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Student Experiences WFH: Recruitment, On-Boarding and WFH Organisational Support in Professional Services

Human Resource Management Level 9 Master's

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THESIS TITLE – "Student Experiences WFH: Recruitment, On-Boarding and WFH Organisational Support in Professional Services"

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Abstract

This research study was conducted with the research aim of gaining insights of student employees WFH in professional services. The main research objectives included gaining insight into student WFH experiences of online recruitment, online on-boarding and WFH organisational support. Previous studies conducted on this area did not use the WFH student population involved in internships, graduate programs, and part/full-time workers. Other literature shows insight into employee experience WFH however, there is little literature on online recruitment, online on-boarding. There are a few studies conducted on WFH organisational support however, this is not held to just one sample population or specific sector.

After an extensive literature review, this study used a qualitative method to gather student employee interpretations and experiences of WFH. Semi-structured interviews were carried out via Microsoft Teams. This study gathered 12 participants (8 male, 5 female) from the professional services sector. All of which were students or graduates involved in full-time work or graduate programmes. These interviews were consented to be recorded and transcribed to allow the researcher to use thematic analysis to assess the data.

Upon analysing the findings, conclusions were drawn from the interviews. Commute was emphasised to be a key motivation for students to WFH. In contrast, student employees still preferred to be socialising with peers in-person to build relationships. These two findings were not a research objective but were an extremely frequent pattern in all 12 interviews. The research objectives were answered as online recruitment was found to be a relaxing informal experience, online on-boarding experience was less interactive and monotonous than in-person on-boarding. There was a high level of WFH organisational support for all 12 student employees working in professional services. Overall, this study was successful in answering the research question and its objectives while also introducing new key factors for student WFH employees in professional services.

Declaration

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1. Introduction

This study is aimed at researching insights into student workers (part-time, internship, graduate programme) who have worked from home (WFH) for their employer during the pandemic. This study adds to the literature of WFH by selecting a niche type of employee and developing further insight into their WFH experience. Since the spread of Covid-19 virus there has been a significant increase in WFH studies. For example, research has been undertaken considering other demographic profiles including gender, industry, and country. Studies such as Etheridge et al., 2020 have emphasised the difference of impact on males and females who WFH. Impacts such as declined productivity and mental health and well-being. However, Etheridge et al., 2020 was done using a self-report quantitative method providing less insights to gender such as their subjective experiences of WFH. Through analysis of the literature there is a small amount of knowledge on incoming student employees into online recruitment, online on-boarding and WFH organisational support. WFH organisational support can be identified as team exercises, online socialization, and IT support when WFH. These areas are important to address as many students are the future of the labour force and their first initial experiences such as work socialization and organisational trust are impactful on their future of perception of work. There are graduate programme blogs and student diaries from specific organisations on their websites; however, their true experience may be distorted due to organisational pressure and non-anonymity. Using scientific method to analyse and understand student WFH experience can give more accurate insight. WFH can have a significant implication for student employee understanding and work performance. In addition to this, WFH insights can have significant impact on organisations and their future online WFH strategies for incoming student/graduate employees.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 What is remote working?

Over the past few years remote working has become more prevalent as a working style (Alam, 2020, Bolisani et al., 2020, Wang et al., 2021). Remote working has been defined by Di Martino & Wirth, 1990 as "a flexible work arrangement whereby workers work in locations, remote from their central offices or production facilities, the worker has no personal contact with co-workers there, but is able to communicate with them using technology" (Di Martino and Wirth, 1990, p.530). This has also been called teleworking or telecommunicating (Bolisani et al., 2020, Wang et al., 2021). In simpler terms, remote working is an employee working off-site (not in the office), usually using a type of technology to

work such as a laptop, iPad, or mobile phone (Bolisani et al., 2020, Wang et al., 2021). In 2020, the World Health Organisation announced an outbreak of Covid-19 virus across the world (Alam, 2020, Galanti et al., 2021). This made world governments implement restrictions on civilian movement and introduce rules such as social distancing and wearing of masks to cover individuals' nose and mouth for protection against the virus (Alam, 2020, Bouziri et al., 2020, Galanti et al., 2021). This was extremely unforeseen, caused panic and some closures in some industries in the economy such as the hospitality sector (Alam, 2020, Wang et al., 2021). The pandemic caused some companies to cut costs and layoff some staff (Tarki et al., 2020). Organisations had to adapt to these circumstances and use innovative working styles to continue to keep functioning (Alam, 2020, Bick et al., 2020, Bloom, 2020). This made many organisations to convert to remote working, typically from a home environment to reduce individual movement to ensure compliance with government health guidelines (Bick et al., 2020). Many researchers used this opportunity to study and experiment with this type of working style, work environment and usually compare different facets to on-site office working.

1.1.2 Working from Home

Remote working does not necessarily mean that the individual must work in a home environment. However, due to the precautions set by governments majority of remote workers over the past few years have worked from home (WFH) (Bloom, 2020). WFH typically involves individuals working in a home office (Barrero et al., 2021, Bloom, 2020). This is not a new phenomenon as it's use began in the early 2000s (Niebuhr et al., 2022). During the pandemic employees have been forced to use kitchens, bedrooms and living rooms as their new makeshift home office (Birimoglu Okuyan and Begen, 2022). The global pandemic forced 3.4 billion people to WFH (Niebuhr et al., 2022). This made countries such as Ireland introduce a code of practice that from April 2021 that every Irish worker has the right to WFH, unless necessary that they attend physically (Citizen Information, 2021). This came into effect on April 1st 2021 (Citizen Information, 2021). This was accompanied by employer and employee responsibilities in accordance with the code of practice right to disconnect (Citizen Information, 2021). This change of employment legislation accentuates the impact and increased rise in WFH. Organisations were quick worldwide to adapt to the pandemic and used webcam technologies available to continue to work (Alam, 2020). Technologies such as Microsoft Teams are commonly used in many organisations using WFH working (Das et al., 2021). The option to WFH and having flexible working hours is seen as a benefit from employee perspective (Lyttleton et al., 2020). However, there are still widely debated pros and cons of WFH that need further research. There are advantages for employees who WFH such as better work-life balance and higher job satisfaction but, there are disadvantages such as creating a feasible working

environment, using new technologies such as Microsoft Teams and risk of obesity (Birimoglu Okuyan and Begen, 2022, Niebuhr et al., 2022). The literature is growing on these suggested pros and cons and further research is needed to determine their reliability and validity through different scientific methodologies.

1.1.3 WFH employee perspectives & WFH research studies

Before the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 there were key reasons as to why Human Resource Management (HRM) in organisations would implement WFH. Raišienė et al., 2020 discussed that HRM identified that WFH gives organisations competitive edge, meets needs of employees and is cost saving for the organisation. It is also time saving as employees do not need to commute to the office to work (Afrianty et al., 2022). However, for WFH to be effective there are different elements of WFH and WLB that need consideration (Raišienė et al., 2020). Raišienė et al., 2020 accentuated a need for socialisation, work-life boundaries, effective communication, and management trust to be crucial factors when WFH to be a successful working strategy. Employee trust in management is important when WFH, as lack of trust in management can enhance employee anxiety and confusion (Raišienė et al., 2020). These crucial WFH factors were supported by a more recent study by Afrianty et al., 2022. Study from Afrianty et al., 2022 and Raišienė et al., 2020 found that strong online leadership and management is needed to sustain employee positive views on WFH. WFH can increase organisational commitment if employees feel well trained in IT and have the correct digital equipment provided to them (Afrianty et al., 2022). With regards to gender, women found appreciation for being given the option to WFH with accordance with their work-life balance, this is not the same for men (Raišienė et al. 2020). Men had higher levels of unhappiness than women with the WFH prospect and thought more of career constraints and self-organisation inhibitions to WFH (Raišienė et al., 2020). Men believe that this type of working style will delay their career progression and cause more family work conflict at home (van der Lippe and Lippényi, 2020). However, the study by Raišienė et al., 2020 had a bigger sample of women than men to confirm validity and reliability. The study by Afrianty et al., 2022 was only conducted in one country, Indonesia. This makes it difficult to generalise to other countries during pandemic WFH experience. A self-report study by Etheridge et al., 2020 found that in the UK, WFH employees seen a fall in productivity alongside their decrease in mental health and well-being. This was particularly evident for women in low-income jobs with children at home (Etheridge et al., 2020). There is an inequality in gender employment as Etheridge et al., 2020 states that females are less likely to work in jobs suitable to WFH. This in turn in the current pandemic could lead to females leaving different careers and increased anxiety in females (Etheridge et al., 2020). However further study is needed on this view, and it was only conducted in the

UK society. A study by Adams-Prassl et al., 2020 found that females show lower ability than men to WFH. However, a limitation to this research is that it only used participants from three westernised countries (US, UK, and Germany) (Adams-Prasll et al., 2020). The study needs to expand to others such as Asia, South America, and Middle East to validify findings (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020).

As stated, organisations need to understand the effect that WFH is having on their business and their employees (Raišienė et al., 2020). Job satisfaction and employee productivity are key areas in which HRM must pay attention to, to keep the organisation performing. Although findings in US and Europe have shown a balanced level of productivity during the pandemic (Etheridge et al., 2020). However, it is important to contrast these findings to other research to conclude this theory. A study by Battiston et al., 2017 found that face to face interactions in the workplace (police station) lead to higher productivity. This in contrast to a previous study on WFH in 2015 by Bloom et al. found that productivity levels in a Chinese call centre averaged a 13% productivity gain. This was due to less breaks in work being taken (Barrero et al., 2021). There are limitations to both studies as both are on specific areas of employment and is difficult to generalise to most occupations. A study by Bellman and Hübler, 2021 found that there was no visible evidence of remote workings effect on job satisfaction. However, Bellman and Hübler, 2021 did identify factors which can affect WFH job satisfaction such as physical peer support in the office with tasks, mental health, and work-life balance (WLB). WFH can weaken co-worker interpersonal relationships, a face-to-face bond is more beneficial to create a peer bond (Bellman and Hübler, 2021). Bellman and Hübler, 2021 found that WLB is mostly negatively affected by WFH. Employers can improve WLB conditions for WFH employees by using contractual working hours as to not disturb "personal/family time" and this in turn will enhance job satisfaction which increase motivations which leads to a higher labour performance in the organisation (Bellman and Hübler, 2021). WFH was found by Ward (2017) to decrease employee perception of time-wasting time by commuting to the office. One participant in this study accentuated the "freedom" of WFH and its good impact on their WLB. Commuting to work was reiterated as a disadvantage to in-person office working by Afrianty et al., 2022.

1.1.4 WFH: Organisational Perspective

During this difficult adaptation period, organisations have used innovative strategies to improve and motivate staff throughout the pandemic (Azizi et al., 2021). WFH is currently viewed as a perk to retain staff and acquire new staff (Afrianty et al., 2022). This benefits the organisation and increases performance (Afrianty et al., 2022). However, it is hard for organisations to not affect employee WLB in a negative way (Bellman and Hübler, 2021). Organisations have faced many challenges from WFH, such as employee well-being, employee work-life balance, communication and continuing to meet targets and

perform on a weekly basis (Azizi et al., 2021, Khan, 2021). HRM having a clear and precise strategy to attempt to overcome these challenges is crucial (Azizi et al., 2021). As seen in some organisations, when an effective supportive strategy was not introduced during the pandemic, employee anxiety, depression and low motivation arose (Azizi et al., 2021, Khan, 2021). Employees who WFH during the pandemic period suffered with media fatigue and burn-out (Khan, 2021). HRM strategies that have been used to combat these employee difficulties when WFH are for example, fun and morale building activities, team games, communication groups on social apps such as Whatsapp and IT Support and training (Azizi et al., 2021). This is called a "playful work design" which was studied by Bakker and van Wingerden, 2021. The findings showed that this can help employees deal with stress and anxious thoughts during the pandemic (Bakker and van Wingerden, 2021). However, a limitation of this playful work design is that it was only used on a single large banking organisation which may be different to other businesses (Bakker and van Wingerden, 2021). These strategies and activities were researched by a recent study by Azizi et al., 2021 and shown that they were effective in improving employee well-being, job satisfaction and commitment to the organisation. However, they concluded that further study is needed in different cultures and societies as some societies have more facilities than others (Azizi et al., 2021). Management and leadership within an organisation are pivotal to influencing employees when WFH (Afrianty et al., 2022, Azizi et al., 2021, Raišienė et al., 2020). Managers should accentuate their own commitment therefore, motivating others to join the organisations cause (Azizi et al., 2021). This can be done by increasing number of online meetings which emphasises commitment and increases staff socialization (Delfino and van der Kolk, 2021). Support by managers and supervisors during this time was studied by Orsini and Rodrigues, 2020 and found that their support to employees WFH increased their motivation to perform from home. However, this research only drawn from one theory, Self-Determination Theory and didn't include other motivational theories into their discussion such as Maslow Hierarchy of Needs (Orsini and Rodrigues, 2020, Stewart et al., 2018). Examples of support can be letting employees have an employee voice about WFH and giving employees flexitime (Orsini and Rodrigues, 2020). This can decrease psychological pressure on WFH employees (Orsini and Rodrigues, 2020). Thus, retaining staff members (Orsini and Rodrigues, 2020). Organisational management of talent and development of internal talent is very important to retain performing employees who WFH (Azizi et al., 2021, Gallardo-Gallardo and Collings, 2021, Nangia and Mohsin, 2020). Many employees have the view that because they WFH that they are not being recognised and their career path is being eroded because of their current working style (Azizi et al., 2021, Nangia and Mohsin, 2020). This is particularly found in males than females as discussed prior by Raišienė et al., 2020. It's the managements job to ensure that talent and performing employees that there is a career path in front of them and a succession strategy within the company that they can be a part of (Azizi et al., 2021, Gallardo-Gallardo and Collings, 2021). It is important that

management find the right balance with a WFH strategy as some employees who seek promotion may over-work to be determined as a "visible" candidate for a role (Delfino and van der Kolk, 2021). In contrast, a qualitative study by Ward, 2017 found that if WFH was no longer an option, this would affect employee performance negatively. However, this study only pertains to the banking industry only, as a limitation (Ward, 2017). Organisations should use intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to retain employees who WFH (Delfino and van der Kolk, 2021, Orsini and Rodrigues, 2020). This can be pay or bonuses or intrinsic rewards such as more responsibility and challenges (Orsini and Rodrigues, 2020). Theories such as Self-determination theory and Maslow Hierarchy of needs should be studied by HRM to understand what motivates individuals to continuously perform a behaviour (Delfino and van der Kolk, 2021, Orsini and Rodrigues, 2020, Stewart et al., 2018). This understanding would create better comprehension of employees who work in a home environment wants and needs (Orsini and Rodrigues, 2020).

1.2 Recruitment

1.2.1 What is recruitment?

Recruitment is when an organisation attempts to gain more human capital to help the organisation achieve its vision and mission (Ahmad Azmy, 2018). One definition of recruitment is "is the process of collecting relevant information about work-related tasks and human characteristics needed to do the work so as to help managers determine the qualifications and types of skills needed in the recruitment process" by Dessler, 2013. Recruitment is trying to find the best candidate for a specific job in an organisation, who can perform well and increase the likelihood of the organisation achieving success (Ahmad Azmy, 2018). This is an extremely important aspect of an organisation as it determines if organisations are obtaining the right person to perform in the job (Ahmad Azmy, 2018). Ahmad Azmy, 2018 emphasises that a good HRM recruitment strategy can increase organisation performance and success. Therefore, organisations must have recruitment processes and systems in place to obtain these talented performers they need (Ahmad Azmy, 2018). Most organisations use job specifications, such as qualification and competency requirements to pinpoint a certain pool of talent (Ahmad Azmy, 2018). The more precise and specific the job specification the better the shortlist of potential candidates (Ahmad Azmy, 2018).

1.2.2 Online-Recruitment

The pandemic has caused many layoffs of staff in many different industries and increased unemployment (Fan and Nie, 2020, Tarki et al., 2020). It has stopped organisations in some scenarios from recruiting new staff for a period (Tonnar, 2020). However, some organisations kept functioning and needed to scout talented candidates to fill important roles within the company (Tonnar, 2020). Organisations have decided

to use online recruitment and selection in this time of uncertainty (Ahmed et al., 2020). This may be conducted through phone call interviews or virtual online interviews (Ahmed et al., 2020). With some organisations using video recording interviews, where the participant gets time to record their answers to interview questions (Joshi et al., 2020). Organisations have saved time and financial costs conducting interviews online and they approve its implementation (Tiller et al., 2013, Wolff and Burrows, 2021). There are also different interview methods such as a structured interview and interview rounds depending on the organisation may be used as a recruitment method (Abbas et al., 2021). This is a more traditional style of interviewing (Abbas et al., 2021). Online interviews have been shown in some cases to be more effective for the candidate than traditional interviews (Tiller et al., 2013). It has a recruitment advantage as candidates are comfortable online (Tiller et al., 2013). However, Ellen and Abdelfattah Kareem, 2020 discussed that the virtual recruitment process may also leave candidates with a disadvantage. At home distractions can cause disruption to performance in an online interview (Ellen and Abdelfattah Kareem, 2020). Other types of non-physical interviews such as phone call interviews are not the best interview strategy as the interviewer can miss communication cues than if it was a video call interview (Wolff and Burrows, 2021). However, this phone call interview process can inhibit the interviewer to be less bias to the physical appearance of the candidate (Joshi et al., 2020).

Body language is a huge component of virtual interviews as well as face-to-face interviews (Wolff and Burrows, 2021). Candidates can become overwhelmed that they may have an IT misfunction or haven't been properly understood or heard correctly (Ellen and Abdelfattah Kareem, 2020). A study by Wolff and Burrows, 2021 found that the biggest fear among candidates is not being able to communicate effectively with their interviewer. However, this sample only included medical residents (Wolff and Burrows, 2021). This has made organisations such as Allianz and Amazon provide video interview guides and tips for candidate's pre-interview to ease psychological pressure (Tonnar, 2020). Examples of tips given are active listening, picture background and appearance (Tonnar, 2020). Some HRM recruiters may not be optimally skilled conduct virtual interview assessments and analysis (Ellen and Abdelfattah Kareem, 2020). Traditional organisation recruitment practices must evolve to a concise virtual interview. In some organisations they have introduced psychometric assessments for candidates to do while at home (Edenborough, 2005, p2, Tonnar, 2020). This involves testing candidates' competencies and skills in areas such as numerical reasoning, verbal reasoning, and technical assessments (Hornsby, 2019). Organisations such as JP Morgan and Microsoft use this type of recruitment and selection (Hornsby, 2019). There are some benefits of psychometric testing such as identifying person fits for the job design, help focus further development of skills, improving employee retention and improving selection accuracy (Edenborough, 2005, p3). However, being recruited and selected from an at home environment,

candidates lose out on physical recruitment aspects such as tour of office, better in-person communication and atmosphere of the workplace (Ellen and Abdelfattah Kareem, 2020, Joshi et al., 2020). This was discussed by Bellman and Hübler, 2021 regarding the importance of employee face-to-face interactions.

1.3 On-Boarding

1.3.1 What is On-Boarding?

On-boarding involves organisations welcoming and inducting new employees into the business while also orientating and emphasizing organisational vision, mission, and objectives (Cesário and Chambel, 2019). Famous organisations such as IBM, Google and Facebook use induction to ready it's new recruits (Cesário and Chambel, 2019). It is an important phase for both the employee and the organisation as it can increase organisational trust, increase job satisfaction, and enhance commitment (Cesário and Chambel, 2019). On-boarding can be defined as "onboarding refers to the specific practices initiated by an organisation or its agents to facilitate employee adjustment to new roles" (Klein and Polin, 2012). However, some on-boarding phases or sessions can become a bit monotonous (Cesário and Chambel, 2019). Therefore, Burke, 2014 emphasises the use of gamification in on-boarding to increase interest and competitiveness. A study by Cesário and Chambel, 2019 found that organisations need to keep evaluating and innovating their on-boarding process to retain new employees and enhance employee engagement. However, a limitation of this study is that 30% of the sample population got inducted five years ago (Cesário and Chambel, 2019). Human error and false memory could influence their experience with their organisations on-boarding when they were new employees (Cesário and Chambel, 2019).

1.3.2 Online On-Boarding

On-boarding is usually a very social and group orientated process (Cesário and Chambel, 2019). However, as many organisations implemented WFH, the on-boarding process of new employees had to be undertaken from an at home environment (Carlos and Muralles, 2021). On-boarding is usually formal, tracking new hire progress and understanding of organisation vision and objectives (Carlos and Muralles, 2021). There is an informal aspect which can increase employee commitment and trust, which is building relationships with their colleagues (Carlos and Muralles, 2021). This can be activities such as going for lunch together off-site, and this makes the new employee become more comfortable in their new team (Carlos and Muralles, 2021). This was accentuated to increase job satisfaction and decrease negativity by Bellman and Hübler, 2021. Due to WFH, this is harder to achieve, and most organisations use a checklist on-boarding approach to their on-boarding process (Carlos and Muralles, 2021). The online on-boarding

process must be structured and try train and explain the organisation to the new employees. As Goodermote, 2020 mentions it is like doing induction in a "soundproof room". There is no communication apart from online communication (Goodermote, 2020). This is harder for employees to learn as they are outside the traditional high verbal communicative office environment (Goodermote, 2020). In contrast a study by Paechter and Maier, 2010 provided findings that students do prefer to learn online rather than face to face. However, this study is twelve years old and not conducted in an on-boarding situation (Paechter and Maier, 2010). A checklist approach is a numbered learning and development list of items that the employee must do from home (Carlos and Muralles, 2021). An advantage of this is that the employee can do this at their own pace and in their own time schedule (Carlos and Muralles, 2021). However, there is huge lack of human relationship connections made using this method (Carlos and Muralles, 2021). WFH, there is no passing co-workers by in the hallway, so organisations try to set up regular meetings to enhance socialization as social interaction in on-boarding is vital (Carlos and Muralles, 2021, Goodermote, 2020, Maurer, 2019). These can be formal mentor meetings to track progress, or lunch dates for colleagues (Carlos and Muralles, 2021). However, a limitation of the research is that it is very limited regarding online on-boarding experiences (Carlos and Muralles, 2021). This new area needs to be researched further.

Organisations encourage line managers and senior staff to engage with new hires to gain a good working relationship (Carlos and Muralles, 2021). Online meetings can be increased by management to stay in contact and listen to new recruits (Delfino and van der Kolk, 2021). This has been shown to reduce new hire fear and stress of a new job. However, in the study by Carlos and Muralles, 2021 it was found that new hires miss physical cues and take longer periods of time to become comfortable when on-boarding remotely. Goodermote, 2020, Emphasises that small gradual steps, online tutorials, and department e-meet and greets can be effective tactics to improve online on-boarding. Even though online on-boarding steps can be small, they must have details and good explanations for the process to be a success (Goodermote, 2020). However, a limitation of this finding is that it was only a sample of online onboarding for the medical sector (Goodermote, 2020). Graduate programmes and their orientation and induction programmes have been modified to support virtual learning and understanding (Persky et al., 2020). A study by Persky et al., 2020 found that pharmaceutical postgraduates found it difficult to understand and adapt to virtual on-boarding. Areas such as understanding core values and training developments were more difficult in an online environment (Persky et al., 2020). However, a limitation of this study is that it only used pharmaceutical postgraduates which makes it harder to generalise to other postgraduate programmes in another industry or institution (Persky et al., 2020).

1.4 WFH Organisational Support

1.4.1 Importance of team bonding and strengthening co-worker relationships

Teamwork is an essential part of any organisation (Fapohunda, 2013). It has been implemented heavily since the 1980's (Fapohunda, 2013). It was defined by Fajana (2002) as "teamwork is an integration of resources and inputs working in harmony to achieve organisational goals, where roles are prescribed for every organisation member, challenges are equally faced, and incremental improvements are sought continually". Employees must learn to work cohesively with their team members to achieve company objectives (Fapohunda, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial that the organisation implements team building and supportive co-worker dynamics to increase likelihood of reaching department targets (Fapohunda, 2013). Teamwork is still hugely valuable in WFH working style and it is still main characteristic organisations seek when recruiting new staff (Alipour et al., 2021). Alipour et al., 2021 emphasises that 63% of WFH employment requires the skill of being able to work in a team environment. Which is higher in jobs without WFH option (Alipour et al., 2021). However, even though Alipour et al., 2021 is a good descriptive study; they conclude that further research is needed on the causal relationship of increased teamwork and WFH. The change to a WFH environment could have changed team dynamics and co-worker bonds as there is no face-to-face interactions (Azizi et al., 2021, Lal et al., 2021). A study by Andrei, 2021 found that there was increased online communication between teams. These were usually done by using Microsoft teams and provided both formal and informal communication regarding work tasks and employee well-being and support (Andrei, 2021). Formal online team meet ups were not affecting performance if the daily team tasks were well coordinated and organised (Andrei, 2020). However, this study was only conducted in Romania and its workers were used to using online technologies for work (Andrei, 2021). With regards to informal communication, socializing outside of work with peers can enhance job satisfaction, especially non task orientated conversations (Bleakley et al., 2021). It allows for individuals to feel more comfortable in their team (Bleakley et al., 2021). However, one participant from this qualitative study by Bleakley et al., 2021 found that it still felt like working, talking through a laptop. Team support strategies were implemented through the pandemic to help WFH employees with their adaptations and social environment. A study by Santos and Ralph, 2022 showed that a software organisation introduced weekly entertaining strategies to upkeep comradery. These are team bonding strategies such as Project Happy Hour, Second Language Day, and Costume Meeting (Santos and Ralph, 2022). These provided gamification and a type of team therapy to support employees while WFH (Santos and Ralph, 2022). Although these strategies increased motivation and

interaction, they had drawbacks such as social pressure and were sometimes socially demanding (Santos and Ralph, 2022). Also, a limitation of these teamwork supports is that they were only used on one software team in an organisation which can be difficult to generalise. Other organisations may not find these strategies beneficial to their online teams. Additionally, upon critically analysing these team support strategies, they may not be suited to incoming recruits and graduates entering the company.

1.4.2 WFH Organisation support strategies during pandemic

This has caused many businesses to adapt and re-establish their culture (Singhal, 2020). WFH has caused many organisations to put the employee first instead of the traditional business first attitude (Singhal, 2020). Organisations realise that human capital is of huge importance when working virtually (Singhal, 2020). Therefore, companies operating from an at home environment require synchronized online communication to perform efficiently (Singhal, 2020). Azizi et al., 2021 attempted to study this area of WFH and organizational HRM strategies used towards it. They found that most organisations introduced morale builders such as social activities (Azizi et al., 2021). For example, online activities to increase morale are weekly events such as virtual fitness i.e., yoga classes (Azizi et al., 2021). Employees can socialise virtually and become physically active together online during these classes (Azizi et al., 2021). Book and photography clubs internally have been set up to show continuous socialisation within the ranks of the company (Azizi et al., 2021). This enhances organisational commitment and trust (Azizi et al., 2021). However, with flexitime this can be difficult to have all employees online at the same time for participation in this social morale builders (Azizi et al., 2021). There are also informal morning coffee/tea meetings that have been introduced to combat social isolation WFH (Lal et al., 2021). However, further study is needed if these online activities help WFH employees (Lal et al., 2021). Socializing outside of work with peers can enhance job satisfaction, especially non task orientated conversations. Hossain and Clatty, 2021 emphasised that organisations must implement mental health awareness to improve well-being of employees during the pandemic. A limitation of this is that it was only carried out with a sample of nurses who may have suffered more psychological effects than in other industries. Individual strategies such as organisations promoting self-care such as mindfulness (Hossain and Clatty, 2021). This can help employees with the negative impact of the pandemic and negative thoughts (Hossain and Clatty, 2021). Increased training and education can help employees during the pandemic (Hossain and Clatty, 2021). This can be IT training and provide IT equipment such as a monitor (Azizi et al., 2021). Managerial career progression meetings are a morale builder as it provides employee insight into their performance and career progression (Azizi et al., 2021, Delfino and van der Kolk, 2021, Gallardo-Gallardo and Collings, 2021). Contrary to this, there are some limitations with this study as it needed further empirical

evidence, to use more than just English language articles, use more than just the three databases to find literature (Azizi et al., 2021).

1.5 Current Study

While WFH has been studied in abundance throughout the two years of global Covid-19 pandemic, there is little research on student workers WFH. As shown by a review of the literature studies such as Azizi et al., 2021, Alam, 2020 and Cesário and Chambel, 2019 there is no real mention of student workers and their experience of WFH. In the USA in 2020, 40% of full-time undergraduate students were employed and 73% part-time undergraduate students were employed (IES, 2022). Most students only engage in part-time work to accommodate their studies. In March 2022 Ireland, 550,000 of the labour force are part time (Trading Economics Ireland, 2022). In 2020, some of these jobs may have turned into a WFH strategy due to covid-19. Also, students who obtained internships and graduate programmes had to work virtually. It is important to understand the implications of WFH during an internship as this type of employment is meant for practical hands-on learning of degree knowledge (ChanLin and Hung, 2015). Online internship experience has little to no literature. It is important to understand the student employee perspective WFH as to retain and improve the future workforce. To address this research gap, this study will analyse the student experience of WFH. The main objectives of this study are online recruitment, on-boarding and organisational support during WFH. Student workers can be working in a full-time/part-time role, internships, or graduate programs. As there has been many studies done on students educational learning from home, it can enhance HRM knowledge on the different lens of experience of a student attending work and learning the organisation behind a laptop screen in their living room. The results from this qualitative study can increase organisational understanding of student workers WFH experiences. This can improve organisation recruitment strategy, on-boarding processes, and organisational support systems. Thus, this knowledge can improve organisational function as areas such as recruitment have huge impact on labour turnover and job satisfaction.

1.6 Research Question

The research question of this dissertation is based around the largely unexplored students who WFH for different organisations. While there have been many studies conducted around students and educational learning from home through college and university; there is very little literature done on students who are WFH during graduate programmes, internships, full-time work, and part-time work. There is little known if student employees and WFH have the same experience as students learning academics online such as

through university online lectures. Also, there is little literature surrounding digital online recruitment, on-boarding, and support/morale activity experiences towards new graduate employees. Organisations had to keep recruiting and working throughout this period of covid-19. As recruitment is a key HRM area to improve organisation performance and motivation (Ahmad Azmy, 2018). Therefore, it will be interesting to discover the different student graduate experiences of being recruited, orientated, trained, and immersed at home. The feedback from participants can be vital to organisational improvement and engagement of new future graduate employees who are designated to a WFH environment. This study examines student employees' perspectives and subjective experiences of WFH for different organisations in professional services. The main sub objectives of the research are, to examine and understand the experiences of students in relation to three core aspects of work:

• Online recruitment

• Online on-boarding

• Online support and morale activities

2. Methodology

The methodology of a research study refers to the collection, analysis and showcasing of results (Holden and Lynch, 2004). This is usually done in either a quantitative or qualitative methodology. Etheridge et al., 2020 used a quantitative methodology while other studies such as Ward, 2017 used a qualitative approach to research WFH. While, quantitative can add greater generalisability with usually more participants, qualitative can gather further insight and knowledge into the participant perceptions of experience. This chapter will discuss how to choose the correct methodology for the analysis of student WFH experience. It will discuss the pilot study, ethical considerations and participant sample used for analysis.

2.1.1 Research Philosophy

Philosophy is the way in which an individual views the world around them (Holden and Lynch, 2004). This is particularly relevant when deciding which research method to pursue. The researcher may find the world to be influenced more by social society rather than government law and order. Especially, when the research involves human participants who have complex behaviours, thoughts, and emotions. It is pivotal to choose the correct research procedure to gain the most accurate and real-life results. Therefore, the

researcher must have a good understanding of the world around them and the target population in which they want to study (Holden and Lynch, 2004).

2.1.2 Ontology

Ontology has been a philosophical perspective since ancient Greek times (Welty, 2003). It is the science of reality. This has been defined by Gruber, 1993 as, "a specification of a conceptualization" (Welty, 2003). Reality is constantly changing as new developments and ideas have been explored leading to new limits of the known reality (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In this study a constructivist viewpoint will be the main position used as the researcher is looking at student work perspectives and subjective experiences of WFH.

2.1.3 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the nature of how knowledge is found and obtained (Becker, 1996). It looks at different ways to obtain knowledge such as perception, types of reasoning and memory (Becker, 1996). For this research study it is largely focused on participant interpretation of WFH experience. This has provided clarification that the approach of qualitative should be taken to give insight into subjective interpretations and subjective experiences WFH.

2.2 Research Method

2.2.1 Qualitative or Quantitative

Deciding the correct research method is key to ensuring that the study conducted is answering the research questions outlined. Research methodology is vital in all studies in all fields. There are two types of approaches: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative refers to more numerical collection of data from participants and uses the number of indicators from a scale or questionnaire developed to answer the research question. This method is used to gather generalisation to the findings with high participation from target population to infer result. On the other hand, qualitative method is more insightful and gains more perception of the participant. This is usually via participant subjective views on a subject. There are different types of qualitative research options such as guided interviews, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. For this study, research method needed to suit the study aims and objectives. From literature review, a qualitative approach was chosen as it can provide the correct deeper insight into the research question than quantitative numerical scales. Thus, considering the view of the world and the

research ideology of interpretation and constructivism, a qualitative approach has been deemed the most ideal research methodology. Assessing what type qualitative method to take was undertaken. Unstructured interviews were inappropriate for this study as the participant could stray off topic and it is less controlled. A structured interview approach was considered but, following a strict set of questions and answers could leave out some interesting insights and knowledge that different participants had WFH. Therefore, a semi-structured interview research method was deemed the correct qualitative approach to take.

From the analysis of the literature studies such as Ward, 2017 and Ahmad, 2021 used semi-structured interviews to gain insights into employee experiences of WFH. Their aims were to provide more knowledge and fill the literature gap on on-site work compared to off-site from homework. Semi-structured interviews involve the researcher asking open ended questions, leaving space for participants to expand and give subjective views on their experiences and thoughts on the topic suggested. However, the researcher still needs to be competent using this method and not let the participant go off research topic.

2.2.2 Hybrid Approach

While both quantitative and qualitative have their uses and systematics there are research methods such as a mixed hybrid approach. This has been used in other studies such as Swain, 2018. It has benefits such as

- Use of both quantitative and qualitative measures to infer answers to research questions using both qualitative insights and quantitative reliability.
- In HR, it can be used to research both macro and micro levels
- Provides different approaches to answering research questions and scientific comparison between both findings.
- Can develop research questions further.

Hybrid approach, while it does have its benefits can be difficult to conduct. It is a relatively new scientific research method and more understanding and use of it can provide the best experiments to utilise it. Also, it requires a knowledgeable practitioner to implement as it can be overwhelming and tricky to wield (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

2.3 Participants

This study will gather participants using convenience method of sampling. Convenience sampling method is gathering participants who are easy to ascertain. This can be via word of mouth, e-communication such

as Gmail, Instagram, Snapchat. There will be no age limit apart from all participants must be over 18 years old. Sample sizes for qualitative research is based upon the specificity of the research aims and the sparseness of the sample population (Malterud et al., 2016). Qualitative research is more about the information and knowledge that the sample holds (Malterud et al., 2016). Other qualitative WFH studies such as Ward, 2017 had 9 participants, this gives the researcher an idea of the number of participants needed to acquire the right amount of information from the specific sample of students who WFH. This study gathered 12 participants to be interviewed and analysed surpassing this figure. Participants need to be a student or ex-student during the pandemic working full-time, part-time or working in a graduate program or current student undertaking an internship. These students must be WFH or who have WFH to give insight to student WFH experience for the study.

2.4 Data Collection

 Individuals who wished to participate in the study had to complete a google doc form available via email, WhatsApp, or another social media platform. They were first greeted with an information sheet detailing their involvement in the study and what the study aims to achieve. This form also indicates that the participant can withdraw at any time from the study and their data to be erased ethically. It will include who the dissertation will be submitted to and the purpose of this submission. If individuals were content on continuing, they were then met by a consent form which they must fill out and sign to proceed further. A Microsoft Teams meeting link was scheduled and sent to the participant who has read the information sheet and signed the consent form. They would join the meeting at the specified time and given a brief introduction on the interview process and confirming their consent to begin conducting the interview. They were then thanked for their consent and asked to give their permission to start recording and transcribing the interview.

After consent, the interviewer would start asking the questions set out. This would take an average of 10-15 minutes. After completion of the interview questions the interviewer would give the participant a debrief form to read and attach contact numbers and emails of the researcher and available helplines if the study caused any mental health implications. Helplines such as Jigsaw and Pieta House were attached for participant use if necessary. The information form and debrief form will be presented via google forms. At the end of the interview, the interviewer thanked the participant for their participation in the study and time. The researcher provided time at the end of the interview if there were any questions or explaining where to find the debrief form.

2.5 Factors for consideration

- Participants must give permission to be video recorded before the researcher starts the recording process and beginning interviewing. This is for ethics and as when consent is given the researcher can transcribe the interview information for better, easier analysis.
- The researcher must indicate the start of the interview process and the time it should take to conduct the full interview. The researcher should give information on the structure of the semi-structured interview to give the participant better understanding of the process.
- The structure of the questions in terms of chronological order is important. This can make sure the interview is easily followable and doesn't seem like an unstructured interview. It can also keep the participant on a pathway of their experience of WFH. Such as 1. recruitment, 2. on-boarding, 3. team-based work.
- The researcher must give help to participants in terms of making them feel comfortable and not feel pressured to answer questions in a specific way. The research must also be able to expand on questions if the participant asks for explanation. This is called probing and can be useful to help participants understand the interview questions (Ward, 2017).

2.6 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to analyse and critique the interview questions. It allowed for participant feedback on the interview process for changes to be made such as interview time range and questions asked. Pilot studies are recommended to allow for these updates to methodology and increase chances of a better overall interview process (Bryman and Bell, 2011). One participant was used during this pilot study. This participant was a student who WFH and gave feedback on number of questions asked and timing per question to allow for more insightful information. This pilot study allowed for improvement of questions. To be rephrased to better suit the objectives of each question. An example of a question asked in this pilot was *"In general, how has your experience been WFH?"*. This was later changed to better suit the opening of the interview to the research topic and allowed for further expansion. This adaptation is easily modified in a qualitative approach unlike a quantitative approach which questions cannot be changed unless re-analysing the internal consistency and reliability of the newly modified questions. Furthering the appropriateness of a qualitative approach for this study. This allowed for practical

implications for the interviewer such as opening statements, information detailing on the study and participant involvement, and interview gained experience. This pilot study allowed for the researcher to perfect the transcription and recording devices on Microsoft Teams. This competency of the video forum allowed for better interview processes.

2.7 Data Analysis

2.7.1 Descriptive Data

Data that is collected will be put into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet which will then be used to develop a descriptive table. Descriptive statistics for age, gender and work-type will be formatted in a Harvard style table. This will give readers a clear and visual description of the demographics of participants taking part.

This table shows descriptive demographics of the participant sample, n=12.

Participant number	Gender	Age	Job Type
Participant 1	Female	22	Internship
Participant 2	Male	24	Graduate Programme
Participant 3	Male	23	Full-time
Participant 4	Male	23	Part-time
Participant 5	Male	23	Graduate Programme
Participant 6	Female	23	Graduate Programme
Participant 7	Male	23	Graduate Programme
Participant 8	Male	23	Full-time

Participant 9	Male	23	Graduate Programme
Participant 10	Female	24	Graduate Programme
Participant 11	Female	23	Full-time
Participant 12	Female	22	Full-time

2.7.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic Analysis is a type of flexible and well used data analysis method for qualitative interviews. It is a method in which the research identifies patterns or themes in the data that are indicators of common shared views or experiences among participants (Braun and Clarke, 2012, Swain, 2018). These themes are usually based around a particular question in the interview which aims to discuss a specific research question. For example, if the research question is regarding dislikes from WFH, if all participants mention how they disliked receiving emails outside of working hours due to WFH; that can be pinpointed as a topic of discussion from the data analysis. These patterns can be systematically coded and analysed to keep the research from being hard to follow. Codes can be attached to concepts and perceptions that are necessary to answer the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2012, Swain, 2018).

This method seems to be a useful and comprehensive method of data analysis. It can be easily understandable to many researchers, and it is a systematic type of analysis. Therefore, the Braun and Clarke 2012 version of thematic analysis has been chosen to be used in the qualitative semi-structured interview approach to identify themes and patterns within these discussions. These themes and common concepts identified from this process will be broken down and discussed in the findings section in further detail, while also drawing comparison from the literature. However, this usually is less time consuming with a research team rather than one individual researcher.

2.7.3 Ethical Considerations

Participants will be asked before starting the experiment to carefully read the information sheet regarding the study and what it involves for each participant. Also, the information sheet will include possible risks

associated with taking part in the study. This will keep participants fully informed and include their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. The information sheet will accentuate that the study is anonymous with only age, gender and job type being the main demographics needed for participation. The demographic for this study is not just for males and females. Other transgender, and LGBTQ+ participants are encouraged to take part as to not be discriminatory. There is no racial or ethnic discrimination in this study. All cultural backgrounds are encouraged to take part to gain different subjective insights. After reading the information form and wishing to continue knowing the factors of participation, they would then sign a consent form. This consent form details the participants involvement and consent to be videoed, recorded, and transcribed for scientific analysis. If participants feel more comfortable conducting the interview with their camera off, this is allowed.

Additionally, this section will detail the protection and security measures in place to protect the participants data for the experiment and analysation. Participant data will not be held on to longer than required for study and analysis, under the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003. If the individual does not wish to share private and confidential information such as their work life situation, this will not be questioned further. Questions have been created and modified using a pilot study and drawing from previous qualitative WFH study questions. Participants will not feel pressured into answering questions they do not wish to answer. Recordings and transcribed interviews will be kept in a locked file on the researcher's laptop, which requires a security key to enter the file. Recordings and transcriptions will be deleted as soon as the study is completed.

 At the end of the study participants will be met with a debrief form thanking them for their efforts to complete the survey and acknowledge their attempts to help the NCI third level education community and increasing WFH literature. The debrief form will include relevant numbers to contact if any participant found an element distressing. Contacts such as Samaritans and Pieta House will be included alongside the researcher's contact details for any further questions with participant data and study information.

3. Findings

This study answered the research aims. This study gave adequate insights of student WFH experiences and transitioning from college life to working online. A total of twelve participants, seven males and five females were asked questions regarding their recruitment, on-boarding and organisational support during their WFH experience. All these participants work either in an internship, graduate program or part-time, or full-time roles in professional services such as financial services. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant via Microsoft teams and the transcripts were then analysed using

thematic analysis. This method allowed for the researcher to identify key patterns in the interviews and develop themes from these.

3.2 Themes

The following are themes identified from the thematic analysis conducted:

1. Travel time is a key motivation
2. Prefer in-person social interactions
3. Online Recruitment is relaxed
4. Online On-Boarding is a detached experience
5. High Organisational Support

These themes were identified from thematic analysis of the transcribed conversations, consented by the participant. Participants were asked what they thought of WFH and advantages and disadvantages. This gave insight into their thought process and some answers varied from different individuals.

3.3 Thematic Analysis

3.3.1 Theme 1 – Travel time is a key motivation

Throughout every single interview conducted the main advantage was not having to commute into the office. As participant 9 mentioned *"You're not having to get up early and commute in and out of work"*. Increased time sleeping was a factor by participant 10 *"extra sleep"* similarly as participant 2 states *"getting up earlier and have to have breakfast and get ready. Put on the work attire and then get the dart into town or the city centre"* alongside morning routines as participant 7 mentioned *"To start my shift, I could get it if I start at 9:00 o'clock I could get up just 8:45, go down, have a quick breakfast and a coffee"*. Other participants such as 11 commented how traveling to the office is *"wasting time"*. Participant 11 also emphasised that time taken off commuting makes work *"halved"*. Cost of travel was a motivation for participants to want to WFH as participant 4 outlined *"obviously you know you don't spend money on travel and don't spend time wasted"*.

Commuting to and from the office can impact employee hobbies and interests such as sport. Participant 10 mentions *"a big positive is the flexibility"*. This was mentioned by participant 2 *"anyone who plays sport that they'll be able to tell you that you save so much time on commute"*. This was again mentioned by participant 11 *"like if I'm playing sports in the evenings, it's so much easier to just be able to go*

from home, you're ready to go. You're not wasting time commuting.". Participant 2 commented how WFH and working style depends *"on your goals"*.

3.3.2 Theme 2 – Prefer in-person social interactions

In every interview, participants mentioned how they were constantly on online calls and meetings. These would happen mostly once a week as participant 8 mentions *"had meetings every Saturday"*. As participant 7 outlined it was useful to meet up with colleagues online *"I found that like a weekly meeting, quite useful for staying on top of things"*. Sometimes the meetings weren't always formal and could be as participant 8 explains *"wasn't really work related"*. Organisations used social activities to create an online interactive environment through a **"big quiz"** as stated by participant 10. Other examples of social activities are by participant 10 who mentions *"a cocktail making class"* and participant 3 *"got a poker tournament every Friday."*. This kept **"people kind of fresh and interactive."** as stated by participant 2.

However, participants believed regardless of what online social activity was put on it was not the same as in-person socialising. As participant 10 revealed it was hard to socialise *"So, it was no social side of the first eight months. So, it kind of made it hard for us to get to know each other and like we had never met our teams in person or anything for like the first year."*. As outlined by participant 2 some people are *"be a lot more shy"* in an online environment. Participant 2 commented on how working in-person would *"make it easier for yourselves when you go out and stuff"*. Participants agreed they preferred to be out, face-to-face with their colleagues. This was outlined by participant 3 *"Friday night you're meeting people face to face in town for a few drinks."*. Also, from a communication standpoint some participants such as participant 7 found it difficult to perceive and understand their colleagues online *"online communication, it can be difficult to like, assess people's tone and how they're speaking. And, you know, it might take something the wrong way. And when they mean something mean to completely different, if you know what I mean. So, I found maybe in terms of communication."*. To sum it up, participant 10 stated *"There's no comparison to online and in person."*.

3.3.3 Theme 3 – Online Recruitment is relaxed

Each participant was asked about their online recruitment experience as a student WFH. For the most part participants found it as participant 3 states a *"bit weird"* and *"a little bit daunting"*. This was the same with participant 4 who *"found it quite strange"* by *"talking into a computer"*. Participant 5 mentioned *"worry"* about online interview issues that can occur such as that you had to make sure that *"your*

background was all clear" and fear that *"connection will go, and they won't be able to hear you".* While also to remember normal interview etiquette such outlined by participant 5 *"to dress nice".* Participant 7 mentioned however that it was better to be *"in comfort of your own room"* while preparing and conducting *"interview online".* This helped participant 9 who felt *"less nervous"* and found interviewing from home *"easier"* and *"less hassle".*

After the online interview, participants largely stated that the interview process was as participant 5 states *"more of a friendly chat".* This was supported by participant 7 who commented how their interview *"not going to be an intensive interview"* and that it was *"more of just a conversation".* Besides the *"relaxed"* (participant 12) nature of the online recruitment process some participants would still prefer to be face-to-face as participant 7 outlined *"I think I probably would prefer myself to go in and have a chat with someone in person because I feel like I'm more myself when I'm in person rather than behind the screen and talking to someone you know".* Online interviews being *"more of a friendly chat"* (participant 5) has been rooted back to some participants being offered internships previously and organisations accepting these candidates for their own graduate roles as explained by participant 2 *"had the job after the internship".* However, some participants had received their graduate or employment pre-covid, so they conducted their interview in-person as participant 10 states that they had *"interview in person"* and *"It was before COVID hit".*

3.3.4 Theme 4 – Online On-Boarding is a detached experience

Participants detailed their on-boarding experience from a home environment. Many of whom found it difficult as participant 9 states *"it was harder".* This was supported by participant 7 *"the first couple of weeks were a bit slower than they would have been if I was in the office."* and explained that it was hard to remain engaged *"you know, lose a bit of interest or something when you're when you're staring at the computer screen all day the whole time".* Participant 12 explained their learning experience as *"beneficial"* as they were shown *"kind of everything, like how the system setting up your phone, setting up your laptop, and how to like kind of do like, you know, every little thing like you're putting in your annual leave your time sheets, all that just kind of getting to know the company. And then we had e-learns to complete, which yeah, just kind of gave I suppose like they showed us the type of like behaviour that's expected like.".*

Participant 4 delved into feelings of bitterness *"I was bitter waiting around that I don't think would have been there if someone could say see you waiting around. And then I think it was quite slow get enough to get up to the speed of things.".* Participant 9 outlined it was *"hard"* that in their experience

they had to learn *"from a shared Microsoft team screen"*. Participant 6 explained similarly how they learned from isolated videos *"It was all like videos that you were sent to watch yourself and then and that was kind of it."*. Participant 6 recommended that a more *"interactive"* and *"rapport building"* on-boarding strategy might help *"the lack of relationship"*. Participant 11 outlined the same frustration mentioning *"That's what annoyed me the most, but then you're losing out on the personal aspect of it."*. Also, participant mentioned technology issues as a reason for poor on-boarding experience in a statement *"I think like with everything but like the technology just kept going if people have bad Internet, it just the whole process of on-boarding online made it just took so much longer."*. Participant 11 remarked *"Like you were just having, it was like constantly being like someone's VPN would drop or like different things solely because of the technology. So, it just added more time. So, whether you're taking time from commuting or whatever, you're adding more time"* and that this would *"delay either way"*.

3.3.5 Theme 5 – High Organisational Support

All twelve participants outlined that they received a lot of support when WFH through organisational support. Participant 12 explained that their organisation implemented *"a buddy system"* which consisted of *"support system kind of just checking in, see how you're getting on if there's any questions or any issues."*. Participant 12 appraised her firm saying, *"I think they definitely have a good support system."*. Participant 8 also included that their firm held *"weekly quizzes"* such as *"Kahoots"*. Other participants such as participant 8 explained having a *"whatsapp group"* for *"socialising and support"*. Participant 10 even had *"a social committee for like my specific department"*. Participant 6 outlined her experience *"So, you were on a team, and you had to collectively get the most number of steps for the month of July and everyone kind of made an effort and the bit of competitiveness was nice because everyone kind of made an effort to win and socialize as well. And that was good because we build relationships with people on other teams that we wouldn't usually deal with."*. However sometimes participant 6 found it *"Quite isolating at times"* but with *"team catch ups"* which was *"Nice cause you got to meet people who you wouldn't usually deal with on a day-to-day basis"*.

Participant 6 outlined that their organisation aided in *"ergonomic kind of setup of your desk."*. This was expanded on by participant 7 who explained that *"they'll send out all the equipment to desk in the chair and what's necessary for you to complete your normal day's work."*. This was the case for participant 12 also *"they gave like laptop, headset and mobile."*. Participant 11 received *"a keyboard, second screen"* and a *"mouse"*. There was also *"IT Supports"* (participant 11). Participant 11 mentioned *"there was*

support there" even if ***"it's like the silliest of question"***. Participant 8 also had an *"IT team"* that were ***"very quick"*** and would ***"replacing equipment, sent out you next day"***.

3.3.6 Summary –

Participants found WFH experience to have its advantages and disadvantages. Advantages such as not having to ***"commute"*** (participant 9) and disadvantages such as ***"lack of relationship"*** (participant 6). There were relevant themes showing throughout the semi-structured interview process. While these themes build on new factors influencing student WFH experience, it also answers the relevant research aims of online-recruitment, online on-boarding and organisational support.

4. Discussion

In this section, all the themes found from the present study will be discussed. The discussion shall be drawing from the findings of the study and discussing research objectives. While also comparing to previous literature. Limitations of the current study will be presented and discussed. This study showcased that there are key factors that can alter the experiences of students WFH in professional services. The qualitative thematic analysis identified five key themes from the semi-structured interviews with the twelve participants. The first two themes identified add to the literature of student WFH experiences regarding their motivations to WFH and their social behavioural preferences for work. The last three themes, answer the research objectives of student online recruitment, online on-boarding and organisational support for students who WFH.

4.2 Theme 1 – Travel time is key motivation

This theme was not a key vocal point of the study and its research objectives. Yet, it was a reoccurring theme in all twelve participant semi-structured interviews. Participants all remarked how they viewed travelling to and from the office as a disadvantage. As participant 10 mentions you get ***"extra sleep"*** not commuting into the office. Participant 10 similarly outlined how WFH is better for WLB as ***"a big positive is the flexibility"***. This was studied in previous research by Lyttleton et al., 2020 which supported this finding as it was viewed as an advantage to WFH for employees. Organisations use flexibility as an employee benefit and use it to advertise new positions. Thus, attracting more talented candidates. WFH saved employee time and financial cost of commute as outlined by participant 4 ***"you don't spend money on travel and don't spend time wasted"***. This is linked to a study by Afrianty et al., 2022 who found this aspect of WFH beneficial for employees too. Even though a limitation of the study by Afrianty et al., 2022 was that it only used one country (Indonesia) to gather participants. This current study supports its

finding on employee commute perspectives especially as they are from different cultural backgrounds. However, further study is needed to make the finding more generalisable to other countries as this finding is from Indonesian and Irish societies.

As participant 7 outlined, they preferred to go downstairs just before their shift started and make ***"breakfast and a coffee"***. This addresses the element of WLB and what employees would rather their work-life day to be. This was found in previous studies such as Bellman and Hübler, 2021 to enhance job satisfaction. However, Bellman and Hübler, 2021 emphasise that organisations find it difficult not to interfere with an employee's WLB regardless of what strategy they implement. This study accentuates the key role WLB has as a reason to want to WFH, but further study is needed on different WFH strategies and how they affect WLB. Other participants in this study such as participant 2 discussed how WFH is effective if it is aligned with ***"your goals"***. This was mostly found to be regarding hobbies and interests such as sport. As participant 11 commented not having to commute was better for their WLB on the days they had sports in the evening time ***"like if I'm playing sports in the evenings, it's so much easier to just be able to go from home, you're ready to go. You're not wasting time commuting."***. Raišienė et al., 2020 found that WLB is a crucial factor in maintaining a successful work strategy and not commuting is a factor to maintain employee motivation to WFH. This finding emphasises the importance of employee perception of time management and work-life boundaries and is supported by previous research such as Bellman and Hübler, 2021.

4.3 Theme 2 – Prefer in-person social interactions

Theme 2 emerged as a clear reoccurring pattern in the interviews with participants. Social interactions and social life with peers from work is a common and sought-after aspect from findings in this study. Participant 10 mentioned how WFH ***"made it hard for us to get to know each other"*** and that ***"There's no comparison to online and in person."***. This was reiterated by participant 2 who stated that regardless of online social communication that peers were still ***"a lot more shy"***. This reflects a study by Carlos and Muralles, 2021 who discussed how organisations using a WFH strategy tried to set up more regular meetings to keep this social aspect alive. However, while participants in this study found appreciation for organisation attempts for online social interaction, they preferred to be face-to-face with peers. The organisation saves costs and time implementing a WFH strategy but studies such as Battiston et al., 2017 emphasise better productivity being face-to-face in the workplace. However, this finding by Battiston et al., 2017 was in a police station setting, not professional services. Productivity was found to be 13% better in a call centre when employees WFH. However, this was only in a Chinese society (Bloom et al., 2015).

Additionally, the statement by participant 10 that WFH made the social aspect **"hard"** supports findings by Goodermote, 2020 who addressed the factor of employees being out of their social norms. Being physically present was mentioned by participant 3, who would rather be in an in-person social environment such as a **"Friday night, you're meeting people face to face in town for a few drinks."**. Participant 2 also supported this view stating that being physically out with work colleagues socializing would **"make it easier for ourselves"**. Socializing outside of work was found in previous literature by Bleakley et al., 2021 to enhance employee job satisfaction. Bleakley et al., 2021 additionally found how it would allow employees to be more comfortable, which aligns with the statement by participant 2. However, due to the nature of the pandemic outside social interactions became scarce (Alam, 2020). Organisations had to use new online social innovations to maintain and build employee morale (Azizi et al., 2021). Introducing playful work designs and increasing online meetings to attempt to address this social drawback (Azizi et al., 2021, Bakker and van Wingerden, 2021). This theme addresses the human need for face-to-face social interaction and that current online communication has not satisfied this human need. Even though organisations in this study introduced more meetings and online events, this still didn't meet employee social expectations.

4.4 Theme 3 – Online Recruitment is relaxed

Online recruitment was found to be prevalent in this study and it directly addresses the first research aim. Participants views on online recruitment varied as some participants such as participant 9 found being interviewed from home **"easier"** and made them feel **"less nervous"** being in a comfortable environment. This in contrast to a study by Ellen and Abdelfattah Kareem, 2020 who found that interviewing from home can affect interview performance negatively due to at home distractions. Participant 3 found interviewing from home **"a little bit daunting"** and participant 5 emphasised their **"worry"** towards it. This fear factor was discussed previously by Wolff and Burrows, 2021. Candidates get increased anxiety and nervousness leading up to an online interview. However, further study is needed on the specific triggers of online interview process. Triggers can be talking to a laptop screen, not sensing social cues, and the prospect of IT failures. Organisations can support potential candidates by sending some information on the online interview process. Participants experienced a different type of recruitment approach than previously discussed structured interviews by Abbas et al., 2021. Online recruitment of participants was found to be more relaxed as informal recruitment approaches were mostly taken. Examples of these approaches are participants having one online interview, which as participant 7 outlined was **"more of just a conversation"** and was told in advance that it wasn't going to be an **"intensive interview"**. This is different from traditional recruitment processes (Tiller et al., 2013) and

supports the previous critical analysis of organisations online interviewing. Participant 5 also supported this finding as they commented how their interview process was **_"more of a friendly chat"_**.

However, some participants still prefer to be in-person getting interviewed such as participant 7 who felt they could be **_"more myself"_** in-person. Participant 3 found the online interview experience **_"weird"_** and as participant 4 stated it was **_"strange"_** talking into a computer screen instead of having a person sitting physically across from you. This variation of view on interviews emphasises that different individuals have different anxieties pre-interview. Participants may have found the online interview **_"strange"_** (participant 4) as they could have a pre-empted expectation of the online interview experience. As discussed by Tiller et al., 2013 organisations save time and financial costs recruiting online however, their online recruitment process needs further evaluation to successfully assess the candidate sitting at home. Organisations implemented this virtual type of recruitment method due to the pandemic however, it is unknown if this relaxed informal approach is due to awareness of the candidate mental health and well-being during this difficult period or if it is due to untrained online interviewer practitioners as outlined by Ellen and Abdelfattah Kareem, 2020. Perhaps, a recorded interview question approach outlined by Joshi et al., 2020 could decrease candidate anxiety to not being in an in-person setting. Further research is needed on video recorded interview approach to confirm such conclusions.

4.5 Theme 4 – Online On-Boarding is a detached experience

Participants found online on-boarding to be relatively isolating and a detached learning experience. Previous literature such as Cesário and Chambel, 2019 accentuate how on-boarding is meant to be a social and team bonding type process. Peers get to interact and socialise while learning and developing within the organisation (Carlos and Muralles, 2021). However, online on-boarding was quite a different experience as outlined by participant 6 **_"lack of relationship building"_** in their online on-boarding experience. This was reoccurring as participant 11 reflected on their frustration that they were losing out on meeting people and socialising, mentioning the absence of **_"personal aspect"_**. Previously mentioned by Carlos and Muralles, 2021 and Goodermote, 2020 who emphasised the lack of social interaction and social impact on new recruits. In past research increased online meetings can be implemented to address this isolating process (Carlos and Muralles, 2021). This made participants such as participant 4 **_"bitter"_** being on-boarded in this **_"slow"_** process.

HR departments should make sure that their on-boarding is engaging as to not frustrate their newly hired employees. This dissatisfaction could lead to poor performance and employee engagement. From a learning perspective, participant 9 stated they had **_"videos"_** to watch to learn about the organisation,

which they found *"hard"* due to it being on a *"screen"*. This was reiterated by participant 7 who found it boring as they would *"lose a bit of interest or something when you're when you're staring at the computer screen all day the whole time"*. This checklist approach seems to have been taken by most organisations operating online and this was explained by Carlos and Muralles, 2021 to be very limiting in terms of peer interaction and relationship building. However, findings by Carlos and Muralles, 2021 are limited as they are only in relation to librarian faculty online on-boarding. Further research on professional services online on-boarding is necessary as there is a small number of literatures currently available.

This finding reflects the position by Persky et al., 2020 that online on-boarding can be difficult for students to adapt to and engage in. Participant 11 emphasised that in their experience it was irritating how the technology such as *"VPN"* and *"bad internet"* caused the on-boarding to be time consuming. This is an area that organisations have had to address due to the WFH situation. Technology and IT training is important during WFH. However, evidence from this study shows that further development of IT is necessary to make WFH a smooth process. Online on-boarding has been shown to be a frustrating and a socially narrow process. This has impacted participant job satisfaction as it needs more social interaction during this process. As discussed by Maurer, 2019 social morale in early on-boarding is important. To conclude, Participant 6 outlined the online on-boarding process needs to be more focused on *"rapport building"* rather than an isolated learning process.

4.5 Theme 5 – High Organisational Support

The final theme identified was that organisations in professional services gave participants high levels of support during their WFH period. This theme answered the last research objective which was what was student worker experience of organisational support while WFH. Participant 12 emphasised how they felt they had a *"good support system"* and that their organisation implemented a *"buddy system"* with the previous year's holder of the position. This gave participant 12 someone who was constantly *"checking in"* on their progress and any problems or queries. This was mentioned by Carlos and Muralles, 2021 to be important for new hires. Mentoring and coaching new hires is pivotal to new hire success in their new role. Participant 8 discussed how they received support from their organisation by a *"Whatsapp"* group for *"socialising and support"*. This has been previously supported by Bleakley et al., 2021 who stated that informal outside of work conversations positively affected employees job satisfaction. Also, Lal et al., 2021 stated that other informal types of social activities can help increase job satisfaction. Participant 8 remarked their organisation implemented a *"weekly quiz"*. Other types of online social activities were implemented by organisations such as *"cocktail making class"* in participant 10's experience and a team

step challenge in participant 6's experience who found it increased *"competitiveness" "socialising"* and *"build relationships with people on other teams that we wouldn't usually deal with."*. Gamification has been outlined by previous studies such as Santos and Ralph, 2022 to support employees who WFH. This increases employee engagement and online socialising. Azizi et al., 2021 mentioned how weekly events can be effective morale builders. This is important as participant 6 stated that WFH *"can be quite isolating at times"*.

These social activities and team bonding strategies implemented by organisations can help employees who WFH with their mental health and wellbeing. Perhaps, organisations who use WFH strategy should use their saved finances on these activities to maintain employee job satisfaction WFH. Evidence from the interviews shows that organisations have changed their needs to that of the employee. This supports previous literature by Singhal, 2020 emphasising organisations changing their ethos and culture to concentrate more on employee needs. Other types of organisational support participants received was equipment and IT support systems for their WFH office space. Participant 8 accentuated that their *"IT team"* was *"quick"*, even at *"replacing equipment"*. While others such as participant 12 received equipment to help their home workspace such as *"laptop, headset and mobile"*. This was mentioned by Azizi et al., 2021 as a way in which organisations could support their WFH employees. This finding shows that organisations gave it their best attempt to support employees who WFH during the pandemic in a few different ways. However, their saved financial capital should be concentrated on further innovation of WFH support strategy.

4.6 Study Objectives –

This study directly addressed the main research question of "Student experience WFH – online recruitment, online on-boarding and WFH organisational support in professional services". As there was little research done on the topic previously. Participants gave their subjective experience and perspectives WFH, and this adds valuable knowledge to the growing WFH literature. This study has provided key insights into student WFH experiences such as their motivations, ideal WLB, workplace social life, online recruitment, online on-boarding and organisational support WFH.

4.6.1 Objective 1 – Online Recruitment

The first research aims of addressing the student experience of online recruitment was achieved. This study received insight into the relaxed nature of the recruitment process as outlined by participant 12 *"relaxed"*. Online recruitment was not as structured as traditional recruitment processes. Participants

outlined how it contained one interview that was as participant 7 put it *"more of a conversation"*. Participants gave the researcher insights into their feelings about being interviewed online as some found it worrying. The data showed that organisations took a more informal friendlier approach to interviewing, and this allowed for most candidates to feel more relaxed and a bit less estranged to be talking to a person behind a laptop screen.

4.6.2 Objective 2 – Online On-Boarding

The second research aim of gaining insight into student online onboarding experience was fulfilled. Online on-boarding was discovered to be quite disengaging and consisted of *"videos"* to look back through for help and learning, as participant 6 explained. Organisations took a checklist approach in most cases, and this allowed this usually social process to cause lack of engagement from new student employees, as participant 7 remarked *"lose a bit of interest"*. This was frustrating as participant 11 explained that the *"personal aspect"* was gone. There was clear evidence that online on-boarding was not as innovated and developed as other HR areas and this caused new hires such as participant 4 to become *"bitter"* at this *"slow"* process.

4.6.3 Objective 3 – WFH Organisational Support

The last research aims to be answered was what was the level of organisational support for students WFH. This was found in this study to be of a high standard. Organisations targeted mental health, physical health, employee competence WFH, employee IT assistance, social morale and WFH office equipment. As participant 12 outlined *"I felt I had a good support system"*. Organisations would implement challenges and social activities such as *"weekly quizzes"* (participant 8) and even a *"cocktail making class"* (participant 10) to address the cut off social element of WFH. Organisations would innovate and improve their IT departments to become faster and more efficient as participant 8 outlined that they would be *"quick"* and replace their equipment *"the next day"*. It was transparent from the interviews that participants had a supportive experience as organisations made it pivotal to protect and support employees WFH health and wellbeing.

4.7 Limitations –

As in every piece of research conducted there are research limitations and confounding variables to studies. Addressing the limitations of a study is important as it gives critical analysis of the research and allows the researcher and the reader to spot more ideas for future research. This can be regarding any

facet of the area of research for example a new study using a quantitative approach to this research question. The main research limitations are addressed below:

- Participants were not currently being recruited and on-boarded during the study. This only allowed for participants to use their memory of the process and try reflecting on their experiences. This can allow for human error and false memories to distort the true nature of their experience. At minimum the period since being recruited was one year ago.

- Some participants were recruited and on-boarded before the pandemic. This meant that their experience of these processes was face-to-face and in the office. This meant that they could not provide any insight into online recruitment or online on-boarding as they did not undergo this experience. This meant that there was limited experience in these areas for the researcher to analyse and draw conclusions upon.

- The technological side of the interviewing process using Microsoft teams was not always fully functioning to optimal potential. Some interviews and their recordings froze and even loss of connection during the interview was a problem for some participants. Also, some participants were not familiar with the online forum and found it difficult to join the Microsoft teams call in some circumstances. The transcription option of Microsoft teams also sometimes changed participant words and sentences. This added time to the researcher to fix the transcription.

- There were more males than females in this study. This can make it harder to generalise to the overall student WFH population.

- All participants were working in Ireland. This makes it difficult for this piece of research to generalise to other countries such as UK. There can be different student WFH experiences in different societies. This study can only be used as a comparison to other countries.

- All participants worked in professional services. This makes it harder to generalise to ALL students who WFH as there can be students who work in other services from home. The online recruitment, online on-boarding and WFH organisational support can be different to professional services.

4.8 Conclusion

To conclude, this study accomplished answering the research question "Student WFH experiences in online recruitment, online on-boarding and WFH organisational support in professional services". The research objectives such as online recruitment, online-onboarding and WFH organisational support were complied with as participants gave their subjective experience and other key details of these HR organisational processes. The qualitative approach gave the study better insight through participant interpretation and ability to expand on questions asked in the semi-structured interview. This study has expanded the WFH literature as it gives key insights into student experiences being recruited and on-boarded online. This can allow for organisations to improve these processes and identify shortcomings of their current online recruitment and online on-boarding strategies. These findings can make professional service organisations make their recruitment team more aware of candidate fears and nerves and even introduce new interview techniques. Also, organisations can implement newer online on-boarding strategies other than a checklist strategy that uses more peer social and engaging material than just videos to watch from home. Organisations that save costs on premises can concentrate finances on WFH support and innovation. Researchers can identify interesting findings and begin research on a new area of student WFH.

A surprising finding from this study is the length of commitment organisations would go to support their student workers. Evidence shown in the interviews shown that organisations attempted to deliver their support in many different areas of work-life to maintain employee morale during the pandemic WFH period. This can be illustrated in their introduction of online social activities; IT equipment support and constant online communication. As online recruitment and online on-boarding was found to be quite relaxed and not as interactive, this was an interesting finding in contrast to WFH organisational support for student hires. Another surprising finding was the impact travel has on employee perception of the organisation and job satisfaction WFH. Although it was known not having to commute was a factor for employees preferring to WFH, it was mentioned numerous times throughout participant interviews as an advantage to WFH. Other aspects such as getting extra sleep and WLB were other known employee WFH advantages but are not on par with not having to travel in and out of the office. Perhaps, a further study could be conducted on employees in professional service travel time and job satisfaction to add to this research finding.

The qualitative method used fitted the purpose of the study perfectly, as it gave the participants a chance to expand on their experience rather than just rate it on a questionnaire. A quantitative approach would have not allowed for further expansion of online recruitment, online on-boarding or WFH organisational support. However, perhaps the semi-structured interview questions could have had more sub-questions allowing for further breakdown and analysis of student WFH experience. The interview could have contained more questions to allow for further in-depth explanation of participant answers. However, this would be more time consuming. Future study could also be conducted in-person as technical difficulties were a definite drawback from the methodology. This could allow for participants to be less nervous about IT difficulties during the interview process. A hybrid approach to this research question could additionally allow for numerical ratings of experience as well as participant expansion of the experience. This giving more data to the researcher to allow for more accurate findings. However, a skilled practitioner is needed for this methodology. As a student population was the key population for this sample, another new study could use a different target population. This study allows other researchers to use the same method on a different sample, such as non-students, or students in different countries to allow for comparison of experience and support WFH. Particularly, in WFH organisational support. It would be interesting to see if other professional services offer the same commitment to maintain employee morale in other countries or if it is just a main HR aspect in Ireland.

4.9 Recommendations

This section details the recommendations for professional services organisations to introduce and develop to improve their online experience for students. As seen in this study there are key motivations and factors that affect student experience WFH. These were expressed in the interview process and some themes were more prevalent than others. Therefore, these findings give the researcher an insight into the student participants wants and needs WFH and how it can be improved. This is in relevance to online recruitment, online on-boarding and WFH organisational support. The following recommendations have been broken up into three parts: Online Recruitment, Online On-Boarding and WFH Organisational Support.

4.9.1 Recommendations for Online Recruitment

Although organisations did not have a choice during the pandemic to conduct recruitment processes from an online environment. This gave them a good opportunity to evaluate their recruitment process and adaptation skills. For instance, participants emphasised the relaxed approach taken by organisations in

terms of their online recruitment process. This may be due to awareness of candidate anxiety or just inexperienced online practitioners. Organisations want their recruitment process to give them the best insight into the candidate and their skills and competencies. A recommendation is that organisations could use practical online competency exercises for the candidate to complete from home and send back to the HR team. This could then show candidate ability and decrease anxiety if they progressed on to an online interview. Also, an advantage of this is that organisations save time and costs as they are engaging in more suitable candidates who have showed ability to do the job via completion of the online exercises.

A second recommendation is that organisations need to train and develop HR recruitment practices for online formats. This can help the recruitment process as there are skilled HR recruiters conducting phone call interviews, online exercises, and online interviews. This type of training can provide the interviewer with more awareness of candidate anxieties and fears of being interviewed from an at home environment. This awareness can be expressed to the candidate through the interview link email message to reduce anxiety and fears. Thus, giving the candidate the best opportunity to perform and give an engaging interview.

4.9.2 Recommendations for Online On-Boarding

Online on-boarding was accentuated to be very monotonous and not interactive enough. As on-boarding is usually an engaging and social phase of induction this needs significant improvement. The participants in this study emphasised their frustration at losing out on social aspects and peer interaction. A recommendation is to use a team approach strategy to online on-boarding. This involves putting new hires into teams to help each other complete learning tasks and projects. This will activate peer learning which will enhance knowledge obtained. These tasks can involve quizzes on how to log your annual leave or how to clock-in and this can be a competitive engaging team exercise while also inducting new employees.

Another recommendation is to give new employees chances to meet people from new departments and learn the overall cogs of the business model. This will give new hires a comprehensive understanding of the organisation from different company backgrounds. This can be done by having the new hire listen and engage in other department meetings while also asking questions. A good idea could be to set a target number of questions new employees must reach each week to keep the on-boarding as interesting and informative as possible.

4.9.3 Recommendations for WFH Organisational Support

Organisational support to an employee working from home is vital. This helps employee morale and job satisfaction. Throughout this study participants shown a huge appreciation for the support they received while working in a home environment. Examples of supports mentioned were social activities, equipment, and regular meetings. Some of these supports were very innovative and impactful. However, organisations need to make sure that these events aren't always after working hours or on weekends as this can inhibit interaction. Therefore, analysis of the optimal day and time of day to conduct supportive events and activities for each individual organisation needs research. Organisations could also for example send out gift baskets and discounts to employees to emphasise their appreciation for the employees WFH. This can be done using finances saved on renting/owning premises.

Another recommendation is for the organisation to use more physically active online social events as some participants felt that they were still in work as they were sitting down at their laptop on a call with people from work. Organisations should add more challenges such as the daily step challenge mentioned in the study. This is engaging and supports employee mental and physical health.

5. Personal Learning Statement

The researcher found that this study was influential on their view of WFH. This study engaged the researcher in different aspects of academic learning and development. It was extremely interesting to gain insight into student experiences WFH. These insights gave the researcher better grasp on what advantages and disadvantages students find WFH. Also, it gave feedback and analysis on online organisational processes such as online recruitment for example. It wasn't always an easy next step or quick fix to many challenges that arose during the research process.

Overcoming these challenges allowed for personal growth and increased self-belief in ability to carry out a piece of research. Examples of challenges faced were setting up interviews, conducting interviews, analysing the data, and drawing engaging conclusions from the findings.

If the study was to be repeated by the researcher there are some small changes that the researcher would implement. These minor changes are a result of learning from the current study and identifying drawbacks and limitations of the study.

However, the researcher overall found that the study was a great learning experience academically but also personally as they developed their interview ability and competency using different online forums such as Microsoft Teams.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Appendix 1 - Pilot Questions

1. In general, how has your experience been WFH?
2. How did you find the online recruitment of your internship/grad programme/part-time work in your experience?
3. Did you find any parts beneficial or difficult to you as a student WFH, during the online recruitment process?

4. After receiving the job, how was your on-boarding experience in an at home environment?

5. Did you find it easy to understand or was it more difficult being on your own physically, during on-boarding?

6. Did you receive much organisational supports form your team, supervisor, or other management during WFH?

7. Was there any clubs or societies or online activities for you to join and socialize with your peers online? Was this beneficial in your opinion?

8. In your opinion, what innovations or improvements can organisations make to make this Student transition to WFH easier?

7.2 Appendix 2 - Final Dissertation Interview Questions

Interview Questions – Dissertation x18701281

1. Tell me a little about job, responsibilities, and typical day to day duties

2. If you worked in the office previously how was working from home (WFH) different

3. In general, how has your experience been WFH? (positive/negative/challenges/overcoming challenges)

4. Looking specifically at online recruitment tell me about your online recruitment your internship/grad programme/part-time work.

5. Did you find any aspects beneficial or difficult to you as a student WFH, during the online recruitment process?

6. After receiving the job, how was your on-boarding experience in an at home environment?

7. What were the key challenges with on-boarding from home? Were there benefits? Do you feel you missed out or gained anything from the online setting for on-boarding?

8. If you have had physical on-boarding before, what were the key differences to this online experience

9. In terms of organisational support when working from home- can you tell me what that looked like?

In terms of team, manager, or supervisor support, how did this (or not) manifest in the online space?

10. Was there any clubs or societies or online activities for you to join and socialize with your peers online? Was this beneficial in your opinion?

11. In your opinion, what innovations or improvements can organisations make to make this Student transition to WFH easier?

Anything further to add about experiences of WFH?

Demographic information:

Gender –

Age –

Job Type/Sector –

7.3 Appendix 3 – Email/Message sent to potential participants

Hello, I hope you are well and enjoying your summer!

I am an NCI Masters student in HRM, and I am wondering if you would like to take part in my dissertation. This will involve being available for a semi-structured interview that will have the interviewer (me) ask questions about your student Working from Home (WFH) experience. If you are interested in participating, please let me know and I shall send on relevant information and consent form alongside a Microsoft Teams link for you to join at a scheduled time. If there is any time or date that would suit you best, do not hesitate to let me know.

Have a nice day,

Kind Regards,

Karl Stanley – HRM master's student of NCI.

7.4 Appendix 4 - Information Sheet

Hello, my name is Karl Stanley, and I am a postgraduate final year student studying Human Resource Management in The National College of Ireland, Dublin.

The title of this study is "Students Working from Home (WFH) Experiences in professional services: Online recruitment, Online On-boarding and Organisational WFH Support".

This Study is aimed to study subjective experiences of students working from home (WFH). Students can be part-time workers or working in internships and graduate programs.

To participate in this study, you must give consent to be used as a participant. You must also be competent and not be under the age of 18. This study is an anonymous study with only relevant demographics needed: Age, Gender, Job Type. All data from the study will be treated confidentially. The data from all participants will be compiled, analysed using Excel and submitted in a dissertation to the HRM Department in the School of Business. No participant's data will be identified by name at any stage of the data analysis or in the final report. This will be done by using your answers to the relevant questions in a semi-structured interview method that has been deemed appropriate by the NCI Ethics Committee. This experiment does not use any type of deception, but can possibly cause some distress such as anxiety, depression & have a negative impact on self-esteem. Participants have the right to withdraw at any time during this study, before submitting with no consequences.

Participants are also encouraged to ask questions if they do not understand the study and feel free to contact me x18701281@student.ncirl.ie. This study does not involve any coercion or external influence or reward to participate in this study.

7.5 Appendix 5 - Consent Form

In agreeing to participate in this research I understand the following:

This research is being conducted by Karl Stanley, a postgraduate student at the School of Business, National College of Ireland.

The method proposed for this research project has been approved in principle by the Departmental Ethics Committee, which means that the Committee does not have concerns about the procedure itself as detailed by the student. It is, however, the above-named student's responsibility to adhere to ethical guidelines in their dealings with participants and the collection and handling of data.

If I have any concerns about participation, I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw at any stage.

I have been informed as to the general nature of the study and agree voluntarily to participate.

There are no known expected discomforts or risks associated with participation.

All data from the study will be treated confidentially. The data from all participants will be compiled, analysed, and submitted in a report to the HRM Department in the School of Business. No participant's data will be identified by name at any stage of the data analysis or in the final report.

At the conclusion of my participation, any questions or concerns I have will be fully addressed.

I recognize the age bracket of this study is 18 + years of age to participate.

I may withdraw from this study at any time and may withdraw my data at the conclusion of my participation if I still have concerns.

7.6 Appendix 6 - Opening Interview statement

Hello, thank you for being willing to take your time to participate in this study. If you have any questions before we start, you can ask now. I will tell you when, I will start the recording and transcription. I am going to ask questions about your student WFH Experience. If there are any questions you do not wish to answer you do not have to. If you are happy to continue to participate still, we can begin the interview.

7.7 Appendix 7 – Debrief Form

Thank you for participating in this anonymous study. This research will be used for a final year dissertation to be viewed by the HRM Department in the School of Business of NCI.

If you decide after completing this study that you wish to withdraw your data, the contact details of the researcher are below. Your data will not be used and will be deleted.

If any participant has any questions or queries, please feel no hesitation to contact me at x18701281@student.ncirl.ie. If you feel any distress or psychological anxieties here are some helplines that can help you:

Samaritans Ireland 01 671 0071

Aware 1800 80 48 48

Jigsaw Dublin 01 658 3070.

Submission of Thesis to Norma Smurfit Library, National College of Ireland

Student name: Karl Stanley

Student number:18701281

School: The NCI School of Business

Course: Masters in Human Resource Management full time level 9

Degree to be awarded: Masters in Human Resource Management QFI Level 9

Title of Thesis: Student Experiences WFH: Recruitment, On-Boarding and WFH Organisational Support in Professional Services

An electronic copy of your thesis will be lodged in the Norma Smurfit Library and will be available

for consultation. This electronic copy will be accessible in NORMA norma.ncirl.ie the National

College of Ireland's Institutional Repository. In accordance with normal academic library practice

all theses lodged in the National College of Ireland Institutional Repository (NORMA) are made

available on open access.

I agree to an electronic copy of my thesis being available for consultation within the library. I also

agree to an electronic copy of my thesis being made publicly available on the National College of

Ireland's Institutional Repository NORMA.

Signature of Candidate: Karl Stanley

For completion by the School:

The aforementioned thesis was received by:

Date:

This signed form must be appended to all copies of your thesis submitted to your school.