therefore proposed that communication in the new WFH paradigm needs to be further explored.

The Civil Service Employee Engagement Surveys of 2015, 2017 and 2020 were developed to gather insight into how staff feel about working in the ICS in areas such as EE, coping with change, wellbeing and commitment to the ICS. The surveys have garnered increases in participation rates with 65% of the ICS taking part in the 2020 iteration. The findings have been mainly positive in terms of EE, however there are challenges such as organisation cultural differences in different departments, promotion opportunities and how performance is managed. Communication is a key theme here for management and employees and this will be further expanded below with references to empirical research findings.

Blended Working in the ICS will place the emphasis on individual departments to initiate their own internal policies using a generic framework put forward from the ICS Policy Division in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. This means that the results of the questionnaire presented in this dissertation may include participants whose Departments are at different stages of implementing the Blended Working policy. However Blended Working is becoming a new working concept in the current working climate and to remain competitive with the private sector the ICS must adapt to this new working environment.

## **2.2 Models of Employee Engagement**

In recent times, there has been many attempts to develop models of EE which can be utilised during the current global pandemic of COVID-19 as older models were focused on the more ‘traditional’ working environment, that of the office. These models include the V5 model (Kumar, 2021), the 5 C model (De-la-Calle-Durán and Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2021), and the GREAT model of motivation (Mani and Mishra, 2020). These models have been proposed in order to account for the changing work environment which has arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***2.2.1 V5 Model***

The V5 model from Kumar (2021) focuses on value, voice, variety, virtue and vision to enhance EE during difficult times. This model was developed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the goal of equipping human resource managers with the tools they need to increase EE both during and after the pandemic lockdowns. It is proposed that this model is demanding in terms of focus and attention required for HR managers, managers and professionals when it is being implemented, however it has the benefit of requiring little to no monetary investment (Kundu and Nag, 2021).

### ***2.2.2 5 C Model***

In contrast to the above model, De-la-Calle-Durán and Rodríguez-Sánchez (2021) propose the 5 C model which was introduced to counter balance the disruption of engagement activities by the pandemic. It is utilised to establish metrics of well-being measurements in staff. While this model was proposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is argued to be applicable to the pre-pandemic style of working environment as well. The model consists of the following headings, that of conciliation, cultivation, confidence, compensation and communication:

### ***2.2.3 GREAT model of motivation***

Finally, the GREAT model of motivation, by Mani and Mishra (2020) identifies non-monetary variance as a means of gaining engagement from staff. The GREAT acronym consists of growth, renewal, enabling, aspirational and transparency. The GREAT model assists with providing HR practitioners with a vision of what incentives can be rolled out to further motivation in staff and promote EE via non-monetary means. It should be noted that not all five areas apply to all types of employees. Pulse surveys assist here as a means of a ‘dipstick’ to determine what areas need to be prioritised at a particular time in the organisation, to ensure



best return on investment from the workforce in terms of motivation and EE. All of these measurements can be used as standalone or combined to enhance staff motivation and engagement. It is proposed that this model can be used by HR practitioners to evaluate their EE programmes in a cost-effective manner.

#### ***2.2.4 Utility of the models***

The above models have been proposed in order to enhance EE during and post COVID-19. While they have been proposed by three separate research groups, it can be seen that they are quite similar in terms of their recommendations for enhancing EE. Perhaps the most common thread seen in these models is communication, which is encouraged through feedback which is two-way in nature. This is further supported by empirical research which showed a relationship between internal communication, EE and employees' openness to change, which is important given the current changing work environment (Nienaber and Martins, 2020; Verčič, 2021; Zainab, Akbar and Siddiqui, 2022). Differences in modes of communication and communication styles will have arisen as a result of the new blended working environments and it is crucial that the effectiveness of this communication is assessed as it is seen as a key element of EE in the three discussed models.

Job satisfaction is another key marker of EE, and it is associated with a number of different variables, including inclusion culture and positive leadership (Im, 2022). The three models discussed above all allude to workplace culture and positive leadership through encouraged feedback from employees to management. Positive organisational cultures have been found to directly impact upon employee performance, and that this is mediated through EE (Abdullahi, Raman and Solarin, 2021). Research into the impact of positive and engaging leadership has found that items such as performance feedback, inclusion in decision making, and trust in management led to enhanced team effectiveness and engagement (Mazzetti and Schaufeli, 2022). Following a change, such as the move to blended working, job satisfaction of employees may be impacted. It is proposed that through the application of some of the action items proposed in the above models any impact this blended working environment has on job satisfaction may be effectively managed in order to promote positive EE.

These models are limited in that they are relatively new, which means that there is a lack of research which applies these models to the current working environment. Furthermore, the working environment which currently exists is very fluid, with blended working policies being adapted for many organisations and therefore it is possible that these models will need to be

adapted further to be applicable to this dynamic workplace situation. Finally, these models appear to be tailored more towards private sector employers as opposed to public sector employers, which may limit their generalisability to public sector employers such as the ICS.

### **2.3 Change Management: Generational Differences**

Change is of utmost importance, it is an objective process that cannot be ignored (Năstase, Giulclea and Bold, 2012). The management of change has to be addressed and strategy must be implemented to maximise success. Generational differences are one such example of change, and can be defined as traditions and cultures that are shared by a group of people, which are lifelong (Arsenault, 2003). Arsenault (2003) argues that generational differences can lead to genuine diversity issues which will have implications for developing future leaders in organisations.

Society is now entering a new generational workforce, one deemed ‘Gen Z’, short for Generation Z. These are people who were born from 1996 onwards and their importance in the wider scheme of work is pivotal as this generation will become future leaders and set the standard of work that is expected in their respective societies (Panwar and Mehta, 2019). Generational differences in the workplace are common yet organisations are now tasked with managing a young workforce of Generation Z, that they feel unable to understand, and the academic management literature has largely overlooked their call for help so far (Magni and Manzoni, 2020). It is therefore important that research focuses on this group in order to allow for smooth integration into the workforce. For example, a recent study performed in 2021 showed that Generation Z workforce crave autonomy, work-life balance and transformational leadership highly and when these areas are fostered it leads to an increased EE ethic (Lee *et al.*, 2021). This is in contrast to the Baby Boomer generation who have been described as ‘living to work’ (Lapoint and Liprie-Spence, 2017).

Moore and Krause (2021) investigated the impact of generational differences on a number of different aspects. Interestingly, this research found that working with colleagues from a number of different generations led to the development of negative perceptions. More specifically, Generation X employees reported significantly higher perceived age discrimination, and this was also reflected in Generation Y responses, in which they reported significantly higher perceived age discrimination, as well as lower levels of job satisfaction and higher levels of intention to quit. When this is considered in the WFH environment, it is unclear whether this would be exacerbated or decreased due to the lack of face-to-face communication. While not

considering generational differences, previous research investigating team virtuality (teams which communicated virtually) found that teams which communicated through a virtual means the majority of the time had more positive perceived team performance following task conflict than those who communicated through a virtual means less frequently (de Jong, Schalk and Curşeu, 2008). This suggests that the virtual communication between the generations may be more beneficial than harmful, and may alleviate some of the negative perceptions between the generations.

When considering generational differences in the workforce, it is important to consider the impact this may have on management styles and on relationships between managers and their direct reports. As alluded to earlier, positive and engaging leadership leads to enhanced team effectiveness and engagement (Mazzetti and Schaufeli, 2022). It is therefore deemed important that any generational differences which arise between managers is thoroughly examined.

#### **2.4 Management Styles Across the Generations**

The existence of multiple generations in the workforce has ultimately led to a variety of different generations in management positions. Research has been conducted in order to examine differences between the management styles of the different generations. This research has found that younger managers (those from the Generation Y) take a less collaborative approach with stakeholders than older managers (e.g., Generation X and Baby Boomers) (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, younger managers prefer more technical management techniques, and they focus more on self-motivation and self-discipline. There is a paucity of research in this area however, with little academic literature to back up any observed generational differences (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2019) and it is therefore proposed that this is an area which needs further research.

#### **2.5 Workplace Stereotypes**

Research conducted by King and colleagues (2019) found that age related stereotypes exist within the workplace, as well as meta-stereotypes, which are a generation's own views of the stereotypes they believe other generations have of them (Vorauer, Martens and Sasaki, 2009). Meta-stereotypes are an important consideration when assessing generational differences. For example, millennials may believe that Generation X view them as lazy, which may impact upon their communication style with Generation X colleagues. Interestingly, it was found that peoples stereotypes of older co-workers were generally positive, and included terms such as hardworking and responsible, while older co-workers generally viewed their meta-stereotypes

as boring and grumpy. In contrast, middle age workers had both positive stereotypes and meta-stereotypes, while the younger co-workers had less positive stereotypes and meta-stereotypes. A study conducted in 2020 found that people can react with a sense of challenge or threat when confronted with meta-stereotypes that they believe colleagues from other generations have about them. This can lead to conflict between the generations at work, or avoidance behaviours, both of which can negatively impact communication and efficiency at work (Finkelstein *et al.*, 2020). This is therefore a crucial consideration when assessing the impact of generational differences in the workplace, as both stereotypes and meta-stereotypes may have a negative impact on EE and job satisfaction.

## **2.6 Communication**

As WFH has changed the working environment for the foreseeable future, communication between colleagues has been greatly impacted. According to De-la-Calle-Durán and Rodríguez-Sánchez (2021) and their 5 C model, communication including personal interactions between co-workers and management is essential for positive EE. Mehra and Nickerson (2019) conducted a study investigating generational differences in job satisfaction and organisational communication. This research found that organisational communication was positively related to job satisfaction, and that the category of generation modulated the relationship between these two factors. Generation Y employees who were in a managerial role reported the highest level of job dissatisfaction, and they rely heavily on avoidance when communicating with older adults. This study concluded that through the development of a positive communication strategy, job satisfaction may be enhanced, while cautioning that the way in which a positive communication strategy is defined may differ greatly between generations. This is a key consideration when assessing the impact of blended working on communication between the generations, as the implementation of a positive communication strategy may be seen as a way in which to improve job satisfaction, however if implemented with a ‘one size fits all’ approach it may ultimately be unsuccessful.

King and colleagues (2019) conducted a laboratory experiment in which they advised undergraduate students that they were training different people on the use of a computer-based task. It was found that the quality of the training which the students provided to the trainees varied depending on the age which they were advised the trainee was, with poorer training provided when they believed that the trainee was older. This finding relates directly to the current WFH environment, in that most training and communication has moved online and is more technology focused. If this finding is also true of the working world, it may have

detrimental effects on the communication patterns between different generations, and may have a knock-on effect on the ability of older generations to perform their day-to-day tasks in a remote working environment, due to a lack of communication and training from younger generation colleagues. This may also have an effect on succession planning, as older employees will need to train younger employees, and this may lead to some issues with successful succession planning.

Media Richness Theory is an important theory to consider in the current WFH paradigm. This was first researched in 1984 and 1986, when Daft and Lengel examined how different mediums of communication can change how a message may be understood, with the best medium being that which matches best with a specific situation (Daft and Lengel, 1988). In order to be viewed as a rich communication medium, it must be a medium which can clarify misunderstanding in a short amount of time. Therefore, face-to-face communication mediums are argued to be the richer communication medium when compared with communication which is performed via an electronic medium (Mehra and Nickerson, 2019), and this may have a large impact on communication between colleagues, and between managers and their direct reports in the new WFH/blended working paradigm.

## **2.7 Instrumentation used in studies assessing EE**

There has been much research conducted into assessing EE across multiple organisations. For the purposes of this review, studies which were conducted during the mandatory WFH environment were included. Donovan (2022) assessed EE with a specific focus on reactions to the stay-at-home and ensuing WFH orders. This study was conducted through an online questionnaire, in which the questions consisted of Likert style questions. The analysis conducted was mixed methods, including both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Similarly, research conducted by Boskovic (2021) which investigated employee autonomy and EE in the remote working environment was performed using a questionnaire which consisted of a number of Likert scale questions and assessed using quantitative methods.

As this research is being conducted on a sample of participants from the ICS, previous EE questionnaires which were performed by the ICS were also assessed. The Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (2015, 2017 and 2020) consisted of some demographic questions and a number of Likert scale style questions assessing EE. Due to the consistency between the literature reviewed and the previous EE questionnaires administered in the ICS, a

questionnaire which could be taken online was deemed the most appropriate for data collection for this research.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

As outlined above, there is a need to investigate the impact that the WFH environment has had on a number of key indicators of EE. For the purpose of this study, it is deemed that communication and job satisfaction are two key elements of EE, and as assessed through the literature, these areas may be impacted through the changing communication mediums enforced upon the workforce during and post COVID-19 restrictions. Managerial aspects will be analysed for the purposes of finding similarities between the multiple generations but also possible differences that may exist. This research aims to examine this through the lens of the ICS. Furthermore, new models of EE have been developed in order to adapt to the new WFH environment, suggesting that there has been a shift in EE which needs further investigation. Finally, as there is a new generation of workers entering the workforce, that of Generation Z, it is important that the needs of this generation are assessed as the research outlined above indicates assimilation difficulties between different generations thus far.

## **Chapter 3. Research Question**

### **3.1 Objectives**

The objective of this research is to investigate the impact of WFH and blended working on EE across generations within the ICS, with a specific focus on communication and job satisfaction. More precisely, differences in communication styles across generations will be examined, and any impact which the switch to a less face-to-face interaction paradigm may have had on EE will be explored, with a specific focus on job satisfaction.

### **3.2 Research Question**

*Research question:* Are there generational differences in Employee Engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing blended working environment in the Irish Civil Service as assessed through communication and job satisfaction?

### **3.3 Hypotheses**

From the literature reviewed, the central hypotheses to determine the impact of WFH on EE across generations within the ICS, with a specific focus on communication, job satisfaction and perceived managerial effectiveness are as follows:

*Hypothesis 1:* There will be differences between the generations in terms of EE in the blended working environment.

*Hypothesis 2:* There will be differences between the generations in terms of job satisfaction in the blended working environment.

*Hypothesis 3:* There will a difference between the generations in terms of their satisfaction with communication in the blended working environment.

*Hypothesis 4:* There will be a difference between the generations in terms of their satisfaction with performing management duties in the blended working environment.

## **Chapter 4. Methodology**

Methodology refers to the strategy and rationale used in research projects. This aids in answering questions which are central to the topic being investigated. The methodology chosen for this research project was identified following a review of the literature and reports such as the Irish Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey 2020. This chapter outlines the research methods chosen, and the justification for choosing these methods over other available research methods.

### **4.1 Research Focus**

The focus of this research project was to investigate the impact of the newly adopted blended working environment on EE in the ICS. More specifically, this research aimed to explore any differences in EE which may arise across the following generations: Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y (Millennials), and Gen Z. This was explored through a focus on the areas of job satisfaction, communication, and managerial relationships, which are key indications of EE (Reissová and Papay, 2021; Tkalac Verčič, 2021; Johnson, 2020).

### **4.2 Research Methodology**

The research philosophy utilised for this research project was positivism. Positivism according to Ponterotto, (2005) is the method by which to verify hypotheses that are stated to be quantified and where functional relationships can be derived between explanatory and casual factors (independent variables) and outcomes (dependent variables). This study aimed to utilise quantitative research methods in order to investigate the relationship between generational differences and the impact that WFH has had on these generations in relation to EE. Positivism was chosen as, based on the results obtained, the proposed hypotheses was either accepted or rejected.

This study utilised questionnaires as the method of data collection, which was a quantitative approach to research. Other studies such as De-la-Calle-Durán and Rodríguez-Sánchez (2021), Lee *et al.*, (2021) and Conway *et al.*, (2015) have also used quantitative analysis in their approach into EE. A quantitative approach was chosen for this research due to the ability to reach a large sample of Civil Servants remotely through online questionnaires. Qualitative research methods were considered however, this method is generally tailored to a smaller sample size. Mixed Method research methods were also considered, however due to time constraints it was not feasible for this research project.



This research collected primary data and was cross-sectional research. A cross-sectional design allowed for large amounts of data to be obtained in a relatively quick manner, as well as providing the ability to investigate a number of variables of interest at the same time. However, this design was limited in that it did not allow causation to be established, however for the purposes of this research it was deemed the most appropriate design.

### **4.3 Sample Size Calculation**

A power analysis was used to determine the sample size required to gain results representative of the target population of the ICS. There are 40,000 Irish Civil Servants currently according to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Renewal (2022). With a confidence level of 95% and a 5% margin of error the power analysis ideal figure was 370 responses. The final response rate for the survey was 160 respondents. While this was below the ideal sample size identified for this research due to time constraints it was beyond the scope of the data collection to obtain the ideal sample size.

## **Sample size calculator**

Confidence Level:

95% ▼

Population Size:

40000

Margin of Error:

5% ▼

Ideal Sample Size:

381

**Figure 4.1:** Ideal sample size, calculated using the sample size calculator (Qualtrics, 2022).

#### **4.4 Data Collection**

Data collection obtained 160 responses during the duration of the survey, which began on 17<sup>th</sup> of May and finished on 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2022. This is a sample of employees from the population of Irish Civil Servants. As the COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to evolve, it was deemed important that this research be conducted in order to develop a greater understanding of the impact of the pandemic on employees in the ICS. Furthermore, due to the move to adopting a blended working environment approach in the ICS this research will better inform policies and practices surrounding this working environment.

Quantitative research allowed for the collection of numerical data which could be statistically analysed (Astroth and Chung, 2018). This was beneficial as differences between groups could be identified, as well as any relationships between data points. This questionnaire consisted of 38 questions, which included demographic questions and specific questions relating to WFH, which had different answer choice options, as well as answers which were on the Likert Scale where appropriate. The questionnaire was administered through an online securely encrypted platform to ensure ethics and data protection were adhered to. Participants were invited to partake in this research through departmental communication updates. Full information was provided to potential participants in relation to informed consent including the purpose of the research. The questionnaire which was utilised was based on the ICS EE survey 2020 and the ICS EE Survey - COVID-19 Remote Working, with adaptations made to make the survey relevant to the research question under investigation. The questions used were not all exact copies of the questions from the ICS EE survey 2020, as that questionnaire was tailored mainly to the pre-pandemic working environment conditions. For the purposes of this study, the questions were edited to include WFH/blended working environment conditions. This decision was made as the ICS EE survey 2020 was assessing EE, which was the aim of the current study, however in order to make it clear to participants that this current study was in relation to WFH/blended working, these phrases were added to the questionnaire where appropriate. Questions were also included from the ICS EE Survey – COVID-19 Remote Working, where applicable.

The questionnaire – “Are there generational differences in Employee Engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing blended working environment in the Irish Civil Service as assessed through communication and job satisfaction?”

The questionnaire consisted of six sections, with a variety of multiple choice questions and Likert Scale based questions. The sections within the questionnaire were as follows:

1. Informed Consent
2. Demographics
3. Blended Working
4. Job Satisfaction
5. Communication
6. Manager Specific Questions

The aim of section 1 was to introduce the research to the participants, provide information on the purpose of the research and the contact details of the researcher, explain how the data would be collected and stored, and obtaining informed consent from the participants. This section required the participants to consent in order to continue in the questionnaire.

The focus of section 2 was to gather demographic information on the participants, including generation, gender, working location, working environment, grade in the ICS, years of service, reason for WFH, living and family situation and educational achievement.

Section 3 explored the participants WFH experience pre-pandemic, during the pandemic, and post-pandemic. This section also investigated the participants views of the organisations efforts to encourage EE during the pandemic, and post-pandemic, as well as the impact of WFH/blended working on social isolation and loneliness.

Job satisfaction was examined in section 4, with a specific focus on individual performance of work tasks, work-life balance, and advantages and challenges of WFH.

The objective of section 5 was to identify any impacts of WFH/blended working on communication, both with team members and managers. Furthermore, differences between the perceived impacts of WFH on communication were assessed for both the start of the WFH environment at the beginning of the pandemic, and the subsequent blended working environment post-pandemic.

Section 6 was specific to managers, and aimed to explore the impact of WFH/blended working on their ability to manage their direct reports, as well as investigating their perceptions of how their teams performed in the remote working environment.

#### **4.5 Development of Questionnaire**

A literature review was performed prior to the formulation of the research question. Academic journals were consulted, as well as Government reports and existing research conducted through questionnaires by both academics and Government bodies.

It was found that the current literature was limited in the data in relation to the impact of WFH and blended working on EE in the Irish Civil Service. This research aimed to fill these gaps, and explore the impact of WFH/blended working on EE, assessed through communication and job satisfaction. Furthermore, the impacts of this on managers was assessed.

Reliability is very important for questionnaires and it is the aim of this research to use a questionnaire which has high reliability where possible, therefore a pilot study was conducted to assess the scales used. This pilot study consisted of 10 respondents, whose responses were assessed through Cronbach’s alpha for reliability. All scales assessed had acceptable reliability, as illustrated in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1:** Cronbach’s alpha of scale questions assessed through a pilot study.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Cronbach’s alpha</b>
<b>Question 20 - EE</b>	0.895
<b>Question 27 – Job Satisfaction</b>	0.914
<b>Question 33 - Communication</b>	0.673
<b>Question 38 – Mangers Perceived Ability</b>	0.970

#### **4.6 Limitations**

This research was limited in that only quantitative research was performed. While this research method was chosen as it allows for statistical analysis of the data, it is limited in that comments from individual participants were not obtained. Through a Mixed Methods approach more information could have been obtained in relation to why specific answers were provided, however, due to time constraints, it was beyond the scope of this research project. Furthermore, due to the continuing health concerns for vulnerable populations it was not deemed appropriate to conduct face-to-face interviews. Virtual interviews were considered, however due to the rise in “Zoom fatigue” (Döring *et al.*, 2022) this approach was not pursued.

#### **4.7 Ethical Considerations**

When collecting data from human participants it is important that the participants are fully informed about the purpose of the research. Furthermore, the nature and duration of the research, as well as the potential benefits and risks to participating in the research must be outlined to the participants. Finally, participants must be made aware of their rights in relation to the data collected. A detailed informed consent form, which outlined all of the above was made available to the participants, and participants who did not feel they were fully informed, or did not wish to complete the questionnaire were made aware of their right to withdraw at any time.

This research questionnaire did not collect any personally identifiable data such as IP address or email address. Personal information was not collected and therefore was not reported during the analysis. All participants were adults currently employed in the ICS. All potential harm was evaluated before the questionnaire was released to participants, and the researchers’ contact details were provided to allow participants to raise any concerns in relation to the questionnaire. The data were stored by the researcher in a password protected file and will be kept, as per NCI policy, for a period of five years before being destroyed.

#### **4.8 Statistical Analysis**

The data collected was mainly categorical and ordinal. Examples of categorical data include sex and generational group, while examples of ordinal data include education level and satisfaction rating.

Data collected were recoded into numerical values before statistical analysis was performed, as outlined below.

**Table 4.2:** Codes used to recode the data for analysis in SPSS.

Code	Response	Response	Response	Response	Response
1	Strongly Disagree	All of the Time	Extremely Dissatisfied	Large Negative Impact	Pessimistic
2	Disagree	Some of the Time	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Small Negative Impact	Unsure
3	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	No Impact	Optimistic
4	Agree	Not Often	Somewhat Satisfied	Small Positive Impact	
5	Strongly Agree	Never	Extremely Satisfied	Large Positive Impact	

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. Descriptive analysis such as measures of central tendency and measures of dispersion were used where appropriate, which included calculating the mode for responses on the Likert Scale type questions. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to assess if the data sets were normally distributed. This test was used instead of the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality as there are greater than 50 responses. The data did not follow a normal distribution and therefore a Kruskal-Wallis test was performed when comparing the generations. Where significant effects were found using the Kruskal-Wallis test post-hoc comparisons were made using the Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test. This test was performed with the Bonferroni adjustment. These tests were utilised for inferential statistical analysis in order to test the hypotheses formulated prior to the commencement of research.

#### **4.9 Value of the research**

Due to the change to work practices as a direct result of the WFH environment which was adopted during the COVID19 pandemic, the remote working/blended working approach has gained traction in many sectors of employment (Boskovic, 2021). In order to remain as a competitive employer, it is important that the ICS examines the feasibility of a blended working policy, and it is of the opinion that the research conducted in this project would help to make

an informed decision for the best course of action to adopt when implementing a blended working policy. Through examining the responses of current Civil Servants, the advantages and challenges of blended working can be assessed, which would allow for the development of more informed policy and practices.

## Chapter 5. Analysis and Results

This chapter presents the findings obtained from the online questionnaire, more specifically, the impact of WFH/blended working on EE for Irish Civil Servants. The questionnaire aimed to investigate the impact of WFH/blended working on EE through the assessment of job satisfaction and communication. Furthermore, the impact of this new working environment on managers and their perceived abilities to perform their role was examined. Finally, generational differences were explored, in order to identify if there were different responses to the new working environment between the different generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z.

### 5.1. Demographics

160 responses were collected, 98 (61%) were female and 62 (39%) were male. The generation of the participant that responded ranged from Baby Boomer to Generation Z, as illustrated in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1:** Number and percentage of respondents in each of the generational categories.

<b>Generation (Year of birth)</b>	<b>Number and Percentage of Respondents</b>
<b>Baby Boomers (1946-1964)</b>	12 (7.5%)
<b>Generation X (1965-1980)</b>	45 (28.1%)
<b>Generation Y (Millennial) (1981-1996)</b>	92 (57.5%)
<b>Generation Z (1996-2012)</b>	11 (6.9%)



Demographics for all variables can be found in Table 5.2 below.

**Table 5.2:** Demographics of the respondents to the questionnaire.

<b>Demographics</b>							
<b>Grade of Participants</b>							
Secretary General or Equivalent	Assistant Secretary or Equivalent	Principal Officer or Equivalent	Assistant Principal Officer or Equivalent	Administrative Officer of Equivalent	Higher Executive Officer or Equivalent	Executive Officer or Equivalent	Clerical Officer or Equivalent
1%	0%	7%	17%	53%	5%	8%	9%
<b>Working Location</b>							
Dublin	Leinster (Outside of Dublin)			Connacht	Munster	Ulster	
88%	6%			1%	4%	1%	
<b>Reason for Working From Home during Covid-19 Pandemic</b>							
Compulsory in terms of Public Health Guidance/Employer Request				Not a member of the ICS pre Covid-19 pandemic			
89%				11%			
<b>Participants Current Working Environment</b>							
Blended Working (1 to 4 days in the office per week)	Office based (5 days in the office per week)			Full Time Working from Home	Part time Blended Working (1 to 4 days in the office per week)		
84%	3%			9%	4%		
<b>Years of Service in the ICS</b>							
0-5 years		5-10 years		10-20 years		20+ years	
55%		23%		11%		11%	
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>							
Secondary Education	Vocational Training	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Postgraduate Diploma	Master's Degree	Doctorate Degree	Other Qualification Not Listed Above
5%	1%	<1%	22%	12%	51%	4%	4%
<b>Working from Home pre-Covid19</b>							
Never	Never but did have option to		Less than once a month		A few times a month	Once a week	Always
86%	3%		5%		1%	2%	3%
<b>Frequency Working Onsite since Introduction of Blended Working</b>							
0 days a week		1 day per week	2 days per week	3 days per week	4 days per week	5 days per week	
9%		17%	49%	17%	6%	2%	

Due to the interest in generational differences, the different generations and their respective grades are illustrated in Table 5.3.

**Table 5.3:** Breakdown of the generations and their respective grades in the Irish Civil Service.

<b>Generation</b>	<b>Secretary General or Equivalent</b>	<b>Principal Officer or Equivalent</b>	<b>Assistant Principal or Equivalent</b>	<b>Administrative Officer or Equivalent</b>	<b>Higher Executive Officer or Equivalent</b>	<b>Executive Officer or Equivalent</b>	<b>Clerical Officer or Equivalent</b>
<b>Baby Boomer</b>	2	1	3	0	1	4	1
<b>Gen X</b>	0	6	12	15	2	3	7
<b>Gen Y (Millennial)</b>	0	4	13	58	5	5	7
<b>Gen Z</b>	0	0	0	11	0	0	0

### **5.3 Employee Engagement**

**Hypothesis 1:** There will be differences between the generations in terms of EE in the blended working environment.

#### ***5.3.1 Descriptive Statistics – Overall Results***

Employee Engagement was assessed over a number of questions which are illustrated in Table 5.4. With the exception of the feeling of isolation reported in this section of the questionnaire, the responses to the questions assessing EE were positive, with the mode response being either Agree or Strongly Agree. This is in contrast to the findings of Kundu and Nag (2021) who argue that the WFH environment has led to a decrease in enthusiasm and engagement for employees. The feeling of isolation reported echoes a recent review in which it is put forward that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected EE in most organisations due to the nature of WFH whereby staff can feel isolated (De-la-Calle-Durán and Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2021).

**Table 5.4:** Employee Engagement questions and responses.

<b>Did you feel your Department was effective in engagement with you during the COVID-19 pandemic when remote working?</b>				
Strongly Agree 32%	Agree 49%	Neutral 9%	Disagree 9%	Strongly Disagree 1%
<b>Do you feel after two years in the pandemic that your Department has improved upon its engagement practices in terms of employee engagement?</b>				
Strongly Agree 16%	Agree 33%	Neutral 30%	Disagree 16%	Strongly Disagree 5%
<b>During the early stages of the pandemic, did you feel technologically able to complete tasks in a remote environment?</b>				
Strongly Agree 36%	Agree 48%	Neutral 9%	Disagree 6%	Strongly Disagree 2%
<b>Did you feel isolated from colleagues while remote working?</b>				
All of the Time 11%	Some of the Time 62%	Neutral 7%	Not Often 10%	Never 10%
<b>I perform more effectively at home than compared to normal working arrangements in the workplace/office</b>				
Strongly Agree 32%	Agree 28%	Neutral 28%	Disagree 10%	Strongly Disagree 2%
<b>I have the appropriate equipment and resources required to work effectively from home</b>				
Strongly Agree 47%	Agree 44%	Neutral 4%	Disagree 4%	Strongly Disagree 1%
<b>I receive regular contact from the organisation while working from home</b>				
Strongly Agree 43%	Agree 39%	Neutral 9%	Disagree 7%	Strongly Disagree 2%
<b>My organisation provides training in remote working skills and behaviours</b>				
Strongly Agree 23%	Agree 31%	Neutral 24%	Disagree 18%	Strongly Disagree 4%

### ***5.3.2 Inferential Statistics – Generational Comparisons***

Responses to all the above questions were statistically analysed in order to compare the responses between the 4 different generations. All data were found to be not normally distributed (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test). Analysis using the Kruskal-Wallis H test found no differences between the generation for any of the questions relating to EE. This is interesting as previous research has reported that there are some generational differences observed in relation to EE, however this is not seen across all areas of EE (Lapoint and Liprie-Spence, 2017). Therefore, the hypothesis (1) that there will be differences between the generations in terms of EE in the blended working environment must be rejected and the null hypothesis that there are no differences between the generations in terms of EE in the blended working environment is accepted.

## **5.4 Job Satisfaction**

**Hypothesis 2:** There will be differences between the generations in terms of job satisfaction in the blended working environment.

### ***5.4.1 Descriptive Statistics – Overall Results***

The job satisfaction of respondents was assessed over a number of questions which are illustrated in Table 5.5. These initial responses suggest that the respondents were mainly positive and satisfied with their job in terms of remote working and their ability to perform day to day tasks.

**Table 5.5:** Job Satisfaction question and responses.

<b>Were you satisfied with how you coped remote working in terms of the day to day performance of tasks?</b>				
Extremely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied
57%	34%	1%	6%	2%
<b>Are you satisfied with how you are coping working in a blended working environment?</b>				
Extremely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied
41%	42%	8%	6%	3%
<b>Are you satisfied with how your unit is currently performing with blended working in terms of performance?</b>				
Extremely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied
38%	46%	8%	6%	2%
<b>My work-life balance has positively improved</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
51%	22%	12%	11%	4%
<b>I regularly perform work duties outside of regular working hours</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
19%	24%	20%	27%	10%
<b>I work longer hours at home compared to in the office/workplace</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
24%	31%	14%	22%	9%
<b>When working from home I know when to disconnect from work activities and switch off</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
25%	37%	17%	18%	3%
<b>I often receive work related calls or emails outside of normal working hours</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8%	18%	18%	30%	26%

Respondents were asked to rate the impact of WFH on managing their individual performance and productivity, which is illustrated in Table 5.6. The responses suggest that the majority of participants were positive towards the WFH environment, and did not feel that it impacted upon their individual performance and productivity. Furthermore, the biggest advantage to blended working was found to be saving the regular commuting time, which is in line with previous research showing the negative impact of commuting on employees (Gerpott, Rivkin and Unger, 2022).

**Table 5.6:** Rating the impact of Working From Home on individual performance and productivity.

Please rate the impact of working from home on managing your individual performance and productivity				
On time delivery (meeting schedules, deadlines etc.)				
Large Positive Impact	Small Positive Impact	No Impact	Small Negative Impact	Large Negative Impact
32%	21%	36%	8%	3%
Overall accomplishment of my goals and objectives				
Large Positive Impact	Small Positive Impact	No Impact	Small Negative Impact	Large Negative Impact
25%	30%	29%	12%	4%
Quality of work completed to a high standard				
Large Positive Impact	Small Positive Impact	No Impact	Small Negative Impact	Large Negative Impact
29%	25%	38%	5%	3%

### 5.4.2 Inferential Statistics – Generational Comparisons

#### Difference between the generations: Working outside of working hours.

Assessment of the respondents regularly performing work duties outside of working hours found that the mode response was Disagree (27%). Analysis of the data found that it was not normally distributed ( $D(160) = 0.184$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Kolmogorov-Smirnov test). Comparisons of the 4 different generations and their responses found a difference ( $H(3) = 8.059$ ,  $p = 0.045$ , Kruskal-Wallis H test), however Post Hoc Comparisons found no specific differences between the generations ( $p = 0.097$  Dunn’s post hoc test with Bonferroni adjustment). Therefore, while post hoc comparisons did not find a difference between the generations, a difference was observed when analysed using a Kruskal-Wallis H test, the hypothesis (2) that there will be differences between the generations in terms of job satisfaction in the blended working environment can be accepted. Reviewing the data, it can be seen that Baby Boomers median response was Agree, while Generation Z’s median response was Disagree. This suggests that Baby Boomers work outside of their regular working hours, while Generation Z employees do not. This fits in with the research which argues that Baby Boomers ‘live to work’ (Lapoint and Liprie-Spence, 2017), while Generation Z have been found to place a high priority on work life balance (Human Resource Management International Digest, 2021).

## **5.5 Communication**

### ***5.5.1 Descriptive statistics – Overall Results***

**Hypothesis 3: There will a difference between the generations in terms of their satisfaction with communication in the blended working environment.**

The impact of WFH and blended working on communication was assessed across a number of questions. Communication from managers and the organisation was assessed, the responses to which are illustrated in Table 5.7. The respondents feeling towards blended working when compared to their feelings towards WFH at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic was mainly positive, with the mode response being Optimistic (74%).

**Table 5.7:** Communication from manager and the organisation.

<b>Do you feel your direct line manager communicated with you to a high standard during the compulsory remote working period of the COVID-19 pandemic?</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
55%	30%	4%	9%	2%
<b>Do you feel your direct line manager communicates with you to a high standard during the blended working environment that has arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
47%	34%	11%	6%	2%
<b>I receive ongoing support and communication from line manager(s)</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
46%	38%	10%	5%	1%
<b>I receive regular wellbeing supports from the organisation while working from home</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
24%	39%	21%	13%	3%

Communication with colleagues was also assessed, and the responses are illustrated in Table 5.8. The majority of responses to these questions were either positive or reported no impact on their communication with colleagues in the blended working environment,

**Table 5.8:** Communication with colleagues.

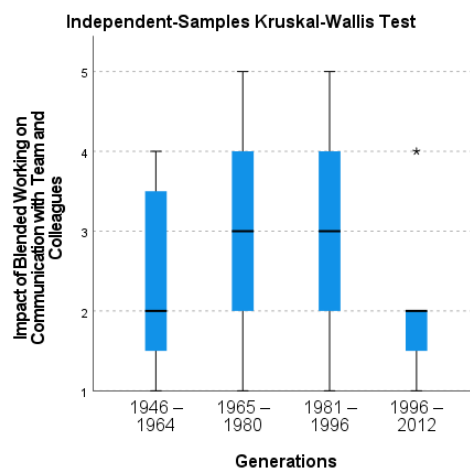
<b>Please rate the impact of blended working on your connection with colleagues and the organisation in relation to the following statements</b>				
<b>Communication with team and colleagues</b>				
Large Positive Impact	Small Positive Impact	No Impact	Small Negative Impact	Large Negative Impact
5%	25%	21%	37%	12%
<b>Team cohesion and teamwork with colleagues</b>				
Large Positive Impact	Small Positive Impact	No Impact	Small Negative Impact	Large Negative Impact
7%	23%	22%	35%	13%
<b>Engagement and commitment to the organisation</b>				
Large Positive Impact	Small Positive Impact	No Impact	Small Negative Impact	Large Negative Impact
11%	19%	43%	17%	10%
<b>To each of the statements below please provide the most appropriate response which best describes how you feel in relation to blended working</b>				
<b>I often feel alienated from my co-workers</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6%	17%	22%	35%	20%
<b>I am satisfied with my work relationships and/or collegial friendships</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
18%	54%	17%	10%	1%
<b>I am comfortable with asking my work colleagues and/or manager for help at any time</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
34%	50%	11%	5%	0%
<b>There is a sense of camaraderie in the workplace and virtual workplace</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
24%	41%	18%	15%	2%
<b>My work relationships and friendships have changed for the worse since the implementation of blended working</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4%	18%	28%	28%	22%
<b>I have social companionship at work, even with the implementation of blended working</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
16%	49%	22%	10%	3%
<b>I miss being around my work colleagues and friends</b>				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12%	30%	36%	12%	10%



### 5.5.2 Inferential Statistics – Generational Comparisons

#### Difference between the generations: Communication with team and colleagues.

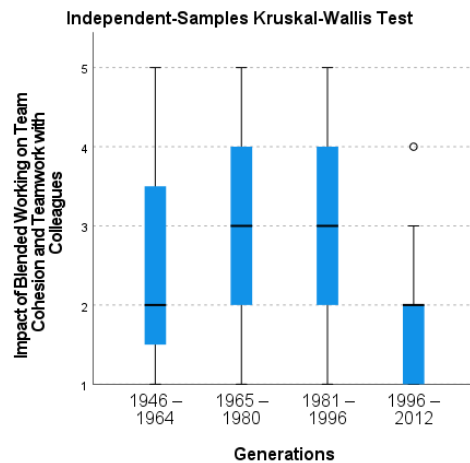
The impact of blended working on communication with team and colleagues was assessed and it was found that the mode response to this was Small Negative Impact (37%). Analysis of the data found that it was not normally distributed ( $D(160) = 0.236$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Kolmogorov-Smirnov test). Comparisons of the 4 different generations found a difference ( $H(3) = 9.751$ ,  $p = 0.021$ , Kruskal-Wallis H test). Post Hoc Comparisons show a difference between the Generation X and Generation Z ( $p = .034$  Dunn's post hoc test, Bonferroni adjustment). Post Hoc Comparisons show a difference between Generation Y and Generation Z ( $p = .050$  Dunn's post hoc test, Bonferroni adjustment). Generation Z gave a median response of Small Negative Impact, while both Generation Y and Generation X gave a median response of No Impact. This finding shows that Generation Z were more impacted in relation to their communication with colleagues than Generation Y and Generation X were. This finding is surprising given that Generation Z are the first generation of digital natives, meaning they were born in a time in which internet access was widespread (Leslie *et al.*, 2021), which would suggest they would be more familiar and comfortable with communicating digitally.



**Figure 5.1:** Responses to the statement ‘Please rate the impact of blended working on your connectedness with colleagues and the organisation in relation to the following statements - Communication with team and colleagues’ broken down for the 4 generations. 1946-1964: Baby Boomers; 1965-1980: Generation X; 1981-1996: Generation Y; 1996-2012: Generation Z. 1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly Agree. A difference was identified between the Generation X and Generation Z and between Generation Y and Generation Z. Data presented as median with interquartile range, minimum and maximum values.

Difference between the generations: Team cohesion and teamwork with colleagues.

The impact of blended working on team cohesion and teamwork with colleagues was also assessed. The mode response to this question was Small Negative Impact (35%). Analysis of the data found that it was not normally distributed ( $D(160) = 0.225$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Kolmogorov-Smirnov test). Comparisons of the 4 different generations found a difference ( $H(3) = 8.497$ ,  $p = 0.037$ , Kruskal-Wallis H test). Post Hoc Comparisons show a difference between Generation Y and Generation Z ( $p = .049$  Dunn's post hoc test, Bonferroni adjustment). As above, Generation Z gave a median response of Small Negative Impact, while Generation Y gave a median response of No Impact, again suggesting that Generation Z were more impacted in relation to their communication with colleagues than Generation Y were.



**Figure 5.2:** Responses to the statement ‘Please rate the impact of blended working on your connectedness with colleagues and the organisation in relation to the following statements - Team Cohesion and Teamwork with Colleagues’ broken down for the 4 generations. 1946-1964: Baby Boomers; 1965-1980: Generation X; 1981-1996: Generation Y; 1996-2012: Generation Z. 1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly Agree. A difference was identified between Generation Y and Generation Z. Data presented as median with interquartile range, minimum and maximum values.

*Difference between the generations: Satisfaction with work relationships and friendships.*

When asked if they were satisfied with their work relationships and friendships the majority of respondents Agreed (54%). Analysis of the data found that it was not normally distributed ( $D(160) = 0.317$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Kolmogorov-Smirnov test). Comparisons of the 4 different generations found a difference ( $H(3) = 8.204$ ,  $p = 0.042$ , Kruskal-Wallis H test). No specific generational differences were identified through post hoc analysis (Dunn's post hoc test, Bonferroni adjustment). The median responses given by Generation Y was Agree, however their overall responses ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. In contrast, both Baby Boomers and Generation X gave a median response of Agree, with their overall responses ranging from Disagree (Generation X) or Neutral (Baby Boomers) to Strongly Agree. These findings show that there was a greater diversity of responses given by the Generation Y (Millennial) respondents when compared with Baby Boomers and Generation X.

*Generational differences in communication: Summary*

Differences were identified between the generations across a number of areas of communication, as outlined above. Therefore, we can accept the proposed hypothesis (3) that there will a difference between the generations in terms of their satisfaction with communication in the blended working environment. While some findings were surprising, including the finding that the Generation Z were more negativity impacted by the introduction of blended working in relation to communication with colleagues, it is not surprising that differences were observed between the generations. Media Richness Theory is important to consider in relation to communication. This theory argues that face-to-face communication mediums are argued to be the richer communication medium when compared with communication which is performed via an electronic medium (Mehra and Nickerson, 2019) and this may have had some bearing on the results obtained.

## **5.6 Manager Specific**

**Hypothesis 4: There will be a difference between the generations in terms of their satisfaction with performing management duties in the blended working environment.**

This research aimed to investigate if there were differences between the generations in relation to their managerial role and ability to carry out this role effectively in the new blended working environment. Out of all respondents, 45% reported managing staff. It was found that only 1 respondent from Generation Z reported managing staff. This respondent was removed as this is too low of a number for a statistical analysis, therefore the manager generations which will be examined are Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y.

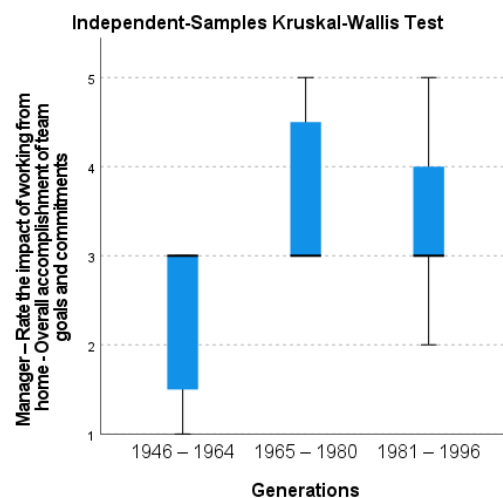
### ***5.6.1. Descriptive Statistics – Overall Results***

The majority of respondents reported that they felt able to support their team in the blended working environment (76%). When asked how often they were in contact with their team when WFH on a typical day the majority of respondents reported being in contact multiple times per day (73%). It was found that the majority of respondents felt they could trust their team to perform effectively when WFH (89%). These results show an overall positive feeling towards the ability of the managers to support their teams, and a level of trust between the managers and their teams in relation to their effective performance of their duties in the remote working environment.

### 5.6.2. Inferential Statistics – Generational Comparisons

#### Difference between the generations: Accomplishment of team goals and commitments.

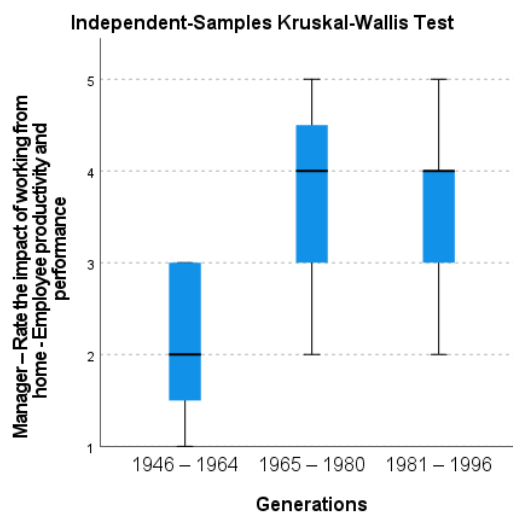
Managers were asked to rate the impact of WFH on the overall accomplishment of team goals and commitments. The mode response to this was No Impact (45%). Analysis of the data found that it was not normally distributed ( $D(71) = 0.257, p < 0.001$ , Kolmogorov-Smirnov test). Comparisons of the 3 different generations found a difference ( $H(2) = 7.959, p = 0.019$ , Kruskal-Wallis H test). Post Hoc Comparisons show a difference between Baby Boomers and Generation Y ( $p = 0.026$  Dunn's post hoc test, Bonferroni correction). Post Hoc Comparisons also show a difference between Baby Boomers and Generation X ( $p = 0.019$  Dunn's post hoc test, Bonferroni correction). The median response given by the Baby Boomers was No Impact, however their responses ranged from Small Negative Impact to No Impact, in comparison to Generation X, whose median response was No Impact, with responses ranging from No Impact to Large Positive Impact. This finding suggests that Baby Boomers have a more negative view on the impact of blended working on overall accomplishment of team goals and commitments in comparison to Generation X.



**Figure 5.3:** Responses to the statement ‘Please rate the impact of Working From Home as part of blended working has had on managing team performance and productivity - Overall accomplishment of team goals and commitments’ broken down for the 3 generations. 1946-1964: Baby Boomers; 1965-1980: Generation X; 1981-1996: Generation Y. 1: Large Negative Impact, 2: Small Negative Impact, 3: No Impact, 4: Small Positive Impact, 5: Large Positive Impact. A difference was identified between Baby Boomers and Generation X. Data presented as median with interquartile range, minimum and maximum values.

Difference between the generations: Employee productivity and performance.

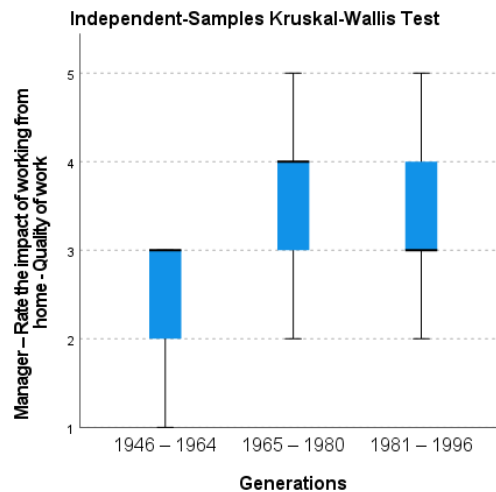
The mode response given by managers to the impact of WFH on employee productivity and performance was No Impact (37%). Analysis of the data found that it was not normally distributed ( $D(71) = 0.203$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Kolmogorov-Smirnov test). Comparisons of the 3 different generations found a difference ( $H(2) = 11.203$ ,  $p = 0.004$ , Kruskal-Wallis H test). Post Hoc Comparisons show a difference between Baby Boomers and Generation Y ( $p = 0.009$  Dunn's post hoc test, Bonferroni correction). Post Hoc Comparisons also show a difference between Baby Boomers and Generation X ( $p = 0.003$  Dunn's post hoc test, Bonferroni correction). The median response given by Baby Boomers was Small Negative Impact, while the median response given by both Generation X and Generation Y was Small Positive Impact. This finding suggests that Baby Boomers who are in a managerial position are more negative towards blended working and its effects on employee performance and productivity.



**Figure 5.4:** Responses to the statement ‘Please rate the impact of Working From Home as part of blended working has had on managing team performance and productivity - Employee productivity and performance’ broken down for the 3 generations. 1946-1964: Baby Boomers; 1965-1980: Generation X; 1981-1996: Generation Y. 1: Large Negative Impact, 2: Small Negative Impact, 3: No Impact, 4: Small Positive Impact, 5: Large Positive Impact. A difference was identified between Baby Boomers and Generation Y and between Baby Boomers and Generation X. Data presented as median with interquartile range, minimum and maximum values.

Difference between the generations: Quality of Work.

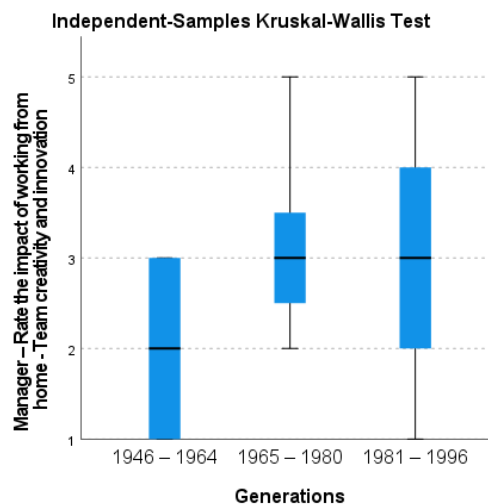
Managers were asked to rate the impact of WFH on quality of work and it was found that the mode response was No Impact (42%). Analysis of the data found that it was not normally distributed ( $D(71) = 0.223, p < 0.001$ , Kolmogorov-Smirnov test). Comparisons of the 3 different generations found a difference ( $H(2) = 6.259, p = 0.044$ , Kruskal-Wallis H test). Post Hoc Comparisons show a difference between Baby Boomers and Generation X ( $p = 0.045$  Dunn's post hoc test, Bonferroni correction). The median response given by Baby Boomers was No Impact, however their responses ranged from No Impact to Large Negative Impact. In comparison, Generation X gave a mean response of Small Positive Impact, with their responses ranging from Small Negative Impact to Small Positive Impact. This result shows that the Baby Boomer respondents were more negative than Generation X in relation to their views on the impact of blended working on the quality of work of their direct reports.



**Figure 5.5:** Responses to the statement ‘Please rate the impact of Working From Home as part of blended working has had on managing team performance and productivity - Quality of work’ broken down for the 3 generations. 1946-1964: Baby Boomers; 1965-1980: Generation X; 1981-1996: Generation Y. 1: Large Negative Impact, 2: Small Negative Impact, 3: No Impact, 4: Small Positive Impact, 5: Large Positive Impact. A difference was identified between Baby Boomers and Generation X. Data presented as median with interquartile range, minimum and maximum values.

Difference between the generations: Team Creativity and Innovation.

Managers were asked to rate the impact of WFH on team creativity and innovation. The mode response to this was No Impact (34%). Analysis of the data found that it was not normally distributed ( $D(71) = 0.173$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Kolmogorov-Smirnov test). Comparisons of the 3 different generations found a difference ( $H(2) = 6.759$ ,  $p = 0.034$ , Kruskal-Wallis H test). Post Hoc Comparisons show a difference between Baby Boomers and Generation Y ( $p = 0.028$  Dunn's post hoc test, Bonferroni adjustment). The median response given by Baby Boomers was Small Negative Impact, with their responses ranging from No Impact to Large Negative Impact. In contrast, Generation Y gave a median response of No Impact, and their responses ranged from Large Negative Impact to Large Positive Impact. These findings show that the Baby Boomers in managerial roles feel more negative towards the impact of blended working on managing team creativity and innovation than Generation Y.

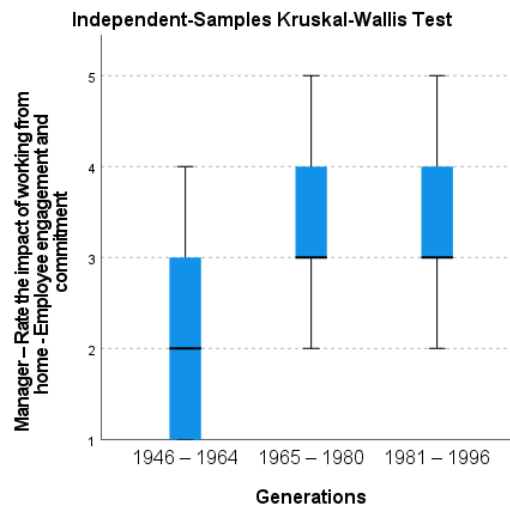


**Figure 5.6:** Responses to the statement ‘Please rate the impact of Working From Home as part of blended working has had on managing team performance and productivity - Team creativity and innovation’ broken down for the 3 generations. 1946-1964: Baby Boomers; 1965-1980: Generation X; 1981-1996: Generation Y. 1: Large Negative Impact, 2: Small Negative Impact, 3: No Impact, 4: Small Positive Impact, 5: Large Positive Impact. A difference was identified between Baby Boomers and Generation Y. Data presented as median with interquartile range, minimum and maximum values.



Difference between the generations: Employee Engagement and commitment.

Finally, managers were asked to rate the impact of WFH on EE and commitment. The mode response to this was No Impact (39%). Analysis of the data found that it was not normally distributed ( $D(71) = 0.212, p < 0.001$ , Kolmogorov-Smirnov test). Comparisons of the 3 different generations found a difference ( $H(2) = 6.443, p = 0.040$ , Kruskal-Wallis H test). Post Hoc Comparisons show a difference between Baby Boomers and Generation X ( $p = 0.044$  Dunn's post hoc test, Bonferroni adjustment). The median response given by Baby Boomers was Small Negative Impact, with their responses ranging from Large Negative Impact to Small Positive Impact. Generation X gave a median response of No Impact, and their responses ranged from Small Negative Impact to Large Positive Impact. These results show that the Baby Boomers felt that blended working was having a negative impact on EE and commitment.



**Figure 5.7:** Responses to the statement ‘Please rate the impact of Working From Home as part of blended working has had on managing team performance and productivity - Employee Engagement and commitment’ broken down for the 3 generations. 1946-1964: Baby Boomers; 1965-1980: Generation X; 1981-1996: Generation Y. 1: Large Negative Impact, 2: Small Negative Impact, 3: No Impact, 4: Small Positive Impact, 5: Large Positive Impact. A difference was identified between Baby Boomers and Generation X. Data presented as median with interquartile range, minimum and maximum values.

Generational differences, manager specific: Summary

The results of the managerial section show a clear generational difference in relation to the perceived impacts of blended working on a number of performance indicators. Therefore, we can accept the proposed hypothesis (4) that there will be a difference between the generations in terms of their satisfaction with performing management duties in the blended working environment. More specifically, it is shown that managers from the Baby Boomer generation report more negative effects of blended working than managers from either Generation X or Generation Y. This finding is not surprising, as previous research has found differences in management styles across different age groups and generations (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2019).

## **5.7 Conclusions**

This research set out to identify any generational differences which may arise in the newly adopted blended working environment. It was found that the majority of the differences which arose were differences between the Baby Boomer generation and the other generations, with this being most evident when Baby Boomers in positions of management were analysed. However, differences were also identified between Generation Z and the other generations when communication was assessed. These findings provide support for the need to perform a more in-depth investigation of generational differences in the workforce in the new blended working environment. This research is limited in that not all generation sample sizes were equal, with the majority of respondents being from the Generation X and Generation Y (Millennial) generations. It is therefore proposed that future research should work to generate a larger sample size, which includes more equal sample sizes. However, while this is important, the sample in this current study is representative of the current workforce, the majority of which are from Generation X and Generation Y.

## **Chapter 6. Discussion**

This research set out to investigate the impact of WFH on EE, with a specific focus on job satisfaction, communication, and managerial perceived ability to perform their roles in this environment. Furthermore, the impact of the generation to which the participant belonged was explored. The results obtained will be discussed in the context of current literature, with suggestions for improving EE where applicable, and any limitations of the study will be explored.

### **6.1 Employee Engagement during Working From Home**

With the exception of social isolation, the responses to questions relating to EE were mainly positive, with most respondents demonstrating confidence in their ability to perform effectively when WFH. Chaudhary and colleagues (2021) investigated the impact of WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic on the engagement of employees based in India. In contrast to the findings of the current study, they found that there was greater variation between employees in terms of their engagement levels, with factors such as salary and gender influencing this. While it was beyond the scope of the current project to investigate the impact of these demographic variables, future research should aim to explore this in order to identify if this would be applicable in the ICS. It is also important to consider any cultural differences which may exist, and it is therefore advised that comparisons of studies across different countries needs to take into account that the populations examined may not be directly comparable.

The majority of respondents reported feeling socially isolated at least some of the time when WFH. This finding appears in other research investigating the impact of the WFH environment on EE (e.g., De-la-Calle-Durán and Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2021). This expression of social isolation in combination with an otherwise mainly positive reaction to WFH has been found previously (Hardman, Llewellyn and Walker, 2021). These findings point to the importance of maintaining contact with employees who are remote working, and encouraging interaction between colleagues, and it is therefore suggested that this is taken into account when blended working policies are being developed in the ICS.

Exploration of EE in terms of generational differences did not lead to any significant findings. There has been little research performed in relation to the impact that one's generation could have on EE. One study, which was performed pre-COVID-19, found differences between the generations of Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y in terms of EE (Lapoint and Liprie-Spence, 2017). While this study did not provide a breakdown of which generations

differed from one another, it did find that responses to certain questions were dependent of the generation of the respondent. These questions were focused around the amount of effort put into the work, satisfaction relating to the variety of the work, and being so focused on work that time went by very quickly. It is argued that there is a need for further investigation into this, as the current workforce is made up of employees from four different generations. According to the V5 model, in order for effective EE it is important that there is a sense of community among employees (Kumar, 2021), and this needs to take into account the inherent differences which may exist across the generations.

Considering the lack of differences between the generations in relation to EE in the context of the ICS, it should be considered that, with the exception of employees who are on probation, there is a high level of job security when compared to, for example, the hospitality sector. During a time of crisis, concerns about job security are generally high (Lin *et al.*, 2021). It is therefore proposed that this job security, which would have been equal across the generations, may have contributed to the lack of differences in relation to EE between the generations. While not factoring in generational differences, recent research has proposed that flexible working arrangements can have a positive impact on employee work attitudes (Seal *et al.*, 2021). The flexible working arrangements which arose as a result of the mandatory WFH may therefore have led to more positive EE across the generations in the present study.

## **6.2 Impact of Working From Home on Job Satisfaction**

Initial assessments of job satisfaction, in terms of coping skills, performance of their unit, and work-life balance in the WFH environment, were mainly positive, with no differences identified between the generations. These findings are reflected in recent research, in which the majority of respondents reported a positive work-life balance during WFH (Hardman, Llewellyn and Walker, 2021). Interestingly, when work-life balance was investigated in relation to the different generations a difference in attitude was identified. More specifically, assessment of working hours over and above those which are termed as ‘normal working hours’ found that Baby Boomers were more likely to report working those extra hours, while Generation Z were unlikely to report working extra hours. This finding highlights the difference between the generations in relation to their approach to the time they will dedicate to work over and above that which is required.

When approached through the lens of the 5 C model (De-la-Calle-Durán and Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2021), which proposes the factor of conciliation (a balance between the personal life

of employees and their work) as an important factor for positive EE, this generation difference shows that there is no one size fits all model of EE. While the Baby Boomers reported working those extra hours, it was not found to impact upon their overall job satisfaction, and therefore shows that different generations may place value on different aspects of their working life when it comes to job satisfaction.

Assessment of the biggest advantage of WFH found that the majority of respondents reported that saving regular commuting time as the main advantage. This finding is important as it will need to be considered when the ICS is developing blended working policies. Previous research conducted into the impact of commuting on employees found that it has a largely negative impact (Gerpott, Rivkin and Unger, 2022). However, when considering the earlier reported finding of social isolation, perhaps a blended working environment, which does not require employees to commute to the office five days a week, will lead to a balance between the impact of commuting and the feelings of social isolation, thereby negating the negative impacts of both.

### **6.3 Impact of Working from Home on Communication**

While the majority of respondents across the generations felt that their manager had communicated with them effectively, both during the initial COVID-19 lockdown and enforced WFH, and the continuing WFH environment, generational differences emerged for a number of different areas in relation to communication. Generation Z employees were more likely to respond negatively to questions about the impact of WFH on communication with colleagues and team cohesion in comparison to both Generation X and Generation Y. While this finding may be surprising given that Generation Z employees are the first 'digital natives' (Leslie *et al.*, 2021) and therefore would be assumed to be more comfortable with communicating through a digital means, perhaps this finding is more related to the newness of this generation in the workforce. Furthermore, research investigating the impact of the imposed distance learning on university students during the COVID-19 pandemic found that a sense of belonging was negatively associated with COVID-19 distress (Marler *et al.*, 2021). This is an important consideration for the current study, as the Generation Z employees would be of similar age to the university students. Given that at this stage of their lives young adults are forming their identities, a process which relies heavily on social connection (Arnett, 2006), this may explain the negative responses of this generation in relation to communication.

All of the Generation Z respondents reported being in the ICS for 0-5 years, and therefore it is possible that they began working during the enforced WFH environment, meaning that it may have been some time before they met their colleagues in person. There is a lack of research into the impact of starting a new job during the COVID-19 pandemic, and as the findings of this current study seem to indicate potential assimilation difficulties of newer employees, it is clear that there is more research required in this area. When designing induction plans for new employees who are joining during the implementation of blended working, it is important that these communication issues are taken into account, and new hires have the opportunity to meet with their team in person where possible.

#### **6.4 Impact of Working from Home on Managers and Their Perceived Ability to Perform**

Managers were found to be generally positive when their perceived abilities to support their team, and trust their team to perform effectively when WFH were assessed. However, generational differences arose when the impact of WFH on a number of performance indicators were assessed. More specifically, managers who were from the Baby Boomer generation were more negative towards WFH in relation to its impact on accomplishment of team goals, employee performance and productivity, quality of work of their direct reports, team creativity and innovation, and EE and commitment, than their Generation X or Generation Y counterparts. This finding brings into focus the different approaches to management across the generations, and the impact that the WFH environment has had on the different generations perceived abilities to perform their role as manager.

Previous research has indicated that there are generational differences when it comes to management style across the generations and different age groups (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2019) and therefore this finding is not surprising. However, in the context of the blended working environment which is currently being adopted by multiple Departments across the ICS this finding is significant, as it points to the need for greater support for managers from the Baby Boomer generation in order for them to effectively perform their role. Leadership has been found to greatly influence employee's performance, with the V5 Model (Kumar, 2021), the 5 C Model (De-la-Calle-Durán and Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2021), and the GREAT Model of motivation (Mani and Mishra, 2020) all alluding to the importance of communication from leadership in order to promote positive EE. Furthermore, recent research has found that during the COVID-19 pandemic and enforced WFH environment, employee stress and burnout were directly associated with lower leadership quality (Platts, Breckon and Marshall, 2022).

Conversely, this perceived lack of ability to perform certain parts of their role could lead to a more negative experience for managers, and may in turn be related to a lack of guidance from leadership higher up in the hierarchy. It has been found that employees who are greater than 45 years of age may experience more depressive symptoms when exposed to lower leadership quality than those who were younger (Platts, Breckon and Marshall, 2022). In order for effective leadership, managers must feel empowered in their role, and have the resources required to perform their job effectively. Given that blended working is going to be introduced as the new working environment in the ICS it is of utmost importance that effective training is given to all in a managerial capacity, and it is proposed that this needs to be included in the blended working policies being adopted by the ICS.

### **6.5 Strengths and Limitations**

This research focused on an under-investigated area in relation to EE, that of generational differences. Currently there is a paucity of research into this area. As the findings of this research demonstrate, there are clear differences between the generations in relation to a number of key areas of EE, all of which could have an impact on their performance in the workplace. Furthermore, due to the move towards a blended working approach in the ICS, this research will allow for the development of better policies, which can take into account differences between the generations and their specific needs.

While this research provides interesting insights into EE, job satisfaction, communication, and perceived ability of managers to perform their roles during WFH, there are some limitations. An ideal sample size of 381 participants was indicated through power analysis. However, the current study had a sample size of 160 respondents. This was due to time constraints associated with the project. Assessment of generational differences is limited as there are different sample sizes per generation, with the majority of respondents coming from Generation X and Generation Y. However, this is representative of the current workforce, the majority of which are from either Generation X and Generation Y, and therefore while not ideal for statistical analysis, it is representative of the population under investigation. Furthermore, the analysis of Generation Z in a managerial role could not be carried out as there was only one respondent from this group that reported having a managerial role and therefore statistical analysis could not be carried out.



## **Chapter 7. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **7.1 Conclusions**

The findings of this research identified key generational differences in relation to WFH in the areas of job satisfaction, communication, and managers and their perceived abilities to perform their role effectively in the ICS. More specifically, Baby Boomers and Generation Z were found to differ from their Generation X and Generation Y colleagues across a number of different areas. Generation Z were impacted negatively when WFH in the area of communication when compared to Generations X and Y, while Baby Boomers in a managerial capacity reported a mostly negative impact of WFH on their abilities to perform their duties effectively in comparison to both Generations X and Y.

Due to the move towards a blended working approach across many industries including the ICS, these findings suggest that there may not be a ‘one size fits all’ policy which can be implemented. As the current workforce is made up of four different generations, which from the results of this study seem to have different responses to, and needs in relation to, WFH, blended working policies which are being adopted will need to be cognisant of these differences. It is clear that separate blended working policies cannot be developed for each of the generations, this would not be realistic and would be a drain on resources. Therefore, it is proposed that the blended working policy adapted takes account of the generational differences observed, and provides more training and support for all staff in these areas.

Future research should aim to further investigate the differences observed in this study, and broaden the scope to identify if there are other areas in relation to EE during WFH which may be impacted, such as motivation. There is a paucity of research in this area, most likely due to the fact that these working arrangements were not the norm until the start of 2020 for the majority of organisations. As these new working arrangements, be it WFH full time or blended working, take hold, it is essential that there is research conducted to investigate the effectiveness of the adoption of these policies, as well as the impact that the new policies are having on employees. Furthermore, it is proposed that this research continues over a number of years, in order to explore how adaptation to this new way of working may impact upon EE. It is important to consider that WFH/blended working is still a relatively new concept, which may still have novelty for employees, leading to increased EE in the short term. It is therefore vital that once this working environment has become the ‘normal’ working environment, that this research is performed again, to identify any differences or difficulties which may arise

following prolonged WFH. A Scandinavian company introduced a work from anywhere paradigm six years before the onset of the pandemic. They found that their staff were drained following a day of video calls, during which they reported feeling added pressure to show consistent energy and productivity levels (Hill and Ippoliti, 2022). This is therefore a key consideration when monitoring the long term impact of WFH.

To conclude, while employees demonstrate mainly positive EE during WFH/blended working, there are generational differences arising in key areas which may lead to difficulties when generating a blended working policy for the entire workforce. It is important that these differences are taken into account when developing blended working policies in order to allow for a workforce who are engaged and feel supported during this time of transition.

## **7.2 Recommendations**

Based on the research conducted recommendations will be made in relation to the adoption of the blended working policy in the ICS. These recommendations will take into account any potential implications, including financial and availability of resources. The recommendations will be presented with the most important as recommendation number one, and all further recommendations in order below the first recommendation.

### ***7.2.1 Pulse Survey for all Staff***

In order to effectively implement the blended working policy, it is important the employees' views be considered. It is recommended that a pulse survey be sent to all staff in order to identify their preferred working arrangements (i.e., how many days a week WFH). This promotes employee voice, by giving staff of all grades the opportunity to share their opinions, and can lead to increased morale, a sense of belonging and EE (Ruck, Welch and Menara, 2017). The most cost-effective method would be to utilise the already existing procured contract with a survey provider and distribute through HR networks across the Departments. Results would be automated through the survey provider, allowing for an executive summary to be created in a short time frame, to provide to senior management groups. More detailed analysis will also be available through the survey provider, which will save on resources needed to generate a more detailed report which could be used in the development of the blended working policy. It is proposed that this survey be administered within the next month, as many Departments are in the process of adopting a blended working policy currently. Allowing the survey to remain open for a period of two weeks should allow for sufficient responses to be collected to generate a clear understanding of the employees' views. By utilising the survey

provider, the results will be available immediately, allowing for a quick turnaround of an executive summary.

### ***7.2.2 Re-evaluation of Current Induction Process***

Due to the finding that the Generation Z employees were more negative in relation to communication than the other generations, and given that most of these employees are employed by the ICS for less than five years, it is deemed important that existing induction processes are re-evaluated. It is proposed that all new hires, including those who started during the COVID-19 pandemic, participate in a new induction process which would facilitate information on blended working, with an emphasis on communication practices within the ICS. Furthermore, the usefulness of ‘coffee mornings’, either virtual or in person, should be investigated as a potential practice which could promote communication between new entrants. The alteration of the current induction process should be relatively cost-free from a financial perspective. There may be some initial resource implications as the process is re-evaluated and the utility of ‘coffee mornings’ are assessed, however this would only be a short-term issue. It is recommended that this re-evaluation begins immediately, allowing for future new hires to participate in an updated induction process. It is proposed that this initial re-evaluation take place over the course of a month, with results of the re-evaluation collated within two weeks of the finalisation of this re-evaluation. This would allow for adjustments to be made to the induction process during quarter three, with the aim of having an adjusted induction process available to all new hires by quarter four 2022.

### ***7.2.3 Training and Development, with an emphasis on managers***

As this research identified a perceived lack of ability to perform their role effectively in the managerial group, it is proposed that further training and development needs to be provided to those in a managerial role, to take into account the blended working environment. While this research identified that this was an issue for the Baby Boomer generation, it is important that all managers receive training in how best to perform their role in this working environment. These trainings would be provided through the ICS training platform, One Learning. In line with procurement requirements this training would have to go through a procurement process and subsequently this would have financial implications. However, this process will allow for the most effective training and development provider to be utilised. This recommendation would have the highest financial and resource costs, however, given the results of this research it is put forward that the benefits would outweigh the costs. Due to the procurement process

this recommendation may take some time to implement. However, it is essential that this recommendation is progressed, therefore this procurement process should start as soon as is feasible. It is estimated, giving time for tender and subsequent procurement and development of the training, that this would take approximately three months and therefore it is envisaged that this would be available by quarter four 2022/quarter one 2023.

### **7.3 Personal Learning Reflection (for CIPD purposes)**

The COVID-19 pandemic put a large emphasis on remote working and although staff had to learn to adapt to this via a technological basis, I felt it should be examined through the important aspects of the Human Resource perspective of EE, Job Satisfaction, Communication and Managers and their perceived ability to perform their role. Through the advancement of the generations from Baby Boomer to Generation X to Generation Y to Generation Z, we can see the evolving nature of work practices and what is important for the members in these generations in terms of work.

Being in the Generation Y (Millennials) proportion of the workforce, I wanted to see if my own viewpoints were similar to my own generation but also of other generations. As mentioned previously in this dissertation, Generation Z are the new workforce of the future and they work alongside colleagues from the Baby Boomer, Generation X and Generation Y generations. Differences arose between the Baby Boomer generation and Generation Z in terms of work-life balance. I found the differences between these two polar sided generations to be fascinating as it demonstrated a clear difference in approach to the working environment between the two generations.

In the not so distant future, we will see a new generation after this one take the forefront of work and the Baby Boomers will be subsequently no longer in the workforce. Through this research project I found differences between the current generations, and therefore it could be proposed that there will be differences which will arise again when a newer generation enters the workforce. Undertaking this research project has allowed me to develop a better understanding of where differences may arise, which will allow me to be a more effective Human Resources practitioner, both now and in the future. In the present climate induction processes and on boarding in recruitment are areas of Human Resources activities that need to be amended to take into account Blended Working policies and practices. However, from the dissertation results, I found that there are differences and scope for improvement within other

areas of HR such as EE, Job Satisfaction, Communication and Managerial Support in areas of managing and leading.

Upon reflection, it would have been interesting to adopt a mixed-methods approach to this research as this would have allowed a deeper understanding of the issues which arose to be developed. However, due to the current working environment and the time constraints associated with this project this was not possible. The most challenging portion of this research was the performance of the statistical analysis of the data obtained. In order to face this challenge, I attended lectures on statistical analysis, which I also reviewed in my own time, as well as performing additional reading into the area. By conducting this project, it allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of the process, which will be very beneficial going forward as there has been a rise in the utilisation of HR metrics.

## Chapter 8. References

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## Chapter 9. Appendices

### Appendix 1. Google Forms Questionnaire

Are there generational differences in Employee Engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing blended working environment in the Irish Civil Service as assessed through communication and job satisfaction?

Study on generational differences in Employee Engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing Blended Working Environment in the Irish Civil Service as assessed through communication and job satisfaction.

Research participant information and consent form

Researcher: Mr John Mullally      Email: [x20132379@student.ncirl.ie](mailto:x20132379@student.ncirl.ie)

Should you have any queries regarding the study, or your participation in the study, please contact the researcher above who will be happy to answer your questions.

## Section A

You are being asked to participate in a research study, the results of which will be presented in a Masters thesis for examination. The researcher above at National College of Ireland (NCI) is studying generational differences in Employee Engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing Blended Working Environment in the Irish Civil Service as assessed through communication and job satisfaction. In order to decide whether or not you want to be a part of this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to make an informed judgment. This process is known as informed consent. This consent form gives detailed information about the research study. Once you understand the study, you will be asked to tick the consent 'Yes' question on the next page if you wish to participate. You will then be asked to input the date of consent.

## Section B

### I. NATURE AND DURATION OF PARTICIPATION:

The purpose of this study is to investigate any generational differences in Employee Engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing Blended Working Environment in the Irish Civil Service as assessed through communication and job satisfaction.

I would like to invite you to be involved in my study. This would mean answering a 15 minute questionnaire. At the end of the study I will collate the information gathered from all participants and analyse it for patterns of response. The information you provide is completely anonymous. It is impossible to trace your answers back to you once you have submitted them to the study. As such we would ask that you be as honest as possible in

order to obtain a true reflection of generational differences in Employee Engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing Blended Working Environment in the Irish Civil Service as assessed through communication and job satisfaction.

### II. POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS:

There are no known risks to participating in this study. However, should you become distressed in answering the questions you have the right to terminate your participation in the study. A debriefing form will also be provided at the end of the questionnaire detailing the contact details of the researcher.

While there will be no direct benefit from participation, studies like this can make an important contribution to our understanding of the new blended working approach. As such, the findings from this study may be presented at national and international conferences and may be submitted for publication in peer-reviewed journals. However no individual participant will be identified in any publication or presentation. Individuals will not be offered any monetary or other rewards for their participation.

### III. PARTICIPANT RIGHTS:

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. All information gathered from you will be non-identifiable (The researcher does not gather data on names, addresses, birthdates). All data gathered will be stored by the researcher in a password protected file and kept, as per NCI policy, for a period of five years before being destroyed. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time up until the point of submission of answers, after which it is not possible to identify and retrieve your personal response. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate. In addition, your participation in the study may be terminated by the investigator without your consent.

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\* Required

Section C Agreement to Consent

1. The research project has been explained to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions concerning any and all aspects of the project and any procedures involved. I am aware that participation is voluntary. I am also aware that my responses cannot be traced back to me personally. Do you agree to partake in the Survey and have read the informed consent information prior to this question? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

2. Date \*

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*Example: January 7, 2019*

Are there generational differences in Employee Engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing blended working environment in the Irish Civil Service as assessed through communication and job satisfaction?

Please take your time when answering this survey. It should take you about 15 minutes. There are short sections to answer based on Demographics, Blended Working, Job Satisfaction, Communication and Manager Questions.

### Demographic Questions

3. Q1. Please choose one of the following category of years in which you were born. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. 1946 – 1964  
 b. 1965 – 1980  
 c. 1981 - 1996  
 d. 1996 – 2012

4. Q2. To which gender do you most identify? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Male  
 b. Female  
 c. Non binary  
 d. Prefer not to say

5. Q3. Where are you based for work currently? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Dublin  
 b. Leinster (outside of Dublin)  
 c. Connacht  
 d. Munster  
 e. Ulster  
 f. Other (Abroad)



6. Q4. What best describes your current work environment? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Blended Working (1 to 4 days in the office per week)
- b. Office based (5 days in the office per week)
- c. Full Time Working from Home
- d. Part time Blended Working (1 to 4 days in the office per week)
- e. Part time Office based (all working time in office).
- f. Part Time Working from Home (All Working Days at Home)

7. Q5. Please specify your grade in the Irish Civil Service \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Secretary General or equivalent
- b. Assistant Secretary or equivalent
- c. Principal Officer or equivalent
- d. Assistant Principal Officer or equivalent
- e. Administrative Officer or equivalent
- f. Higher Executive Officer or equivalent
- g. Executive Officer or equivalent
- h. Clerical Officer or equivalent
- i. Service Officer or equivalent
- j. Other

8. Q6. How many years' service do you have? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. 0-5  
 b. 5-10  
 c. 10-20  
 d. 20+

9. Q7. What was your reason for working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Compulsory in terms of Public Health Guidance/Employer request  
 b. Previous agreement with employer  
 c. I was not a Civil Servant pre COVID-19 pandemic

10. Q8. How many persons are currently working from home in the same house/abode/location as you? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. 0  
 b. 1  
 c. 2  
 d. 3  
 e. 4  
 f. 5  
 g. 6+

11. Q9. Do you have dependents living with you? (Including children) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes  
 No

12. Q10. How many children below the age of 15 years were present at home during COVID-19 pandemic. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- 0  
 1  
 2  
 3  
 4  
 5  
 6 or more

13. Q11. Do you have carer's responsibilities other than dependent children? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes  
 No

14. Q12. Highest level of education you have achieved? Please choose one of the following. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Secondary Education  
 b. Vocational Training  
 c. Associate Degree  
 d. Bachelor's Degree  
 e. Postgraduate Diploma  
 f. Master's Degree  
 g. Doctorate Degree  
 h. Other Qualification Not Listed Above

## Blended Working

15. Q13. What best describes your current living situation? Please pick one of the options below. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. live in my own home alone
- b. live in my own home with partner and/or children
- c. live in my own home with housemates
- d. live in a rented home alone
- e. live in a rented home with partner and/or children
- f. live in a rented home with housemates
- g. live in my family home with parents and/or siblings
- h. temporarily staying with a relative or friend

16. Q14. How often did you work at home prior to the COVID-19 pandemic? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Never
- b. Never but option available
- c. Rarely, less than once a month but have flexibility
- d. Sometimes, a few times a month
- e. Often, once a week
- f. Always, every day of the week

17. Q15. Since Blended Working has been introduced in the ICS via departments, how often do work onsite? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Zero days a week currently still remote work
- b. 1 day per week
- c. 2 days a week
- d. 3 days a week
- e. 4 days a week
- f. 5 days a week

18. Q16. Did you feel your Department was effective in engagement with you during the COVID-19 pandemic when remote working? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Strongly Agree  
 b. Agree  
 c. Neutral  
 d. Disagree  
 e. Strongly Disagree

19. Q17. Do you feel after two years in the pandemic that your Department has improved upon its engagement practices in terms of employee engagement? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Strongly Agree  
 b. Agree  
 c. Neutral  
 d. Disagree  
 e. Strongly Disagree

20. Q18. During the early stages of the pandemic, did you feel technologically able to complete tasks in a remote environment? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Strongly Agree  
 b. Agree  
 c. Neutral  
 d. Disagree  
 e. Strongly Disagree

21. Q19. Did you feel isolated from colleagues while remote working? \*

Mark only one oval.

- a. All of the time
- b. Some of the time
- c. Neutral
- d. Not often
- e. Never

22. Q20. Please choose an appropriate response to the statements provided. \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>I perform more effectively at home than compared to normal working arrangements in the workplace/office</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>I have the appropriate equipment and resources required to work effectively from home</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>I receive regular contact from the organisation while working from home</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>My organisation provides training in remote working skills and behaviours</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Job Satisfaction

23. Q21. Were you satisfied with how you coped remote working in terms of the day to day performance of tasks? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Extremely satisfied
- b. Somewhat satisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Somewhat dissatisfied
- e. Extremely dissatisfied

24. Q22. Are you satisfied with how you are coping working in a blended working environment? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Extremely satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

25. Q23. Are you satisfied with how your unit is currently performing with blended working in terms of performance? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Extremely satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

26. Q24. Please rate the statements below regarding how blended working has impacted your work-life balance \*

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>My work-life balance has positively improved</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>I regularly perform work duties outside of regular working hours</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>I work longer hours at home compared to in the office/workplace</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>When working from home I know when to disconnect from work activities and switch off</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>I often receive work related calls or emails outside of normal working hours</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



27. Q25. What is the biggest challenge you are currently facing due to blended working? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Physical workspace at home
- b. Unplugging or disconnecting from work at home
- c. Communication and/or collaboration with other co-workers when working from home
- d. Childcare
- e. Keeping a regular schedule when working from home
- f. Too many distractions at home
- g. Not having access to the equipment or information required to work effectively at home
- h. Social isolation or loneliness when working from home
- i. Internet connectivity when working from home
- j. Staying motivated when working from home
- k. I experience no challenges due to blended working

28. Q26. What is the biggest advantage to blended working? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Saves regular commuting time when working from home
- b. Cost savings in terms of transport, food etc.
- c. Less distractions at home than in the workplace
- d. Having more autonomy over my work at home
- e. I experience no advantages working from home

29. Q27. Please rate the impact of working from home on managing your individual performance and productivity. \*

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Large negative impact	Small negative impact	No impact	Small positive impact	Large positive impact
<b>On time delivery (meeting schedules, deadlines etc.)</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Overall accomplishment of my goals and objectives</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Quality of work completed to a high standard.</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### Communication

30. Q28. Do you feel your direct line manager communicated with you to a high standard during the compulsory remote working period of the COVID-19 pandemic? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

31. Q29. Do you feel your direct line manager communicates with you to a high standard during the blended working environment that has arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

32. Q30. Compared to when you initially began working from home as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, how are you feeling about the blended working approach? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- a. Optimistic
- b. Pessimistic
- c. Unsure

33. Q31. Please choose an appropriate response to the statements provided. \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	a. Strongly Agree	b. Agree	c. Neutral	d. Disagree	e. Strongly Disagree
I receive ongoing support and communication from line manager(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I receive regular wellbeing supports from the organisation while working from home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

34. Q32. Please rate the impact of blended working on your connection with colleagues and the organisation in relation to the following statements. \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Large negative impact	Small negative impact	No impact	Small positive impact	Large positive impact
Communication with team and colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team cohesion and teamwork with colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engagement and commitment to the organisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

35. Q33. To each of the statements below please provide the most appropriate response which best describes how you feel in relation to blended working. \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I often feel alienated from my co-workers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am satisfied with my work relationships and/or collegial friendships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am comfortable with asking my work colleagues and/or manager for help at any time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is a sense of camaraderie in the workplace and virtual workplace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My work relationships and friendships have changed for the worse since the implementation of blended working.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have social companionship at work, even with the implementation of blended working.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I miss being around my work colleagues and friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Manager  
Questions

\* if you manage no staff select 'No' in Q34 and subsequent questions or statements, select 'Not applicable I do not manage staff'.

36. Q34. Do you manage staff? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

37. Q35. Do you feel you are able to support the needs of your team in the blended \*  
working environment?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

Somewhat

Not applicable I do not manage staff

38. Q36. How often are you in contact with your team when working from home on \*  
a typical day?

*Mark only one oval.*

a. Multiple times per day

b. Once a day

c. Can go through a day without making contact

d. Not applicable I don't manage staff

39. Q37. Do you trust your team to perform effectively when working from home as \* part of blended working?

Mark only one oval.

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Somewhat
- d. Not applicable I do not manage staff

40. Q38. Please rate the impact of working from home as part of blended working \* has had on managing team performance and productivity.

Mark only one oval per row.

	Large negative impact	Small negative impact	No impact	Small positive impact	Large positive impact	N/A I don't manage staff
On-time delivery of meetings and deadlines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall accomplishment of team goals and commitments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employee productivity and performance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communication with team members	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to effectively manage employee work performance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team creativity and innovation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teamwork and cohesion among team members	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employee engagement and commitment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>