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ICADE

**Productivity Post-Pandemic.
Navigating Work Environments:
A comparison of in person, remote and
hybrid work strategies.**

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Resumen

La pandemia del COVID-19 ha acelerado el cambio en las estrategias de entorno laboral adoptadas por las organizaciones. En los últimos años hemos visto a un aumento del número de organizaciones que adoptan estrategias remotas e híbridas. Este documento investiga la relación entre las estrategias de entorno de trabajo y la productividad de los empleados, al tiempo que destaca los diversos factores que influyen en la productividad. Además, identifica los retos asociados a las estrategias de trabajo presencial, a distancia e híbrido. A través de un estudio de la literatura y las teorías anteriores, junto con 8 entrevistas cualitativas con empleados de PwC Irlanda, donde se ha adoptado un enfoque híbrido, las conclusiones revelan que un modelo híbrido es el enfoque óptimo para PwC y organizaciones similares. Los resultados ponen de relieve cómo se mantienen los niveles de productividad en un entorno híbrido, con los empleados destacando la flexibilidad, el apoyo tecnológico, la orientación de gestión y liderazgo, y una configuración óptima de la WFH como impulsores clave de la productividad. Los retos de un entorno híbrido que se desprenden del estudio son la garantía de confidencialidad y el establecimiento de la DPM en viviendas alquiladas, las distracciones, y los retos sociales. Los resultados indican además que la satisfacción laboral de los empleados se deriva de la flexibilidad en el trabajo, los incentivos y ventajas de las organizaciones, una cultura empresarial positiva y el apoyo de los directivos, que permiten a los empleados mantener el equilibrio entre la vida laboral y personal. La motivación de los empleados se debe a sus sentimientos de autonomía, competencia, y afinidad. Este trabajo indica que los empleados prefieren un modelo híbrido, ya que enriquece la productividad y la flexibilidad. Este estudio aporta ideas útiles para las organizaciones que pretenden adoptar una estrategia de entorno laboral nueva y más flexible en una sociedad postpandemia.

Palabras Claves: Productividad, Entorno laboral, Pandemia, COVID-19, Postpandemia Trabajo a distancia, Trabajo híbrido, Trabajo desde casa (WFH), Motivación, Satisfacción laboral, Equilibrio vida-trabajo (WLB), Flexibilidad.

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the change in work environment strategies adopted by organisations. In recent years we have seen increasing numbers of organisations adopting remote and hybrid strategies. This paper investigates the relationship between work environment strategies and employee productivity, while highlighting the numerous factors influencing productivity. Furthermore, the paper identifies challenges associated with in-person, remote and hybrid working strategies. Through a study of previous literature and theories, alongside 8 qualitative interviews with employees of PwC Ireland, where a hybrid approach has been adopted, the findings reveal that a hybrid model is the optimal approach for PwC and similar organisations. The findings highlight how productivity levels are maintained in a hybrid setting, with employees highlighting flexibility, technological support, managerial and leadership guidance, and an optimal WFH set up as key drivers of productivity. The challenges of a hybrid setting that emerge from the study are that of ensuring confidentiality and the WFH set up in rented housing, distractions, and social challenges. The findings further indicate that employee job satisfaction derives from flexibility in work, incentives and perks from the organisations, a positive company culture and managerial support, which allow for employees to maintain work life balance. Employee motivation was found to come from feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This paper indicates that a hybrid model is favoured by employees as it enriches productivity and flexibility. This study provides useful insights for organisations seeking to adopt a new and more flexible work environment strategy in a post-pandemic society.

Keywords: Productivity, Work Environment, Pandemic, COVID-19, Post-pandemic Remote work, Hybrid work, Work from home (WFH), Motivation, Job-satisfaction, Work-life balance (WLB), Flexibility.

Introduction

Objectives

The pandemic was a catalyst in shifting the dynamic of work environment strategies around the world. COVID-19 and advancements in technology have accelerated new ways of working for employees. Post-pandemic we see organisations reassessing the traditional model of being in the office 5 days a week, from 9-5 and we see some firms now implementing permanent remote and hybrid working models. Due to the evolving and novel nature of this topic, it is important to study the implications these work environment strategies have on employees, specifically on employee productivity. Now, in 2024, remote and hybrid working is becoming an increasingly popular strategy to implement, and this paper will explore the historical evolution of remote/hybrid work environments and how they have evolved pre and post-pandemic.

Furthermore, the overall objective of this paper is to explore how work environment strategies impact employee productivity. This work will consider in office, remote, and hybrid strategies throughout. Productivity can be a complex concept to measure in industries that are knowledge-based and so this paper will focus on the concept of perceived productivity of employees. The paper will identify and analyse the specific factors influencing productivity and how these factors may differ depending on the work environment setting.

Hybrid working has emerged as a top choice of work environment strategy for organisations to implement post pandemic, as it offers a flexible and dynamic approach to the work environment. However, it is important to understand any potential challenges and disadvantages of hybrid working, and these will be identified and addressed throughout the research.

Methodology

To reach the objectives specified above, primary qualitative research will be conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews. The sample study chosen are all employees of Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC), in Ireland. PwC employees were chosen as the sample for the interviews, as the firm has adopted a hybrid working strategy post-pandemic and due to the sample being one that is convenient, as I have previous experience working in

the firm, and therefore any contacts and previous knowledge and understanding of the culture, terminology and nature of the firm will be beneficial to this study. Furthermore, a qualitative approach is appropriate for this research, due to the topic being relatively new, with limited previous research conducted.

In summary, this paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discussions surrounding work environment strategies post-pandemic. New strategies should allow organisations to optimise employee productivity, job satisfaction, and motivation and achieving organisational success.

Literature Review

This literature review should help obtain a full understanding of work environment strategies and productivity in a post pandemic world, by providing definitions by scholars, studies and insights from previous research and show the evolution of work environment strategies that led us to those that we have today.

This review of literature is divided into three main sections, the first being the key element of this research, productivity. This section allows us to understand productivity by analysing definitions, factors influencing productivity and theories used in research to measure employee productivity. Secondly, the work environment is studied and gives a comprehensive review of the defining work environments, how they affect employees, and their direct correlation to productivity. The third section gives a historical review of remote/hybrid working, whilst also including research on remote working and its correlation to productivity.

It should be noted that due to the limited time passed since the end of the pandemic, the volume of research and literature is limited, precisely highlighting the importance of conducting this research.

1. Defining Productivity

1.1. The concept of productivity.

Productivity is essential for the success of any business or organization. It is in fact, essential in all aspects of life. In his book on productivity, Michael Haynes quotes the Nobel prize winner Paul Krugman, who once said, ‘productivity isn’t everything, but in the long run, it is everything’. Haynes emphasizes the complexity of conceptualizing and understanding productivity, describing it as a ‘puzzle’ (Haynes, 2020).

Physical productivity can be defined as ‘the quantity of output produced by one unit of production input in a unit of time’ (Valentino, 2001). This definition can be easily understood in industries where goods are made. Productivity is often measured as a ratio, a relationship between output and input (Sink, 1983), and is typically seen as:

$$PRODUCTIVITY = OUTPUT/INPUT$$

In an industry where output cannot be measured in an exact number of goods produced, productivity can be intertwined with the idea of efficiency. Productivity is also defined as *‘an assessment of the efficiency of a worker or group of workers’* (Hanaysha, 2016a). This comes because of the rise of knowledge workers. Historically, industrial workers were known to have defined and repetitive tasks, allowing employers to measure their productivity using this ratio. Today, however, the common knowledge worker or white-collar worker has more autonomy, flexibility, and a wider variety of tasks to complete. Thus, making it harder to be assessed using the classic ratio (Guillou *et al.*, 2020). This is where the idea of perceived productivity is introduced.

Despite being used extensively, the research behind the idea of perceived productivity is limited, as it is a completely subjective concept and is difficult to measure. Perceived productivity is measured by an individual, based off their idea of what it is to be productive, and so it can be difficult to establish. Perceived productivity can be defined as *‘the attitudinal state of an individual derived from the perception that the environment conducive to effective or efficient use of the organisational resources and processes is present’* (Castelle, 2017).

Productivity is vital for the success and overall profitability of an organization. In principle, the higher the productivity levels, the higher the profit. When employees maintain elevated levels of productivity, companies can expect to achieve their strategic objectives, as employees engage with the work to be completed. Therefore, high productivity levels are a key objective of any company aiming to succeed (Sharma, 2014).

1.2. Factors influencing productivity

As previously mentioned, organisations can expect to meet their strategic objectives when employees are productive. Maintaining and improving productivity levels should be one of the most important objectives of any company, as it can result in great benefits and success. These include greater organisational profitability, economic growth, and improved social progress (Sharma, 2014; Hanaysha, 2016a).

In his book on *‘Creating the productive workplace’* Clements-Croome highlights the ‘4 cardinal aspects’ that productivity depends on as:

1. Personal
2. Social
3. Organisational
4. Environmental

(Clements-Croome, 2000) - See figure 1.

Factors affecting productivity:

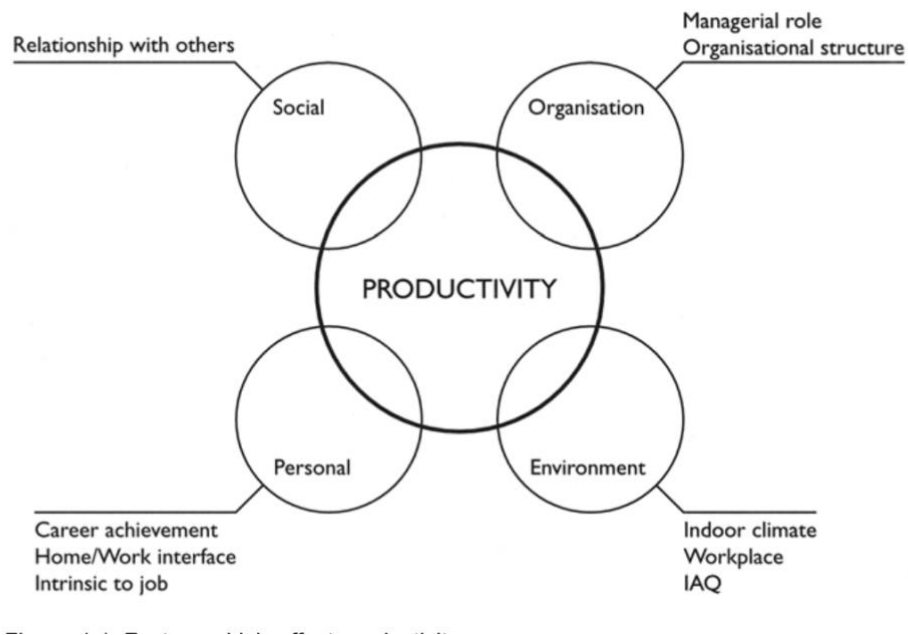


Figure 1 (Factors which affect productivity, Clements-Croome, 2000)

It should be noted that this book examines the environmental aspect of productivity throughout, focusing on the physical factors of the workplace and its effect on productivity. Therefore, when highlighting the other aspects of Figure 1, I have included further literature and concepts, as these were not explained in depth in the book.

1: Personal

It must be highlighted that some of the factors affecting productivity are specific to the individual. In studies conducted by the EuroFm Research symposium in the Netherlands, it was found that employees believe that their general productivity is influenced primarily on their individual productivity, as opposed to their team/ organisation (Maarleveld and De Been, 2011). Clements-Croome identifies 3 subfactors of the personal element, career

achievement, home/work interface and intrinsic to job.

Career achievement is a factor which can cause personal frustration and stress when an individual does not meet it. Lack of progression in an employee's career can result in a decline in morale and conjure up a feeling of being undervalued as an individual (Clements-Croome, 2000). Maslow's famous motivational theory of the Hierarchy of Needs describes a pyramid of human psychological needs, where the bottom tiers must be achieved before the next can be reached (Maslow, 1943). Second from the top tier of self-actualization lies that of self-esteem, in which the concept of achievement can be placed. Achievement in one's personal and professional life helps to reach a feeling of self-esteem and respect from others.

Home/work interface or more commonly described as work-life balance, is a vital personal factor of employee productivity. Work-life balance and its importance has increased tenfold in our society. WLB involves finding the equilibrium between professional and personal lives, where family life is often at the forefront. Failure to achieve WLB has significant impacts on both the individual and the organization. Lockwood highlights how employees who cannot find this equilibrium often experience higher levels of stress, which can lead to wider organisational productivity issues such as task avoidance, absenteeism, and distrust. Organisations must prioritize WLB to maintain a productive and satisfied workforce, resulting in a competitive advantage for the company (Lockwood, 2003).

Autonomous activities, where the employee is willing and interested in completing the task, relate to intrinsic motivation. Clements-Croome notes that satisfaction and work performed can be directly related to productivity (Clements-Croome, 2000). In Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation of employees leads to greater levels of productivity and overall performance of the labour force, as employees are intrinsically driven by the satisfaction of completing the job itself, as opposed to extrinsic motivators such as pay. Employees are driven by their own personal interests and are often more productive when tasks are autonomous, and when employees feel competent in their ability to perform (Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2017).

2: Social

Social factors must also be considered as an aspect influencing productivity. Clements-Croome highlights 'relationship with others' as the underlying component of social factors affecting productivity. Maslow's hierarchy highlights social needs in the third tier of his pyramid, 'love and belonging.' This element of the theory does not solely relate to personal relationships, but also that of feeling a sense of belonging in other relationships (Maslow, 1943). Individuals also want to create and maintain professional relationships with their colleagues and management. The human environment of the work environment is a cardinal factor affecting employee efficiency and productivity. Working relationships with other employees and managers allow for collaboration, efficiency, and organisational success (Abun *et al.*, 2021).

3: Organisational

Organisational factors, as highlighted by Clements-Croome, include, but are not limited to managerial roles and organisational structure. It is vital for managers to encourage a good organisational climate, and structure, one that fits the nature of the company. Managerial styles must also fit the overall working environment and culture of the organization. A study conducted in Greece found that organisational factors, specifically managerial support, organisational climate, and job environment, which had the greatest impact on employee performance. When there is an absence of any of these factors, it leads to negative impacts on the overall performance of the employees. The study found that when there are high levels of support from management within a company, the employees will be more proactive, productive, and committed to their role within the company. The study also found that organisational climate has a direct impact on behaviours, attitudes, and overall performance (Diamantidis and Chatzoglou, 2018).

4: Environmental

Clements-Croome, highlights the direct positive correlation between the workplace and productivity. Written in 2000, when the idea of remote work was not as popular, the author focuses mainly on the 'workplace' as being the building in which employees go to work. This is important to note as throughout the review of literature we will see various definitions of the workplace, which differ from that of an office building. However, this

introduces our first discussion, that the workplace is directly correlated with the productivity of employees. The book emphasizes how the physical environment of the workplace causes a direct effect on employee productivity, and thus highlights the importance for companies to invest in indoor environment systems, such as adequate ventilation, temperature controls and lighting.

Clements-Croome finds that the indoor environment of the building has many positive effects for companies. These include lower absenteeism, increased concentration, job satisfaction, motivation, and increased productivity (Clements-Croome, 2000). This should also be taken into consideration when discussing the work environment in a remote context. As previously mentioned, an empirical study conducted on Greek firms found that a bad job environment, has both a direct and indirect negative impact on overall employee performance, and other intrinsic factors such motivation, satisfaction, and overall productivity. This study refers to the job environment as the physical environment and overall atmosphere in a company (Diamantidis and Chatzoglou, 2018).

To further explore factors influencing productivity, we turn to a report written by ManPower Group Ireland. This report looks at the latest trends, specifically in Ireland, to understand what Irish employers believe drives productivity. ManPower Group Ireland, a multinational employment agency, conducted an extensive survey across multiple employment sectors in Ireland, where they asked employers to forecast what the upcoming quarter will look like for employment. In the most recent survey conducted, at the end of 2023, ManPower Group highlighted their findings of what **‘Irish employers identify as top productivity drivers’** for their workforce (ManPower Group Ireland, 2023).

The survey found the following results:



Figure 2 (What Irish employers identify as top productivity drivers, ManPower Group Ireland, 2023)

Work-life balance was mentioned across 50% of the surveys collected, suggesting that it is of major importance to employees in their career, pushing employers to ensure their organisational strategies align with this factor. As mentioned previously, WLB reduces stress and increases motivation and job satisfaction, encouraging employees to be productive in their work. In addition, positive work culture, clear goals and objectives and professional development are highlighted. Work strategies are also mentioned here, both in person and remote, suggesting the importance of both strategies for employees. The report highlights the importance of flexibility offered by employers. This flexibility not only refers to where employees work but also includes working hours and giving employees the autonomy to decide where/when to work. Where possible, organisations should consider personalized work plans, so that employees with different circumstances can adjust their work accordingly (ManPower Group Ireland, 2023).

The results of this survey align with the previous literature, as it highlights similar elements to Clements-Croome. For example, WLB and professional development align with Clements-Croome’s ‘personal’ factor of productivity. Additionally, ‘organisational’ factors are a major driver of productivity, such as fostering a positive work culture and effective collaboration. Written in 2000, Clement-Croome’s book does not highlight technology as a cardinal aspect, which evidently is a major component of productivity today as we see in the results of the ManPower Group survey. Technology plays a key

role now in employee's lives and should be considered a driver of productivity (ManPower Group Ireland, 2023).

1.3. Productivity, Motivation & Job Satisfaction

Taking the factors of social and personal from Clements-Croome factors affecting productivity, we now delve into the literature and theories behind productivity, motivation, and job satisfaction, which can be intertwined and often are supplementary to each other in literature.

Job satisfaction can be understood, as the level to which employees like or dislike their jobs and how they feel towards certain aspects of the job (Spector, 1997). The concept of job satisfaction can be related to the personal factors of career satisfaction and progression and should also be considered by organisations as a driver of productivity in the workplace. Motivation can be understood as the factors that drive an individual to want to do something. In the literature it has been defined as “cognitive processes that lead individuals to engage in particular behaviours to achieve desired goals” (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Kuo, Woo and Bang, 2017).

Herzberg developed the ‘Two Factor’ theory or otherwise known as ‘Motivation-hygiene Theory’ to understand the motivational behaviours of employees (Herzberg, 1966). Influenced by Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg argues that motivators enhance job satisfaction and hygiene factors decrease dissatisfaction. Motivators include factors such as responsibility, recognition, and achievement. Hygiene factors include interpersonal relationships, working conditions and pay/salary. Herzberg’s theory can be used as a framework for understanding job satisfaction, and for understanding influences of employee productivity in the workplace (Charlotte Nickerson, 2023).

Furthermore, the Job Characteristics Model (JCM), developed by Hackman and Oldham, describes a framework identifying the factors that make a job motivating, satisfying, and engaging for employees. The theory was developed with the idea of making employees more productive, generating higher performance, engagement, motivation, and satisfaction. The core factors affecting job satisfaction include autonomy, feedback, task significance, task identity and skill variety. These factors must be managed correctly by employers for their employees to achieve both personal and work-related outcomes,

which include the feeling of satisfaction in a job (Hackman and Oldham, 1974; Ali *et al.*, 2014).

Self-determination Theory (SDT) is another theory to understand employee motivation and the factors which influence individuals. Different to that of the previous theories mentioned, SDT does not include demotivators to work. SDT theory is based on intrinsic and extrinsic motivators and suggests that the performance of a worker can be directly affected by the motivation they have to complete job activities (Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2017). The three conditions include basic psychological needs that have been found to motivate employees: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomous motivation (intrinsic) is understood as employees engaging in work with ‘a full sense of willingness, volition and choice’ (Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2017) and it leads to an increase in overall performance. Controlled motivation (extrinsic) is understood as tasks that are regulated and involve a type of reward for achievement, such as pay.

A study conducted in Danish and Norwegian newspapers was conducted in 2022 and used both the SDT and Herzberg’s two-factor theory to show job satisfaction and motivation of employees who worked from home during the pandemic, to understand why some employees feel more motivated to complete their work when WFH. Their findings concluded that the optimal solution for the future of the workplace is that of a hybrid work strategy for those who work in a task-based setting (Sonnenschein *et al.*, 2022). Hybrid working and the flexibility that comes with it are shaping the new corporate world in 2024.

2. Work Environment

2.1 Defining Work Environments

Work environment generally refers to the physical or virtual environment where an employee carries out their work. This environment includes the tools, structures, systems, and processes that help these employees to complete their work (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 2011). It must be noted that in much of the literature prior to Covid-19, the primary work environment that is studied is the physical office building.

Post-pandemic, this definition of the work environment needs an alternative definition. Here we are reminded of the idea of sub environments which Opperman used to describe

work environment (Opperman, 2002; Hanaysha, 2016b; Abun *et al.*, 2021). These three sub environments include human environment, organisational environment, and technical environment. This provides a more well-rounded definition of the work environment. Understanding that the work environment delves deeper than the geographical location allows organisations to improve the overall work environment.

1. *Human Environment*: This includes employees in the organization, teamwork and collaboration, group activities, how employees work together and relate, management and leadership styles and practices.
2. *Organisational environment*: Includes practices, procedures, systems, philosophies, rules, and values. These are set out and controlled by management.
3. *Technical Environment*: This includes the technical infrastructure of the organization, tools, and equipment used by the workforce.

Opperman's idea of work environment solidifies the idea that the overall work environment can impact the satisfaction, motivation and ultimately productivity of the employees (Opperman, 2002).

2.2 Work environment & productivity.

Many studies have been conducted to determine the effect and correlation between work environment and productivity. The first of its kind was the Hawthorne experiment. This was a 9-year study conducted on a manufacturing firm by Elton Mayo, to investigate the productivity of employees in their work environment. The initial findings were that work conditions affect productivity and suggested that increased lighting had a positive effect on productivity. However, upon further investigation, Mayo suggested what had a greater effect on productivity was when employees were being observed. Mayo found that the true effect on employee productivity is that of their feeling of being valued, listened to, and observed, which is what we know today as the 'Hawthorne Effect.' This experiment proved that an employee's productivity improves when they are being observed. This study revolutionized organisational behaviour and human relations. The study also highlighted the importance of concepts such as motivational factors and job satisfaction of employees (Mayo, 1933).

Many further studies of employee performance/productivity and the workplace stemmed from the seminal study. Numerous studies have found that the physical aspects of the

work environment directly affect the employees' productivity. Some studies have found that these physical factors including temperature, noise, spatial arrangement, lighting, and the general office design have an impact on employee productivity in the workplace (Hameed and Amjad, 2009). Many of these studies resulted in companies investing in and improving their physical office spaces to increase productivity. Resulting in an overall positive impact and increases competitive advantage of the organisation (Hanaysha, 2016b).

Other factors have been seen to influence worker productivity. A three-year research project was conducted by the Nordic Council of Ministers in the Nordic region. With a rise in globalization and the potential growth of the Nordic trade market, investigators were eager to study the relationship between employee productivity and the workplace. They were eager to understand the reasons why productivity would be hindered or benefit from the surrounding work environment. Unsurprisingly, the results found that the working environment and wellbeing are positively related to productivity in all four countries. Surprisingly however, this study found that psychosocial factors of the working environment, such as WLB and stress, were not strongly related to productivity. However, it must be noted that the data collected for this research was not from the employees of the companies due to data restrictions and hence, it was based on sector and company data. Employees themselves would be quicker to acknowledge and prove the correlation between these factors of the working environment and their own personal productivity. The study suggests that employees agree that these psychosocial factors do affect productivity and must be accounted for (Foldspang *et al.*, 2014).

In a similar study, researchers Duru and Shimawua, studied the effect of work environment on employee productivity, using city transport in Nigeria as the field of study. They examined the work environment and found how, if done right, with both good physical and non-physical aspects (psychological factors), the work environment increases individual output and reduces absenteeism, improves punctuality, and drastically reduces an employee's tendency to have a negative attitude about their work (Duru and Shimawua, 2017).

It can be concluded from the literature that there is a direct correlation between employee productivity and work environment. There is, however, limited research on the effect of

employee productivity in remote and hybrid work environment strategies. The argument here is that the pandemic was completely out of the norm, and they were unprecedented times for the world. Therefore, any research conducted on the productivity of employees working from home should be taken with a pinch of salt. Hence, the importance of conducting further research is now in 2024, when we have seen the end of the pandemic and returned to the new work norm.

3. The Rise of WFH

3.1 Defining remote work.

Remote working, WFH, teleworking, e-working, and flexible working are all used to describe the act of conducting work from the home. The underlying idea of remote work includes the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) which allow employees to conduct their work from the home (Ng, Lit and Cheung, 2022). The definition of ‘telework’ by the European Framework Agreement of 2002, describes the act as “A form of organizing and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employer’s premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis” (European Social Partners, 2006).

3.2 History of WFH

It cannot be denied that the pandemic was a catalyst in the shift to remote workings. However remote work was visible in certain industries prior to the pandemic, and it was on the rise pre-2020.

The European Framework Agreement of 2002 reminds us of the existence of remote working before 2020. The framework was the first of its kind in Europe and it ensured the adequate regulation of teleworking across multiple industries. The European social partners and its member states agreed that remote work was a way to modernize organisations and allow employees to secure more autonomy in their work and ensure a better work/life balance for employees. This framework was a success overall, and the member states implemented the agreement in their respective countries (Aksoy *et al.*, 2022).

Teleworking was on the rise around the world prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. 8% of

European workers worked remotely ‘sometimes’ or ‘usually’ in 2008, however, by 2019 this figure had reached 11% (Eurofound, 2022). The same trends could be seen in the US, where in 2019, 7% of workers worked from home, with an anticipation that this would continue to increase in the coming years (Barrero, Bloom and Davis, 2023).

The rise of remote working came as a direct result of the development of ICT. Without the evolution of technology, working from home would not have been possible. Some factors that made the idea of remote work a reality include:

- Rise of internet access in the home.
- Managerial practices adapting.
- Cloud file sharing devices such as OneDrive, iCloud and Dropbox.
- Team collaboration software (Microsoft teams, Google Chat) allowing employees to connect and collaborate remotely.
- Video-based conferencing apps (Zoom, Google Meets and Teams) allowing employees to work simultaneously.

These factors and more, created the foundation for tele-work and made it possible for the world to shift to remote working when it was vital to do so due to the spread of COVID-19 globally (Barrero, Bloom and Davis, 2023).

3.3 The Pandemic

The pandemic had an unprecedented effect on the workplace and no organization was left unaffected. Organisations had to move online, implement alternative workspaces to adhere to vital social distancing measures, implement new IT services and some even had to rethink their entire business models (Carroll and Conboy, 2020). The world was asked to stay at home to limit the spread of the virus. This meant that those who could were urged to work from home.

Across Europe, the percentage of people working from home doubled from 11% to 22% from 2019 to 2021.

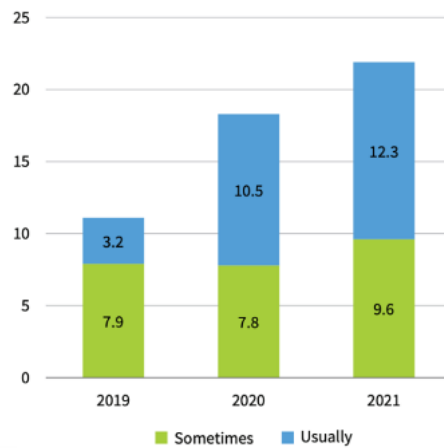


Figure 3 - Share of employees working from home, 2019–2021, EU27 (Eurofound 2022).

In the US, the number of employees who worked from home peaked in May 2020 with 35.4% of employees working from home due to COVID and in January 2022 these figures regulated back to 15.4%. (COVID-19: monthly share of workers working from home U.S. 2022, 2024)

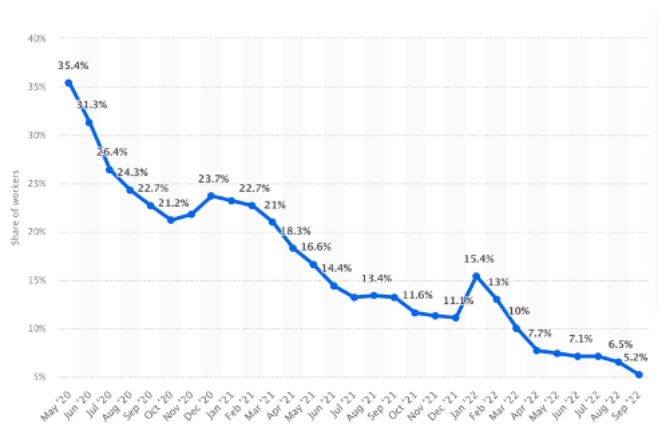


Figure 4 – Monthly share of workers who worked from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States from May 2020 to September 2022 (Statista 2024).

Despite it being the first time that many employees shifted to remote working, the general attitude towards a WFH strategy was generally positive. Research conducted by University College Dublin found that most employees (74%) surveyed in Ireland were in favour of a hybrid work strategy post-pandemic (Geary and Belizon, 2022). When the right strategies are implemented and employees are satisfied in their remote working environment, organisations can benefit from implementing these strategies.

3.4 Post Pandemic trends

As we have emerged from the restrictions of the pandemic, the return to ‘normal’ can now be studied. The most common approach, post-pandemic, for those industries where employees can work from home, has been to introduce a hybrid working policy. This of course, varies depending on the country and the economic development of the country. Countries with higher levels of economic growth and development have been found to be more willing to allow employees to work from home post-pandemic (Hatayama, Viollaz and Winkler, 2020).

According to EuroFound, the percentage of work that is deemed ‘teleworkable’ across EU member states ranges between 33-44%. There are a multitude of factors that must be considered in the ‘teleworkability’ of a job. EuroFound highlights the differences between men and women, between high- and low-income workers and between white- and blue-collar workers. These are just some factors that affect the ability to work from home today. Generally, employees who earn more can typically work from home (Eurofound, 2023).

In a survey conducted by PwC, titled ‘Hopes and Fears Workforce 2023 Survey’ it was found that 62% of Irish employees work in a hybrid model, a 19% increase from that of the previous year. In comparison to the global workforce survey conducted, which found the figure had decreased from 56% in 2022 to 54% in 2023, Irish employers are evidently going to continue to implement hybrid strategies across their organisations (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2023b).

3.5 Hybrid work

As mentioned, hybrid work strategies are becoming increasingly popular post pandemic. Hybrid working is a work environment strategy in which the employee splits the working week between the premises of the employer and the home of the employee (Barrero, Bloom and Davis, 2023). Typically, in a hybrid work strategy, employees will work 2-3 days a week from their homes and the other days on the employer’s premises (Bloom, Han and Liang, 2022).

In a report written by Eurofound, the concept of hybrid work was described as still being ‘fuzzy’ with multiple meanings being attributed to it. This report was written with the hopes of bringing clarity to the term hybrid work and defined it as “*situations in which*

(teleworkable) work is carried out from two sites: at the usual place of work and from home or other locations” (Eurofound, 2023). The report recognized the debate that surrounds the act of hybrid working in Europe, which includes the lack of regulation and legislation as the major concerns. With this, the discussion arises of the optimal number of days that should be worked from home in a hybrid setting. Furthermore, other elements such as locations, mobility, and flexibility must be clarified. Eurofound highlight the four main elements of hybrid working as:

1. Physical
2. Temporal
3. Virtual
4. Social

The institute recommends these elements to be considered by companies/organisations, management and employers when considering, introducing, or designing a hybrid model in their organization. Figure 5 below highlights the elements that must be considered when developing a hybrid strategy model.

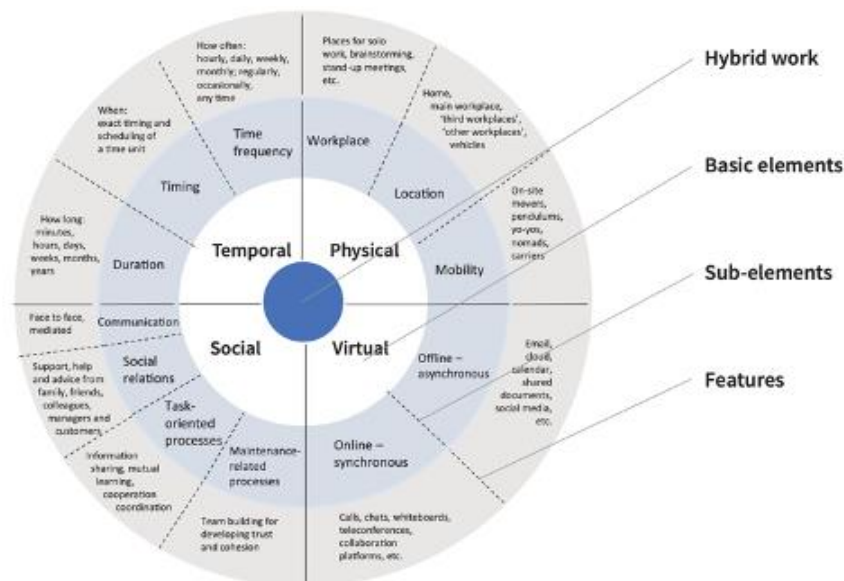


Figure 5 (Eurofound 2023)

The **physical** element can be further divided into three sub-elements. The workplace highlights the locations in which various aspects of an employee’s work can be done. Taking solo work and meetings as two examples, the question could be asked, do these workplaces differ in a hybrid model? Perhaps solo work is more adequate in a remote setting and meetings should be held in the office or equivalent. Location refers to the

physical area in which the hybrid strategy is carried out. Finally, this element encapsulates the factor of mobility, highlighting the types of mobility employees will adopt in a hybrid approach.

The **temporal** element is also divided into three sub-elements, time frequency, timing, and duration. This element considers when, for how long and how often employees will work from each location in the hybrid approach. The **virtual** element considers offline and online elements of the strategy. The online synchronous aspect includes features such as collaboration platforms and technologies, including chats, calls, online meetings, and conferences, which allow for seamless collaboration. The offline, asynchronous aspects include technology factors such as email, cloud, documents, social media, which allow employees to work effectively.

Finally, the **social** element must be considered. This is divided into five sub-elements. Communication highlights the importance of considering the need for face-to-face conversation and potential mediation. Social relations highlight the importance of continuous support for employees, where all stakeholders offer one another support in their work lives. Finally, the processes of working are considered. Task-orientated processes allow for a team-based approach, where employees can learn, share information, and cooperate with colleagues. Maintenance-related processes then enhance this team building and it develops trust among employees and their managers.

Limited studies are available regarding hybrid working strategies, however, from those conducted, positive results and trends can be found. In a study conducted of employees working in the engineering, finance, and marketing teams of Trip.com, a hybrid working approach was implemented for over 1000 employees. The results proved the already perceived benefits of a hybrid approach:

1. Reduced noise levels, which improves individual and focused activities.
2. Increased flexibility of time.
3. Time saving, both on preparation for work and commute times.
4. Reduced space costs

This study also found that attrition rates fell by 33% and the employees were more satisfied with their jobs (Bloom, Han and Liang, 2022). In this same study, it was found that employees valued the hybrid work strategy. This has also been seen in other studies,

where employees compared and viewed the ability to work in a hybrid approach as that of a 5% increase in pay (Aksoy *et al.*, 2022).

As discussed previously, a Danish and Norwegian study of the future of work environment and how remote working has a positive impact on the motivation, job satisfaction and productivity, found that the optimal solution for work environment strategies of the future is that of a hybrid approach. By using the theories of SDT and Two-factor, the study concluded that the out of the three basic needs of job satisfaction and motivation (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) the one that could not be fully satisfied during the pandemic was relatedness. Their proposed solution, a hybrid approach, would satisfy this need (Sonnenschein *et al.*, 2022).

3.6 Where does remote-work work?

It is important to consider industries, jobs, and the people where remote work is successful. Evidently a remote/hybrid approach is not optimal in many industries. In a survey conducted by researchers of University College Dublin on WFH and employee well-being during the pandemic, they found that those who couldn't WFH were considered 'essential' workers who worked in the retail, health, manufacturing, construction, and transportation sectors. Furthermore, 67% of these people were male. These industries remain less likely to adopt remote/hybrid working approaches today because in many cases, it is impossible (Geary and Belizon, 2022).

According to the World Economic Forum, 'professional, scientific, and computer-related occupations' offer hybrid and/or remote work to their employees in the US. This research found that positions with great levels of education required, and higher use of ICT are, on average, more likely to offer hybrid/remote working strategies. However, this does not imply that all companies in specific sectors take the same approach, and these strategies are not implemented in each of them. Organisational culture and managerial styles can differ and therefore lead to variations in the approaches taken (Shine, 2023).

Furthermore, a study of 53 countries by the World Bank Group of the *Amenability of Jobs to Work from Home*, found that the ability to work from home increases as the level of economic development of a country increase. Richer countries tend to have lesser physical labour dependent jobs, instead they provide more ICT rich jobs, allowing employees to

WFH. Demographic elements also have a huge role to play in the WFH approach. The World Bank study found that certain demographics have a higher tendency to be employed in jobs where the ability to work from home is higher. These include salaried and formal workers, university graduates and women. Men, with lower levels of education and have informal jobs, are the unlikely candidate to be able to work remotely (Hatayama, Viollaz and Winkler, 2020).

Furthermore, where an employee lives has an impact on their ability and willingness to WFH. In the results of the 'Working in Ireland Survey,' UCD researchers found that employees living in rural areas indicated a lesser preference for a hybrid work strategy approach, compared to those who live in cities and on commuter belts. This is due to technology-related factors, such as high-quality internet access. Similarly to the World Bank surveys, UCD's findings show a higher preference in women for a hybrid style of working, and further increases with the presence of children in the household (Geary and Belizon, 2022).

3.7 Remote working and productivity

Remote working is a way in which employers can consider the well-being of their employees, increase flexibility, improve WLB, increase productivity, and reduce organisational costs (Lewis, Cary, and Cooper, 2005). It is important however to consider the challenges of measuring productivity, as was highlighted previously. What one might perceive as productive, others may not. Therefore, reports and findings often highlight increases in other areas of the organization, such as higher profits, higher performance rates, and decreases in turnover, which all can be directly related to productivity measures.

There have been studies conducted, which highlight the increase of productivity due to the implementation of remote/hybrid work environment strategies for employees. A study conducted on a Chinese travel agency, where call centre employees were assigned randomly to work from home for a period of 9 months resulted in a 13% increase in performance and productivity, improved job satisfaction, and a decrease in turnover. The study was so successful that the organisation implemented an optional WFH strategy, with almost half of the workforce taking it on, increasing performance by 22% (Bloom *et al.*, 2013).

UCD's report on WFH and employee wellbeing found that remote/hybrid work is directly correlated to an increase in employee productivity. Most respondents reported that their increased productivity levels were due to them having higher concentration levels while WFH. Another prominent factor was that of commuting. Employees who can cut commuting time from their working day find it improves their productivity levels. For those who found their productivity decreased, the factors causing this ranged from limits in equipment/technology, lack of human contact, lack of motivation and interruptions from others in the home, to childcare/care for others (Geary and Belizon, 2022).

Similarly, Felstead's report on homeworking in Wales during the pandemic, found that 40.9% of those surveyed reported that their productivity was maintained during the pandemic and a further 28.9% reported being more productive. The factors behind the increase in productivity resemble those of the UCD report, with the two main reasons being fewer interruptions and the absence of the daily commute. Those who felt their productivity was hindered (30%) had higher domestic commitments. These employees highlighted lack of motivation, higher levels of interruptions, and difficulties with equipment/technology as the factors causing the drop in productivity. Female employees were more likely to report a decline in productivity, due to higher distractions from others, likely children. Furthermore, employees reported feeling drained and often isolated when WFH (Felstead, 2021).

In a 2021 global survey conducted by PwC on HR leaders and business executives across twenty-six countries, the majority (57%) stated that their organisations productivity targets and performance was better than the previous year, showing how hybrid and remote working boosted productivity levels. Only 4% of those interviewed found to have significantly worse performance overall (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2023a). The results of the survey showed that employee well-being and flexibility need to be considered by management and organisations to maintain productivity.

Despite some results from during the pandemic indicate some employees reporting a decline in their productivity, it is evident that organisations are estimating and reporting higher levels of employee performance and productivity in hybrid/remote work strategies. Employees have increased job satisfaction, higher commitment to their organization and improved well-being as a direct result of flexibility and remote working strategies

(Felstead and Henseke, 2017). The overarching theme is that productivity can be maintained and even improved when different remote working strategies are implemented. However, factors such as childcare commitments, distractions, ICT issues, motivation, and a lack of human contact are aspects to be considered that may disrupt productivity in a remote setting and should be considered by organisations considering a remote/hybrid approach.

Methodology

To investigate whether productivity is maintained in hybrid work strategies, primary qualitative research was conducted, in the form of semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research allows researchers to examine new and developing topics, with limited literature and theories to support. Hybrid work strategies are a new phenomenon in the corporate world and due to the limited understanding and research of this topic, a qualitative approach is optimal, as adequate quantitative measurements are not yet available. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, where I asked a list of previously decided questions. The rich and detailed data from qualitative interviews are necessary to develop an understanding behind the topic at hand. A semi-structured approach ensures that the researcher collects the necessary data to answer the research objectives and provide further insights, whilst remaining highly flexible (Lee & Lings, 2008). Here we are looking for participants' thoughts, experience, and opinions on maintaining productivity in a hybrid work strategy.

The interviews were conducted with employees currently working in PwC Ireland. My previous experience as an intern in PwC makes this a convenient sample as I had contact with colleagues and additional contacts of theirs, who were willing to participate in my research. My previous experience and understanding of the terminology, organisational structure and overall culture of the firm helped me to develop adequate interview questions, enhancing the interview and data analysis process.

PwC is known for being one of the 'Big 4' accountancy firms, and has a huge global presence, both in revenue and recognition. PwC is a professional services firm and offers a range of services to its clients, including:

- Audit & Assurance
- Consulting
- Tax
- Deals Advisory
- Strategic Alliances
- Workforce

I chose to focus my research on PwC, as the firm has implemented a hybrid policy in their

Irish firm, which allows for their employees to have ‘everyday flexibility’. PwC employees are contracted to work 36.5 hours a week and are expected to work on average 2/3 days at their primary office location. This is subject to change due to client and team commitments and the policy is informal and fluid in nature, allowing employees to choose the location of their work and working hours. This policy was introduced post-pandemic, to help transition from fully remote working. PwC Ireland has committed fully to the hybrid style of work and thus I felt it was an adequate choice to investigate.

*It must be noted that the participants of these interviews work for the **Irish** firm, as the same hybrid strategies are not available across all PwC firms in the world.*

As previously mentioned, the interviews conducted were semi-structured in nature. It is key to ask open-ended questions in qualitative interviews, to avoid ‘yes/no’ answers. There have been limitations identified, which will be highlighted further on, such as the number of candidates interviewed. Furthermore, while the convenient sample chosen has allowed for a timely and efficient interview process, the potential bias of the data is introduced. To avoid this, I ensured to interview candidates from various teams, with varying demographic features. In addition, the interviewees came from multiple positional levels within the firm, from newly recruited associates to partner level, which allowed for a broader range of insights, opinions, and experiences, enriching the research.

I reached out to the participants via email and through LinkedIn to ask for their participation in the interviews. A total of 8 employees were interviewed, as seen in Figure 6.

Interviewee	Office Location	Position	Line of Service	Team	No. of years in PwC	Gender	Age
A	Dublin	Manager	Advisory	Data Analytics	5	Male	29
B	Dublin	Partner	Advisory	Workforce	24	Male	45
C	Dublin	Senior Associate	Advisory	Foreign Direct Investments	3	Female	25
D	Kilkenny	Senior	Tax	Corporation Tax	24	Female	44

		manager					
E	Dublin	Associate	Advisory	Cyber security	9 months	Male	22
F	Dublin	Senior manager	Advisory	Workforce	6	Female	32
G	Dublin	Associate	Advisory	Project Management	9 months	Male	23
H	Dublin	Director	Assurance	Digital Transformation	23	Female	43

Figure 6 (Table of PwC employees interviewed)

The questions allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the opinions and experiences of the participants. The overarching objectives of the interview questions were to understand the participants' perception of productivity in different working environments, motivation and job satisfaction factors, challenges of hybrid working, and opinions on the future of work environments.

The interviews were conducted virtually using Microsoft Teams, with each interview lasting between 20-40 minutes. All 8 interviews were recorded, to be later transcribed and analysed, with prior consent from the participants.

Data Analysis

To analyse the data, thematic analysis was used. Thematic analysis is described as a flexible and adaptable approach to qualitative data analysis and is a less complex alternative to other qualitative approaches, which is ideal for a researcher conducting their first research project. Thematic analysis allows for the qualitative data to be grouped into common codes and later themes that have appeared during the interviews. Thematic analysis involves both inductive and deductive approaches to coding and analysis. The codes and themes that appear in the analysis primarily stem from the interviews themselves, showing an inductive approach. However, the researcher will bring forward existing ideas and theories from the literature to interpret the data from the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis follows a 6-phase process, which I conducted to analyse the interviews. The phases are as follows.

1. Familiarize oneself with the data

Initially, I rewatched the recordings of the interviews whilst following the transcript, to make any necessary edits. This allowed me to become familiar with the data collected and began to draw up common insights from the interviews.

2. Create initial codes

To begin grouping the findings, I began to code certain quotes from various participants under the same groups. Coding is described as Braun and Clarke as the building blocks of analysis, and it allows for themes to be generated. Microsoft Word was used to create tables which included quotes under the codes used.

3. Looking for themes

After coding the data, it was time to start searching for themes. To do this, I had to group the codes that had similar ideas together and begin thinking of a theme that could fit these codes.

4. Reviewing themes

This phase involved reviewing the codes and themes generated to ensure they are fit for the research. A theme must have adequate evidence to back it up and so it is important to

remove or group together any themes that cannot be properly supported by the data.

5. Deciding and naming themes

This involved describing the specific themes and subthemes, ensuring to highlight the specific aspects of each theme and how they are supported by the data collected. The data used to validate the themes must be interpreted by a researcher so that a ‘story’ can be told to the reader.

6. Writing the report

This final phase involved writing the narrative of the work using the thematic analysis conducted. This includes both the data from the qualitative research and the theories and literature previously studied.

After interpreting and coding the data from the interviews specific themes/sections and subthemes were derived, as can be seen in figure 7.

Theme/Section	Subthemes
1. Flexibility	<p data-bbox="571 1256 767 1285">Why the office?</p> <ul data-bbox="619 1339 1422 1682" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="619 1339 963 1368">• Leaders/managerial roles <li data-bbox="619 1391 1422 1469">• Nature of the work (Team meetings, workshops, collaborations sessions) <li data-bbox="619 1491 995 1520">• Team/management decision <li data-bbox="619 1543 911 1572">• Personal preferences <li data-bbox="619 1594 895 1624">• Autonomy to chose <li data-bbox="619 1646 1102 1675">• Onboarding, socialization & learning <p data-bbox="571 1727 756 1756">When to WFH</p> <ul data-bbox="619 1809 940 1995" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="619 1809 940 1839">• Reducing the commute <li data-bbox="619 1861 876 1890">• Greater flexibility <li data-bbox="619 1912 836 1942">• Reduced costs <li data-bbox="619 1964 903 1993">• Greater productivity

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature of the work (Smaller meetings, training courses) • Personal benefits
	<p>Flexing the working day</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal preferences • Reducing commute time • Childcare reasons
2. Drivers of productivity	<p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing where to work • Personal preferences
	<p>Systems & Tech</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google Workspace • Google Calendar
	<p>Leadership and management support</p>
	<p>WFH equipment provided</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office chair, monitor, mouse
3. Productivity challenges	<p>Rented Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of home office • Confidentiality
	<p>Distractions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile phones • Self-discipline
	<p>Social challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loneliness

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of solitude
<p>4. Employee motivation in hybrid working strategies</p>	<p>Job Satisfaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility – allows for daily tasks, personal life, WLB. • Incentives & perks from PwC • Company culture/managerial support • Maintaining WLB in hybrid setting
	<p>Motivation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomy - responsibility, delegation & trust • Competence – training & workshops • Relatedness – sense of connection in firm <p>Future trends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hybrid is favoured • Adaptation is vital in professional services sector

(Figure 7, Themes/Sections & Subthemes derived from interview analysis)

Results

Pre-pandemic experience

Of the candidates interviewed, 5 out of the 8 had experience working in PwC before the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked about the work environment strategy in place pre-2020, all interviewees highlighted the stark contrast between the current and past work environment strategies.

“I don't know how we did it, but we were in that office five days a week.” (Participant A)

“Yes, we used to go in five days a week, like 9 to half 5, and I honestly don't know how we did it.” (Participant F)

It was important to understand how the typical week of a PwC employee looked pre-pandemic, to give context to the changes that have been implemented since. The participants were not asked specifically about their experience working from home during the pandemic as I felt it was not relevant to the research due to its unprecedented nature.

1. Flexibility

The participants were asked to describe their average week in PwC, to understand how the hybrid approach works. Unsurprisingly, the answers varied. All participants highlighted how their weeks were subject to change on a week-by-week basis. 5 of the 8 participants go into the office on average 3/4/5 days a week and give team, leadership, client needs and personal preferences as their reasonings behind this. Interestingly, 4 out of the 5 that go into the office have managerial or higher roles in the firm, suggesting that those with greater responsibility are often in the office. Those with leadership roles highlighted the importance of *‘being visible’* and *‘sharing knowledge’* in the office.

Other participants highlighted factors influencing their decision to go into the office, such as team collaboration. Participants highlighted efficiency, face-to-face interactions, and collaboration as driving factors to go to the office, particularly on days where there are larger team meetings, workshops, trainings etc.

“Weekly collaboration sessions are much more effective and generally much better in person” (Participant F)

The associates highlighted their reasons for going into the office were mainly due to

management preferences and client needs. Participants mentioned how their office days depended largely on what the rest of the team and management had decided for that week. It appears, that as much as possible, management try to encourage their team to make it into the office on specific days, to maintain this collaboration and efficiency.

“My managers are very good at managing whether we're in the office or whether we're from home. It's very good and as consistent as possible.” (Participant G)

“It's very rare that I'd be the only one in the office. Normally the whole team will come in for the certain days a week” (Participant E)

Further reasons for coming into the office were that of personal preference. Participant D mentioned that, although she appreciates the flexibility of the hybrid approach, she prefers to work in the office. She also noted how her lack of commute to the office, “10 minutes in the car” and the IT systems she uses for her work, which runs more “smoothly” in the office, were further factors behind her preference to work from the office. This participant also mentioned a colleague of hers who comes into the office every day due to his poor WIFI connection where he lives.

“I see the office as a place you get to go than got to go.” (Participant B)

An interesting quote, emphasizing the importance of his team understanding they should have a reason to come into the office and how it is up to the employees' own sense of judgement to decide when to come into the office to work. This suggests that there is a high level of autonomy given to workers to decide their own schedules.

Participant B and Participant H both added that working in the office improves the learning experience of employees, particularly those with less experience in the company. They both highlighted the importance of learning on the job. This was then further emphasized by other participants, who mentioned the opportunities and learnings that derive from being in the office, something that cannot be recreated from home. This was also mentioned as one of the challenges of remote working, as face-to-face learning cannot be fully recreated behind the computer screen.

“Whether you come in as a brand-new associate..., the things that you need to learn to do, being able to communicate in different ways, to see and witness things that you just can't get from being remote all the time.” (Participant B)

“Working in the team and that ability to learn genuinely has been something that I actually appreciate about working in person, versus like if you're working by yourself, at home, you're trying to figure out on your own.” (Participant C)

“Maybe like visibility. Like when you're walking to and from a meeting, it's taking time, but you're also bumping into people..., you're not bumping into anybody online, in the office, you might talk to someone new, and an opportunity might come out of it.” (Participant F)

When analysing the factors behind the decision to WFH, a common response was avoiding the daily commute. Participants appreciate not having to commute to and from the office 5 days a week, as it allows for greater flexibility, lower cost, and increased productivity, both in their work and personal lives.

“I mean, personally, I actually like working from home like I think it's the best thing ever because I live in Drogheda, which is about like an hour from the office without traffic.” (Participant C)

“But if it only had to do that commute every day like it's like an hour and a half to the office, from here, imagine that 5 days a week, every week.” (Participant E)

The nature of work conducted influences when to WFH, participants recognise when it “makes more sense” to work remotely, depending on the work being done. Participant H noted that conducting research and completing E-learning as an adequate day for WFH. Participant A mentioned how it does not make sense to him to come into the office if he is in back-to-back meetings for the day. Similarly, Participant G added, *“if there are certain activities that you just have to do on your own, you can just sit at home and do it in your own time.”*

Furthermore, I asked how the participants availed themselves of this flexibility to understand the concept of PwC’s ‘Everyday Flexibility’ policy. All participants responded that they take advantage of the policy. Participant G mentioned how he usually starts and ends his day early.

“Flexibility, yeah, I definitely do use it like I'm a morning person...Normally I'm in the office 7:50 in the morning, once it comes to half 4 if I have my stuff done, I'll go home.” (Participant G)

Other responses about flexing work hours mentioned avoiding traffic and lessening the commute. 4 respondents mentioned how the flexibility in daily work hours allowed for them to take time back in their day by avoiding peak rush hour traffic in Dublin.

“I suppose for me it's more a traffic thing you know, I mean it takes you good hour travelling both ways. So, but going early certainly does help it a bit. And then what we're finding is certain days of the week are much busier traffic wise going into Dublin, like a Monday, so I might try avoiding going in then when I can.” (Participant H)

“I think flexibility is really important..., like I generally won't drive in to work at 8:00 o'clock in the morning. I might drive in at 7:00 I don't want to hit all that traffic, so I do sort of think about flexing my day.” (Participant B)

Childcare commitments were mentioned by 2 participants, who were the only participants in the research with children. Both highlighted the importance of the flexibility PwC offers and how this facilitates their personal commitments as parents. These participants mentioned being able to collect their children from school and attending extracurricular activities. Here again, we see the level of autonomy and flexibility in the firm.

“I have three kids..., it kind of helps us then because I have to make sure I've collected 2 with them by 6:00 o'clock sort of time.” (Participant H)

“I think in many ways it gives people a sort of sense of purpose..., I don't believe that people need to put in a project name for when they're collecting the kids from school or where they're going to watch their sons football match. If I'm going to watch my sons football match, I'm going to be like, sorry, I'm out of three today.” (Participant B)

It was apparent that employees in PwC are trusted and have autonomy to use the flexible strategy to fit their own personal needs. Those in management and leadership highlighted how they believe that PwC hires intelligent and adequate employees that can make correct and fair decisions. Other participants highlighted their ability to use this flexibility for other personal reasons, such as going to medical appointments, the gym etc., that do not fit into the 9-5 of the working week.

“I had a funeral one week, and it was just a case that I could hit the road at half four and it made so much more of a difference. So, the flexibility in that perspective is great.” (Participant G)

“This flexibility where you can balance both your personal and professional life, I think that is great.” (Participant A)

“If I have appointments or something like dentist appointment, doctors’ appointment. I’ve never been, like, rejected. It’s always accepted because everyone understands that., you know, that’s the situation everyone’s in.” (Participant C)

PwC’s approach to flexibility, whether that is from where you work, to what hours you work, is evidentially appreciated, and utilized by the employees of the firm, regardless of the title or position held.

2. Drivers of productivity

It is evident that an employee’s productivity depends greatly on their own personal influences. Whether they prefer to work in the office or at home often comes down to how they feel they work best personally. However, many extrinsic productivity drivers were mentioned. The main factor being flexibility, which was discussed in theme 1. It was evident that flexibility is a common trend in motivating employees to work in a productive and efficient manner.

Another common trend highlighted by the participants was the IT systems and technology that allow for high productivity levels. Google Workspace is used across the firm and majority of the participants highlighted its seamless functionality as a factor of productivity. Both in person and remotely, employees can collaborate and communicate effectively using the systems in place, *“everyone can work on a Google sheet at the same time, from anywhere.”* It was also noted that managers can easily assign tasks to employees using Google Workspace, allowing for efficient delegation and clear task management.

“It’s fairly, easy to maintain that productivity., I can set myself tasks or like my managers and stuff can set me tasks... I can see what I have to do for the day and then I can just fill out my calendar according to that. I suppose..., that’s the main thing that makes me stay on track.” (Participant E)

The main perk to using Google Workspace software that highlighted by almost all the participants was Google Calander and how it allows for colleagues to stay connected. Participants mentioned how the integrated calendar improves their productivity as it

allows them to keep track of their day and ensure organization and planning.

“I find it brilliant like everything goes into my calendar or my time is blocked out for certain tasks as well as like putting in reminders and putting in tasks.” (Participant G)

“You can schedule tasks and it goes into someone's calendar. So, there's a general reminder there as well... so G-suite has definitely been very helpful in performing those activities.” (Participant A)

Leadership and managerial support were also specified as being factors influencing productivity. The participants alluded to having great support in place from management and see leadership as a vital role in any team. The partner interviewed, as I mentioned previously, noted the importance of trusting and listening to his colleagues.

“Leadership is not about me being in charge. It's taking care of those in my charge, right, and give them the greatest opportunities.” (Participant B)

Other productivity drivers for employees were highlighted in a WFH context. When asked about productivity when working remotely, most of the participants mentioned the company provided equipment, including office chairs, second monitors, and a computer mouse. It is evident that having an adequate WFH setup helps employees work more comfortably and productively.

3. Productivity Challenges

Some participants mentioned the importance of having a separate space in the house, helping them to separate work from personal life. However, others, particularly those who rented housing, highlighted how at times, not having an adequate space to WFH might hinder the WFH experience. This is the first of the productivity challenges highlighted in the remote work setting.

“I'd say like maybe a possible challenge I face is having to separate that work and life situation because like my office at home is my bedroom.” (Participant C)

With PwC being a professional services firm, confidentiality is essential. It can be a challenge at times to ensure this client confidentiality in certain WFH setups, taking participant G's experience as an example,

“Probably that's something worth noting from a work-from-home point of view, that a lot

of people, especially younger people, who are out renting.., are in similar situations to this where like..., I'm living in a house with three others who were all working for either BIG4 or tech firms in hybrid capacities. So, it'll be a case that if Ellen is working from home today, she's using the work from home desk. So, I have to be in the office.”

Another challenge mentioned throughout was that of distractions at home. The common distraction noted was that of mobile phones. Some participants felt they had to make a conscious effort not to spend time on their phone during working hours at home, as it leads to decreased productivity. Self-discipline is needed to avoid these distractions while working remotely.

“I'm not a very boundaried person. Like should I turn off my notifications and throw my phone away for like an hour? Yes, but I don't do that..., it's so easy to be distracted.”
(Participant F)

“Even just picking up your phone like there's no one around you to see you, so you can be less productive if you are not careful and disciplined in that aspect” (Participant C)

Loneliness and feelings of solitude were huge challenges of remote working during the pandemic. That sense of loneliness is not as prevalent in a hybrid setting, where employees are meeting in the office more. What still appears to be an obstacle for employees is the lack of natural social interaction that comes with WFH. Although some are distracted by others in the office, it is evident that the participants appreciate the ability to have interactions with their colleagues. One participant found it *“intense at times,”* due to the lack of natural conversations and interactions with those around them. Another participant noted their enjoyment of having a *“coffee and a chat”* in the office, while another pointed out that meetings at home, at times feel *“solely about work.”*

4. Employee Motivation in Hybrid Working

The participants were asked about factors of motivation and satisfaction. A common job satisfaction factor was again, flexibility. Some participants noted that it allows them to stay organized in their personal and professional lives. Tasks like housework and the gym can be slotted into employees' working day, enhancing their overall job satisfaction.

“Flexibility, 100%, that obviously is a big contributing factor., because it gives you time to do your personal tasks as well and without compromising on your professional

activities.” (Participant A)

“I can put on a wash here or I can empty the dishwasher..., I find it gives me a better work life balance.” (Participant F)

All the participants highlighted the incentives and additional ‘perks’ to the job as contributors to job satisfaction. The abundance of extras PwC provide for their employees is vast, and it was evident throughout the interviews that all the participants thought of this as an added benefit. Examples include a €200 Wellness Budget, that each employee can use as they wish to fund anything that may improve their overall wellbeing. Other incentives mentioned include free parking facilities, social events hosted by PwC, wellness days, vouchers, and a points rewards system where colleagues can commend each other on work well done, which can then be transferred to online banking applications such as Revolut. In addition, the office has been newly equipped with amenities such as pool tables, a gym, and a wellness area. Free breakfast is provided to employees in the office all year round and during ‘busy season,’ dinner is also provided. It is apparent that these benefits contribute greatly to job satisfaction.

“The office has been repurposed to feel as if it's got a community vibe.” (Participant B)

“So, every day you come in this free breakfast and that’s great..., particularly for the younger community..., where you know, the cost of accommodation in Dublin is not easy.” (Participant H)

“The internal points are great cause we do a lot of overtime and it’s great to get that feedback and recognition” (Participant E)

PwC also has a ‘Together Anywhere’ policy, which allows employees to work abroad for up to 4 weeks of the year. Participants spoke about their experiences working in other countries adding to their job satisfaction. Participants mentioned having worked in the UK, USA and Australia for some time. The partner interviewed described the policy as, *“if it works for your team and client it works for me.”*

In addition, company culture is a clear driver of job satisfaction. As previously mentioned, those in junior positions highlighted the support and leadership of those in managerial roles. Overall, participants emphasized the keen sense of community culture and teamwork throughout the firm. One participant noted the *“overall good vibe”* present in

the office. Social events, such as team dinners and events, allow employees to socialize with colleagues on a more personal level, connecting and building friendships.

WLB is a vital factor for employee satisfaction and motivation. Employees noted that since the pandemic, a greater level of WLB has been achieved. During the pandemic employees found it challenging to separate their professional and personal lives, due to a fully remote work environment strategy. One participant mentioned how despite being fully remote during the pandemic, his family felt they saw less of him than when he worked full-time in the office. This was due to the lack of WLB he experienced during the pandemic.

“There were definitely times, during COVID, where they actually saw less of me, even though I was upstairs.” (Participant B)

WLB in the new hybrid strategy appears to be easier to manage for employees. Almost all participants noted the importance of self-discipline whilst working from home, not only to maintain their productivity but also to ensure WLB. Some participants reiterated the use of Google Calendar in helping to ensure WLB as they can block out times, such as an hour for lunch, so that colleagues can respect these times. When employees stick to their planned schedule and avoid distractions where possible, they can enjoy a more balanced working week. Going for walks, going to the gym, making plans with friends and colleagues can improve WLB while WFH. Similarly, when working in the office, employees tend to make plans after work.

“I suppose like being strict with your time..., Like, it's easy to fall into that trap of working longer hours..., it goes into like boundary setting..., like I'd have my calendar blocked before 9:00 o'clock and after half five every day.” (Participant E)

“If I have something like a concert or dinner with friends in the city, chances are probably will go into the office beforehand for the day.” (Participant G)

Autonomy is given to all employees, regardless of their position in the firm. Associates noted not feeling “micromanaged” by management. This is not to say that employees are not supported but are also given responsibility and autonomy in their work. Furthermore, senior members of staff trust and believe in upward delegation.

Furthermore, participants noted feeling competent in their work in the firm, due to the

training and leadership provided. One associate spoke of the “buddy system”, where new joiners are partnered with a colleague with a few years' experience in the company. Extensive and continuous training and workshops also improve employees' competence.

“A motivational factor is obviously when you are learning on the job, if there is something new to learn on the job and the job is challenging that keeps you on your toes and your motivated as well. The training is great, it really helps.” (Participant A)

Relatedness is another major motivational factor for employees. There is a keen sense of connection in the firm, where teamwork is vital for success. All participants indicated feeling some sense of belonging and connectiveness in their team and the wider community.

“That's definitely something that I feel pushed by, team motivation and morale, the people in PwC genuinely are lovely people.” (Participant C)

“Then a healthy team environment is something that I always find very helpful because when you're in a healthy team environment, you enjoy working with your colleagues and you tend to learn a lot more..., that would be a major contributing factor to motivation.” (Participant A)

Future trends & predictions

Despite participants having their own preferences over working remotely or in the office, all of them agree that a hybrid approach is “*the best of both worlds.*” When asked about their opinions and experiences of hybrid work, respondents gave a comprehensive positive response.

“I think it's brilliant, you kind of wonder, how did we do it beforehand? You know, how did we do before. We went in five days, and like especially people who commute, how did they do it. The flexibility is brilliant and like it's never going to go back.” (Participant D)

“I think because everyone's kind of like used to it I haven't heard anyone voice out necessarily that, they don't like it., I will say like with the hybrid working style, it's almost like the best of both worlds.. So yeah, I'd definitely say the hybrid working style is probably the best to the three and in my personal opinion anyways, especially on a productivity front.” (Participant C)

“This strategy enables much more collaboration, cuts down on travel costs etcetera..., I don't think they'll ever go back to the 9:00 to 5:00. Monday to Friday, which we used to do...” (Participant G)

The participants were asked to give their opinions on hybrid strategies and what they expect to see in years to come. The consensus was that those who can implement hybrid strategies should, such as professional services and tech firms. Some participants believe that without this flexibility, companies will lose talent and competitive disadvantage.

“I think organisations are putting themselves at a very big disadvantage from talent retention or from attracting talent., companies who don't have a hybrid work policy. What is driving you in the world that we live in, the global village, that you're not happy for employees, to work in a hybrid environment.” (Participant H)

The idea of going back to the traditional 5 days a week in the office is evidently unsupported by the participants. The pandemic and technological developments are seen as huge drivers of the hybrid approach, and the general idea is that those who have adopted a hybrid approach will continue to implement further flexible strategies.

Discussion

This research aims to understand the impact of different work strategies on employee productivity, the factors that impact this productivity and the impact of work environment strategies on employee motivation and job satisfaction. The research conducted on employees from PwC Ireland, along with the literature and theories studied, has allowed for the research objectives to be achieved, whilst gaining further insights into the future of work environment strategies. However, it is important to highlight that this research focuses solely on the policies implemented in Ireland and so further research is needed for PwC firms across the world. Furthermore, similar research should be conducted on a cross-cultural, multi-organisational level, to acquire a more well-rounded study.

Comparison of working strategies post-pandemic.

As we have seen from the literature, there has been a shift in how employees work. Although remote working was on the rise, the pandemic catalysed the shifting dynamics of work environments. COVID-19 moved businesses online, with many implementing alternative workspaces to adhere to restrictions. New technologies were implemented, and some organisations had to rethink their entire business models (Carroll and Conboy, 2020). Now, on the other side of the pandemic, it is becoming increasingly common for organisations to ditch full-time in-person strategies, as employees are seeking more flexibility. Before 2020, PwC employees had to commute to the office 5 days a week, which corroborates with the literature, where only 8-11% of workers in the US & EU worked remotely. This strategy, although common, lacked flexibility and was overly rigid. In 2024, we see dramatic improvements in remote and hybrid working strategies. With up to 44% of jobs deemed “teleworkable” across Europe, there is an upward trend of flexible working strategies, which are favoured by employees (Eurofound, 2023). The research shows that PwC employees believe that a flexible hybrid approach is the optimal outcome for PwC and firms alike. It was emphasised during the interviews that the idea of working 5 days a week in the office was almost unimaginable now. PwC should continue to implement a hybrid policy to maximise employee and organisational productivity.

However, the debate surrounding hybrid working is still prominent, due to the lack of regulation and legislation in place. Other factors such as the optimal number of days worked in each setting, locations, mobility, and flexibility remain uncertain. This corresponds with the interviews, as we see some disparity in the working weeks, with some choosing to work 1 day in the office and others choosing to work 4 days. Clearer legislation and practices should be implemented in Ireland and across Europe regarding hybrid working policies, to ensure legal protections for both employees and organisations.

Productivity Drivers

Flexibility

The overarching theme that emerged from the interviews was the impact flexibility has had on the participants' productivity, satisfaction, and motivation. Flexibility in work environment strategies allows employees to find the equilibrium between their personal and professional lives and this has improved WLB drastically. In the report by ManPower Group, flexibility was not highlighted as a productivity driver, however, it was argued that flexibility is a cardinal aspect of productivity. The report suggests that employers should consider providing this flexibility to employees where possible and it is evident from the findings that high levels of flexibility are greatly appreciated. Flexibility in hybrid strategies was frequently noted by participants, as employees enjoy having autonomy over their work schedule, within reason. It is evident from the research that employees work more productively with high levels of flexibility and thus could be argued that similar policies should be implemented across global PwC firms. Hybrid working is available to all PwC employees and although the policies are in place, it is not certain that the views and realities of each country correlate. A cultural comparison between Ireland and other countries would add to the research to understand the cultural differences between the work environment approaches.

Work environment

Clements-Croome highlights the importance of the physical work environment for employee productivity, studying how aspects such as light, temperature, and noise can influence productivity (Clements-Croome, 2000). The research conducted enriches these

studies due to the hybrid strategy in place. Participants highlighted the office itself as being equipped with additional resources, which enriches the employee's experience of working in the office. It also allows for face-to-face collaboration and social interaction, which employees agree improves productivity. Furthermore, employees highlighted the home office set up provided by the firm as a factor of productivity, increasing the efficiency of work. Participants noted the home office equipment provided by PwC, such as monitors, office chairs, wireless keyboards and mice and highlighted how this WFH set up is optimal and allows them to work seamlessly and productively at home. Furthermore, employees mentioned that WFH allowed them to avoid office distractions such as noise, which at times impedes productivity.

Organisational

Organisational factors are key to productivity. Managerial support and positive work culture are vital for employees' motivation, job satisfaction, and productivity. The literature shows that the overall work environment and culture have a direct impact on employee performance. Furthermore, the report from ManPower group highlights the importance of a positive work culture, with 43% of employers stating it as a productivity driver. The participants of this study highlighted managerial support and a positive work environment as factors influencing productivity. The level of trust and ongoing support from managers has a direct impact and is appreciated by employees. Leadership in organisations such as PwC should be equipped with the training needed to manage a hybrid approach effectively. This does not only benefit the managers themselves but also ensures adequate support for employees adapting to a hybrid approach.

Systems & Technology

The literature highlights the impact technology has on productivity. Without the evolution of technological factors, hybrid and remote working would simply not be possible. Advanced systems, like Google Workspace, were mentioned by the participants as a factor of productivity. These technologies improve overall collaboration, organisation, and teamwork, which are all vital for maintaining productivity levels, particularly in a hybrid setting. PwC and firms alike should improve infrastructure and connectivity where possible, investing in further technological advancements to ensure high levels of

productivity. Similarly, employees should be equipped with digital knowledge and training to ensure seamless adaptation to advancing tech.

Productivity Challenges

Distractions

Distractions are highlighted as a challenge of remote working in literature. Interruptions from children for example, resulted in a decline in productivity, particularly during the pandemic (Felstead and Henseke, 2017; Geary and Belizon, 2022). Although participants did not specifically highlight children as being a major distraction, some participants mentioned how they could understand how, if they had children, this could be a major factor in losing focus when WFH. The UCD survey found a difference in gender in their research, with women reporting higher distractions due to caring responsibilities than men. This was not the case in the qualitative research conducted. However, as previously mentioned, only 2 participants were parents and only one of these was a woman. The sample of participants limited this finding and hence why further research should be conducted to acknowledge this gap. Interviewing more parents and women would likely change the findings to align more with previous literature. Further research into the impact of domestic responsibilities such as childcare is needed to understand the implications for productivity in a hybrid or remote setting. Participants mentioned mobile phones impeding productivity when WFH and highlighted the importance of having self-discipline to avoid such issues. Distractions can hinder productivity and thus PwC and other firms should focus on ways in which these distractions could be avoided in a hybrid setting.

Technological & Environmental Factors.

Productivity levels cannot be maintained when employees do not have access to the systems needed to complete their work. This coincides with previous literature, specifically the ‘Working from Ireland’ survey by UCD, which highlighted that those in rural Ireland were less likely to WFH due to poor-quality internet access (Geary and Belizon, 2022). The findings of the research align, as some highlighted challenges of slowing systems due to poor internet. Despite highlighting equipment/technology as challenges, the literature does not specifically mention the lack of adequate home office

spaces, which was a finding of the research. Employees in rented housing often find it difficult to ensure confidentiality in a remote setting. Furthermore, make-shift home offices can limit productivity at home. PwC and other firms should ensure to provide adequate equipment and furniture to support employee productivity from home and further governmental actions could be implemented to provide resources to those employees who work in a remote setting to improve the WFH space, such as grants & funding.

Social Challenges

Lack of human contact and isolation are highlighted in the literature as potential challenges to productivity (Felstead, 2021; Geary and Belizon, 2022). It appears that, despite remaining a potential issue, participants in the research do not feel that loneliness and isolation are as prevalent now as they were during the pandemic. Some participants did mention that WFH can feel more intense at times, however it is evident that social challenges are not as pressing today. Incentives, such as the wellbeing allowance and social events provided by PwC can help to improve employee wellbeing and could further reduce social challenges of working remotely.

Employee Motivation & Job Satisfaction

Herzberg's Two-Factor theory, which highlights motivators enhancing job satisfaction and 'hygiene factors' which decrease dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1966). Motivators include factors such as responsibility, recognition, and achievement, which were highlighted by participants as recognition and career and learning opportunities. Hygiene factors include interpersonal relationships, working conditions and other incentives such as pay, which were mentioned by participants. The employees valued the organisational culture, working conditions and the incentives provided by PwC. Both the motivators and the hygiene factors appear to enhance overall motivation and job satisfaction of employees.

The JCM model, which aims to increase employee productivity and performance, highlights autonomy, feedback, task significance, task identity, and skill variety as factors affecting motivation and job satisfaction (Hackman and Oldham, 1974). PwC employees

emphasized the level of autonomy given to employees as a factor of motivation, along with a genuine interest in their jobs. Skill variety was not specifically mentioned, however, some employees alluded to having a broad range of tasks to complete in their work, suggesting variety in work.

Participants noted the autonomy given to them in tasks, the keen sense of connection, and relatedness within the firm, and the high levels of training and support given to employees to ensure competence in their work. Furthermore, the research found that the hybrid strategy satisfies each of these factors, with employees highlighting the flexibility of the strategy as the primary influence. This flexibility allows for greater WLB, further improving employee satisfaction. WLB is vital for employee productivity and PwC employees are satisfied with the strategy in place as it allows them to find this equilibrium. Participants noted the ability to integrate their professional lives with their personal lives, such as completing personal activities (childcare/household tasks) during the working day, due to the strategy in place. Having a job that fits one's lifestyle is fundamental for employees in a modern workplace. These findings can be directly related to the SDT theory, which is based on extrinsic and intrinsic motivators, stemming from the three factors of autonomy, relatedness, and competence, further emphasizes employee motivation (Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2017).

The findings of the research, whilst considering the existing theory provide a comprehensive understanding of how the hybrid strategy fosters high levels of productivity, motivation, and job-satisfaction and WLB. PwC and the wider professional services sector should utilize theories such as Two-factor, SDT and JCM to develop an understanding of psychological factors influencing employee motivation, job satisfaction, and overall productivity.

PwC and other multinational firms should continue to consider the effect of work environment strategies on the workforce. Employees are seeking higher levels of flexibility and WLB in their day-to-day lives and have become accustomed to work-life post-pandemic. As seen from the research, companies like PwC risk losing and acquiring talent if flexible and hybrid work environment strategies are not in place. Organisations

should consider a hybrid strategy, not only for the success of the company, but for the wellbeing, satisfaction, and productivity of their employees. It is evident from the literature and research that employees appreciate the flexibility and it is likely that these trends will continue well into the future.

In conclusion, the literature studied is largely consistent with the primary research conducted. The findings coincide with the theory and literature and emphasize the adaptability and evolution of work strategies post-pandemic. The research reinforces the importance of WLB, flexibility, and managerial support in modern work environments and can continue to improve with further research and understanding. However, it is important to highlight again the limitations of this sample study, as it focuses solely on one organization and one country. A larger sample, with a larger range of demographics, from various firms and countries with cultural differences would enrich this research and should be considered as a recommendation for future studies of productivity in hybrid work environments.

Conclusion

This paper has explored how different work environment strategies, specifically, in-person, remote and hybrid, affect employee productivity in a post-pandemic world. The literature review and theories studied gave a comprehensive understanding of the three cardinal elements of this paper, productivity, work environments and the evolution of remote/hybrid working. This extensive review allowed me to make comparisons and identify gaps in the primary qualitative data collected.

The findings of the qualitative data conducted has shown that PwC employees favour a hybrid approach and see it as the “best of both worlds.” A hybrid approach is the work environment where employees, in general, feel the most productive. The pandemic accelerated the growth of remote and hybrid working, and they can now be considered the optimal and preferred model by employees. From the data collected, no one believes that PwC will return to a full in-person strategy and suggests that PwC and similar organisations should implement hybrid strategies in Ireland and beyond. The overarching theme from the qualitative research is that employees value flexibility in all aspects of their work. Post COVID, employees have adapted to a flexible work strategy and this flexibility has enhanced elements such as motivation, job-satisfaction, WLB and productivity.

The literature review along with the qualitative research studied how factors, including environmental, social, personal, and organisational collectively affect employee productivity and how each of these elements, along with others such as technology and managerial support, can impact the productivity of a workforce. This paper also highlights some of the continuing challenges of hybrid and remote strategies, with distractions, confidentiality and home-office space being mentioned. Employees point out the importance of organization, managerial support, and self-discipline as ways to overcome these challenges as they arise.

This research, however, has some limitations which should be acknowledged and considered. The first being the sample size of the interviewees. The study was conducted on 8 participants, all of whom work in PwC. The small number of participants interviewed may not represent the views of the entire firm and therefore should be considered as a limitation. In addition, with only 8 participants, there was a limited range of demographics

considered. Although the position of the employees varied, there were some limitations in demographic aspects. For example, as mentioned, only one mother was interviewed, which as we have seen from the literature, mothers tend to report higher distractions due to childcare responsibilities. Increasing the number of participants along with broadening the range of those interviewed would make for more well-rounded findings and may have skewed results in a different way.

Furthermore, PwC Ireland was the only company and country studied in the research. It is important to consider how various companies, across Ireland and the world, implement different work strategies and how the productivity of their employees changes as a result. Further research should be conducted to broaden these findings and insights. Another limitation to consider is the limited time that has passed since the pandemic, which may not give a fully accurate representation of long-term productivity levels in a hybrid working setting. Post-pandemic work environment strategies should continue to be assessed to investigate long-term effects.

It can be concluded that employees favour a hybrid work environment strategy. A hybrid strategy allows for employees to maximise productivity and further enhances motivation, WLB and job-satisfaction. Hybrid working helps PwC employees to maintain the balance between professional and personal lives, whilst maintaining high levels of visibility in the firm itself. Further studies should be conducted, with a broader sample of employees from various organisations and countries, to understand the experience of different work strategies on a broader level. Organisations should use these insights and findings to consider hybrid work strategies in the future, to maximise employee job-satisfaction, motivation, and overall productivity.

Declaration of the use of Chat GPT / AI

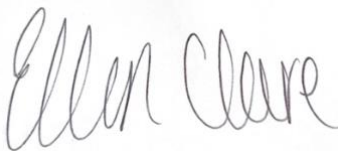
Por la presente, yo, Ellen Clare estudiante de E4, Grado de Administración y dirección de empresas con mención internacional, de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas al presentar mi Trabajo Fin de Grado titulado “Productivity Post Pandemic. Navigating Work Environments: A comparison of in person, remote and hybrid work strategies” declaro que he utilizado la herramienta de Inteligencia Artificial Generativa ChatGPT u otras similares de IAG de código sólo en el contexto de las actividades descritas a continuación:

1. **Brainstorming de ideas de investigación:** Utilizado para idear y esbozar posibles áreas de investigación.
2. **Revisor:** Para recibir sugerencias sobre cómo mejorar y perfeccionar el trabajo con diferentes niveles de exigencia.
3. **Generador de encuestas:** Para diseñar cuestionarios preliminares.
4. **Traductor:** Para traducir textos de un lenguaje a otro. (DeepL.com)

Afirmo que toda la información y contenido presentados en este trabajo son producto de mi investigación y esfuerzo individual, excepto donde se ha indicado lo contrario y se han dado los créditos correspondientes (he incluido las referencias adecuadas en el TFG y he explicitado para que se ha usado ChatGPT u otras herramientas similares). Soy consciente de las implicaciones académicas y éticas de presentar un trabajo no original y acepto las consecuencias de cualquier violación a esta declaración.

Fecha: 4/06/2024

Firma: Ellen Clare

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ellen Clare". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Verbal Consent for interview participants

Prior to beginning the interview, the researcher will ask for **verbal consent** from the interviewee for the following:

1. Their willingness to participate in the interview.
2. Consent for the interview to be recorded and transcribed. These are not to be stored on the interviewer's personal computer drive but that of ICADE. The full transcriptions will only be available to view by the interviewer, and if necessary, her academic supervisor.
3. Any summary interview content or direct quotations from the interview will be anonymized so that the participant cannot be identified, however the company in which they work (*PwC Ireland*) and their general position (*ie, manager, senior manager, partner etc*) will be mentioned throughout.

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

INTRODUCTION

1. Can you describe your role in PwC and how long you have been with the company.
2. What office location do you primarily work in?
3. What was your experience of work environment setting pre pandemic (*if applicable*)
4. Can you describe your week in PwC currently... how many days are you in the office on average? Do you avail of the flexible working hours? - Can you tell me about your reasonings behind this?

PERCEPTIONS OF HYBRID WORKING & PRODUCTIVITY

5. How did you find the transition from the pandemic to the current hybrid model you have now, what were the main challenges? (*If applicable*)
6. Do you feel you and your team maintain productivity levels in this hybrid model / Have you seen any major changes post pandemic?

7. What factors do you feel contribute productivity when working remotely? Do you have any team and/or personal essentials/incentives to maintain productivity?
8. What factors do you feel may hinder your productivity?

MOTIVATION & JOB SATISFACTION

9. Can you tell me about some aspects of your work environment that you feel contribute to your job satisfaction
10. What are your main motivators, what helps you/your team stay motivated daily

CHALLENGES/WLB

11. What are the main challenges, in your experience, of a remote work setting?
12. How do you maintain a work/life balance in this current hybrid model?
13. Do you have any opinion on the future of work environments now that we are on the other side of the pandemic, do you predict any future trends etc.?

CONCLUSIONS

14. Do you have any insights/opinions to add to your experience of maintaining productivity in the different work environments?