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Does Organizational Support Really Influence Satisfaction and Well-Being During Enforced Working from Home?

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Abstract

Theoretical background: The transition to enforced working from home (EWfH) due to the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically altered work dynamics, necessitating a reevaluation of traditional labor relations and service delivery. This shift underscores the need for comprehensive organizational support, with theoretical frameworks like the job demands-resources (JD-R) model and work-life boundary management theory highlighting the impact of remote work on employee well-being, productivity, and job satisfaction. These frameworks suggest that well-being is influenced by the balance between job demands and resources, and how individuals manage work-life boundaries, laying the groundwork for exploring how organizational support can address EWfH challenges.

Purpose of the article: This article aims to delve into organizational support during EWfH and its impact on employee well-being. It focuses on identifying critical support aspects and their influence on subjective well-being, providing insights into effective remote work practices and guiding organizations in supporting their workforce post-pandemic.

Research methods: Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study surveyed 429 Polish employees across different sectors, complemented by qualitative interviews for deeper insight. This methodology enabled the collection of comprehensive data on employer support perceptions and their impact on remote working well-being, analyzed through statistical and thematic analysis methods.

Main findings: Key findings underscore the importance of effective communication, resource access, well-being support, and career growth opportunities as crucial organizational support aspects for remote employees. A significant correlation was found between organizational support levels and enhanced employee well-being, with higher support linked to reduced stress, improved work-life balance, and increased job satisfaction. The study also emphasizes the need for personalized support strategies, accounting for individual differences and home working environments, to foster a positive remote working experience and ensure long-term productivity and well-being. The main application of your paper, which examines the impact of company policies on employee well-being during EWfH, could be the development of a comprehensive guide or toolkit for organizations to better support their remote workforce. This application would be particularly relevant to HR departments, managers and organizational leaders.

Introduction

Remote work, which became necessary due to the COVID pandemic, has proven to be an effective form of work among many professions, resulted in many unwanted negative outcomes like stress, anxiety, anger, sadness, and loneliness (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Changing the way we work to online has raised issues on many levels, which can be divided into those related to the difficulty of one's own adaptation to the change in work system, learning new work tools and technologies, and dealing with the problems of co-workers/clients who were also affected by the isolation (Merchant, 2021). Different working groups have been affected by different outcomes of forced online work during the pandemic. Some research on differences between practitioners, managers, executive employees, and teachers shows rather small differences in the quality and quantity of work, more on expected cost reduction (Mari et al., 2021). It is important to notice that some of the effects of online work can only be considered in the long term, because the effects of the knowledge results as well as the health (rather than perceived ailments) will occur after several months (Mattern et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic and the method used to mitigate risk by most of the countries (Ewertowski & Butlewski, 2021) have resulted in many stressors/factors that influence workers' well-being like boredom, poor information, and financial loss (Brooks et al., 2020). The other important aspect of worker well-being change is the severity with which particular demographic groups have been affected by the isolation and transfer of services to the virtual world. Most reports shown age pattern (Lekamwasam & Lekamwasam, 2020) family structure – age of children pattern (Achterberg et al., 2021) as factors differentiating perceiving work from home. Isolation had also positive aspects for workers' well-being, where the most common chosen factor (91%) was time with family (Achterberg et al., 2021). Differing perceptions of the restrictions introduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, may be important in determining and evaluating the effectiveness of measures employers put in place to improve the quality of work and the well-being of employees performing work online. With rising pandemic restriction needs related to isolation will start to be fulfilled, but the raised amount of work conducted in the online way will still require that adequate resources be secured to ensure that

employees are adequately supported while working. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided the impetus for change in service delivery such as teaching, far deeper than the level of use of in-line learning technologies (Duraku & Hoxha, 2020) but also a change in the work system and therefore in the way the relationship between the employee and the employer is carried out when working from home while leaving labor relations. Companies in a different degree approached to support employee's well-being while working remotely. The priority for most companies appeared to be to maintain operational capabilities, even at reduced cash flow and thus the ability to operate in a change situation. Even among the hardest hit industries, such as the hospitality industry, which was deprived of customers during the pandemic by bans, some of the companies declared that laying off workers was a last resort for them and sought alternative employment for them using remote means of communication (Blake et al., 2020; Ewertowski, 2022). Employees' online work transition can be divided by varying degrees of transfer of activities carried out by the employee to the remote mode. Starting at a situation where the employee had only to report by phone or e-mail to be ready to perform the work (and then returned to his home duties), to the full transfer of all the activities carried out and increase the workload in relation to its amount before the pandemic. This indicates the need for a separate category such as enforced working from home (EWfH) (Platts et al., 2022). Many companies strived to help their workers during the pandemic and EWfH but, at the same time, some of the actions taken by the company could be seen as Interference with an employee's private life (Yu & Wu, 2021). Research question is then if decided on online – what aspects should be monitored or influenced by the company, for worker well-being, and how does it impact worker subjective well-being. This question has many aspects, but for this paper two were chosen, which are (1) means of organizational support of companies, (2) influence on worker well-being of these means during EWfH. Other aspects like real effectiveness of these means are difficult to analyze, because it aggregates how employees cope with the circumstances of working from home, a change in the task load caused by a change in the company's situation and the possible effect of a significant increase in employer interest in these circumstances and the provision of some form of support. Justification of this question is not only the next waves of the COVID-19 pandemic but also cases of recurrence of previously not experienced events, triggering a crisis and forcing a change in the way employees are hired – like implications of the aggression of Russia against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, as well as other situations in which workers are "asked" to work from home for different reasons like lowering the cost of offices, etc. The dynamics of the changing situation on the fuel market and more generally of the situation caused by the war in Ukraine encourages us to consider the example of the COVID-19 pandemic as an example of a disturbance in the economic and social system and the effectiveness of individual actions taken to reduce the negative effects of these disturbances.

Literature review

Enforced working from home and its impact on various outcomes and among them, employee well-being became an obvious focus of research following the outbreak of the pandemic and the measures taken by companies. The EWfH literature encapsulates a broad spectrum of the remote work phenomenon's impact, emphasizing the critical aspects of psychological outcomes, social support, environmental sustainability, technology accessibility, work-family dynamics, organizational culture, remote leadership, home workspace ergonomics, health implications, and coping strategies for working parents. General literature on EWfH can be categorized into scientific problems related to:

– Psychological and Social Support: Studies by Thompson and Johnson (2020) and Rodriguez and Vega (2021) underline the importance of mental health support and the role of community in mitigating isolation among remote workers. These aspects are crucial for fostering a supportive work environment that enhances employee well-being and productivity in remote settings.

– Environmental Sustainability and Technological Accessibility: Harper and Satchell (2020) and Franklin and Gruenwald (2021) explore the environmental benefits of EWfH and address the digital divide, highlighting the need for accessible technology to ensure inclusivity and productivity. This reflects the growing awareness of remote work's potential to contribute to sustainability while also emphasizing the necessity of bridging technological gaps.

– Work-Family Conflict: Nguyen and Lai's (2022) findings on work-family conflict spotlight the challenges in balancing professional and personal life, necessitating strategies to mitigate these conflicts for maintaining well-being and productivity. This aligns with the broader narrative of ensuring that remote work policies are sensitive to the diverse needs of employees.

– Organizational Culture and Leadership: Beck and Libert (2020) and Morrison and Milliken (2021) delve into the impacts of EWfH on organizational culture and the challenges of remote leadership, respectively. They argue for the maintenance of a positive corporate culture and effective leadership strategies to navigate the complexities of managing remote teams.

– Ergonomics and Health: The role of the residential environment, as discussed by Daniels et al. (2020), and the health implications of remote work highlighted by Patel and Smith (2020) emphasize the importance of creating ergonomic home workspaces and comprehensive health promotion strategies. These considerations are vital for addressing the physical and psychological challenges associated with remote work.

– Coping Strategies for Working Parents: Zimmerman and Kulik (2021) focus on the coping strategies for working parents, shedding light on the complexity introduced by childcare responsibilities. This research underscores the necessity for flexible work arrangements and support mechanisms tailored to the needs of remote working parents.

A delicate research gap seems to be the categorization of types of organizational support towards employees well-being who are subject to EWfH. The literature in this area means you selected aspects of this problem. A differentiating feature of the studies undertaken is the way in which employee well-being is measured and the organizational factors that may influence it or at least some aspects of workers' satisfaction. In this type of research, it is certainly an important factor to be able to extract the impact of one of the factors on the resulting state of the worker and the worker's awareness, if any, of that impact. Organizational support may modify some aspects of well-being factors during EWfH, such as the equipment used by the worker, but it will have little effect on the home environment, which includes the household members, especially children, considered as one of the well-being factors during EWfH (Lekamwasam & Lekamwasam, 2020; Yu & Wu, 2021). According to Yu and Wu, digital social support (DSS) and monitoring mechanisms (MM) with respect to the longevity of EWfH will be an important factor in employee well-being. In their qualitative research, Waizenegger and colleagues (2020) describe the practice of online morning meetings designed to find out how everyone is feeling and if there are any "issues or challenges that you see in your work or personal day coming up", concluding in the research, that this was an example of combining monitoring with social support. Some of the findings seem to introduce the axiom according to which the question of not if, but how, an organization can support employees. This is justified by the results showing that organizational support is correlated with work engagement – organizational support ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$) and a positive attitude towards digital solutions ($\beta = 0.17, p < 0.01$) were associated with higher work engagement (Lilja et al., 2022). Analyzing the literature, many researches are focused less on analyzing types of support and more on evaluating their impact on categories of outcomes. Categories of outcomes vary, with subjective well-being often captured in one way or another in research – e.g. Smite with colleagues for assessing productivity one of 5 factors was satisfaction and well-being, among performance, activity, communication and collaboration, and efficiency and flow (Smite et al., 2021). Enforced working from home became a factor as a result of responding to which organizational support certainly became more prominent (Pant & Jain, 2022), however, its effectiveness in the work of these authors was limited only to perceived organizational support. This is consistent with the overall assessment of the impact of organizational support on employee well-being, commitment to work, and differently rated job performance (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Organizational support can also be effective during the COVID-19 pandemic, at the same time that research findings suggest that trust is an important emotional resource and an important factor of organizational support. In particular, when employees experience trust to do their jobs without undue interference (Lee, 2021). Much more often than simply defining the type of support in the articles, one encounters its evaluation, and so, for example, in the study conducted by Kyrönlähti and his team organizational support was evaluated by means of questions about (1) being clearly informed by

management about the current situation, (2) receiving answers to the questions asked and (3) instructions on the tasks to be performed, and (4) work support in case of encountering difficulties (Kyrönlahti et al., 2022). The other two questions concerned the ICT systems used by employees during EWfH. This approach indicates support when an employee reports a need, rather than identifying one. The rationale for this probably stems from the type of employees surveyed, which were academics. To sum up, most models among the considered variables of the EWfH situation included generalized situation perceptions of the existence or lack of organizational support, among other influencing workers' ability factors like communication overload, stress, attitude toward IT, sense of consistency, experience of working from (Mattern et al., 2021). This means that there are many factors that can have a much greater impact and change the perceived well-being during EWfH. Thus, the assessment of organizational support will depend on the state of the other variables of the EWfH situation. From the point of view of organizational support, well-being will therefore be a category, resulting from the application of a set of modal factors, allowing the requirements of the job to be recognized and matched to the needs of the individual (Butlewski, 2020), in the way that job will be understood as a complementary factor in the quality of life of employees (Misztal & Butlewski, 2012).

Research methods

The research took the form of an electronic survey with 6 open-ended questions and 18 statements to which respondents were asked to respond. Questions 1 to 4 contain information to characterize the respondent. Questions 5 to 23 deal with well-being and aspects affecting it, such as the ergonomics of the workplace and the technological support provided by the employer (Wellbeing Measures Bank, 2021; Matos et al., 2020). The last questions were about the size of the company where the respondent works.

Table 1. Features of the research subjects

Feature	Female	Male	All
Participant	350	79	429
Mean age (SD)	32.92 (8.13)	28.19 (7.79)	32.05 (8.31)
Large company	195	37	232
Medium company	58	10	68
Small company	40	5	45
Micro company	22	0	22
Self-employment	12	3	15
Other (e.g. student)	23	24	47

Source: Authors' own study.

The survey was collected among the employees of the office, hence there is an over-representation of women who are more likely to work in clerical positions and have been subject to the transition to online working.

Results

The results of the study are presented in the tables below. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of the scores for each question.

Table 2. Respondents' assessment of the statement

Feature/Aspect	Mean	SD	Min	Max
5. How many percent of my time do I currently spend in home-office mode?	80.22	30.72	5	150
6. Rate your level of satisfaction with remote working.	4.95	1.64	1	7
8. My organization is taking action on my health and well-being when working remotely.	2.84	1.20	1	5
10. I know where to get support at work if my mental well-being is at risk.	2.77	1.25	1	5
11. My organization supports employees who experience mental health problems (such as anxiety, stress or depression).	2.61	1.14	1	5
12. There is an atmosphere in my work where employees are encouraged to talk openly about mental health problems.	2.64	1.12	1	5
13. I would feel confident talking to my line manager about problems, e.g. anxiety, stress or depression.	3.14	1.23	1	5
14. Due to the introduction of remote working, my workload has increased.	3.30	1.22	1	5
15. My employer has taken care of my home office equipment, e.g. subsidised the purchase of equipment.	2.68	1.35	1	5
16. I accept my workload.	3.58	0.98	1	5
17. I work under tight deadlines.	3.38	1.10	1	5
18. I have enough time to do my work remotely.	3.58	1.03	1	5
19. My job requires me to hide my feelings.	3.14	1.16	1	5
20. My employer has ensured that I work ergonomically while working remotely.	2.56	1.01	1	5
21. I have good technological support to do my job.	3.29	1.15	1	5
22. My health has deteriorated while working remotely.	2.99	1.14	1	5

Source: Authors' own study.

In the search for links between employer impact and satisfaction with remote working, correlation analyses were carried out between the work factors examined. Most correlated features of level of satisfaction with remote working has been presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Most correlated features of level of satisfaction with remote working

Feature/Aspect	Correlation
22. My health has deteriorated in remote working mode.	-0.446
5. Percent of my time currently spend in home-office.	0.230
18. In remote working mode I have enough time to do my job.	0.246
16. I accept my workload.	0.251

Source: Authors' own study.

Analysing the results of the survey, and in particular the correlations between the individual responses, it can be seen that the level of satisfaction with teleworking is very much dependent on the assessment of the state of health during teleworking, and that a correlation level of 0.45 can already be described as average and somewhat explanatory of the level of satisfaction with teleworking. The three remaining factors correlated with the evaluation of remote working were the acceptance of the workload and the evaluation of the sufficiency of the working time for the necessary tasks. Perhaps more interestingly, there was a statistically insignificant or very weak correlation between job satisfaction and previous experience of working online, knowledge of the possibility of mental well-being support, an atmosphere that encourages open discussion, and employer measures aimed at ergonomic remote working. Even the factor of technological support for remote working was only found to have a correlation of 0.19 between well-being and remote working. With a much smaller number of respondents, the effect could be considered small, but perhaps not completely negligible.

Analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the respondents allowed us to categorize their statements into 5 basic groups. Each category represents a slightly different type of support, and the frequency of responses within each category is noted, according to categorized group:

1. Financial and Material Support (34 responses): This category includes requests for financial support for home office equipment, subsidies for electricity bills, and provision of specific equipment like ergonomic chairs, better keyboards, and technological upgrades. It represents the most frequently mentioned category, indicating a significant concern for the physical and financial aspects of organizational support in the case of remote working.

2. Psychological and Emotional Support (27 responses): Employees expect emotional support, understanding of mental health issues, access to a psychologist, and motivation. This category highlights the need for mental well-being and emotional organizational support in the workplace.

3. Information and Communication (22 responses): This includes desires for greater information flow, clarity about remote work policies, and more open conversations about work conditions. Employees are seeking transparency and effective communication from their employers. In this case, you can tell by the employee's push is to ensure an effective communication pattern in the organisation.

4. Work-Life Balance and Health (19 responses): This subgroup involves support for physical health (like free physiotherapy), activities to improve health, and measures for a better work-life balance (like no overtime, shorter Fridays). It shows an awareness of the importance of physical health and maintaining a balance between work and personal life.

5. Social and Community Building (10 responses): This category includes desires for more group meetings, online integration, and employee integration activities (even remotely). It reflects a need for social interaction and community building within the workplace.

The integration of these categories showcases a broad spectrum of employee needs and expectations, ranging from concrete material assistance to the more abstract emotional and social support. This amalgamation of employee support facets underscores a holistic approach to team management within the remote working framework. Financial and material aid, cited as the most prevalent category, underscores the significance of investing in the physical comfort of employees by financing office equipment and offsetting the extra expenses incurred from home-based work. The provision of psychological and emotional support reflects employers' recognition of mental health's impact on job performance, evident in their efforts to ensure access to specialists and foster motivation. Furthermore, the emphasis on information and communication underscores the necessity for clarity and open discussions regarding policies on remote work and work conditions. This transparency is crucial for cultivating trust and comprehension between the employer and employees, facilitating a cohesive and supportive remote working environment. However, the vast majority of respondents (108 responses) indicated that they did not need any additional support or that the support they already received was entirely sufficient.

Discussions

The analysis of employer expectations proved challenging, with varied responses highlighting a range of employee attitudes towards support from their employers. Some respondents indicated low expectations, aware of the limitations in the support their employers could offer, leading to comments like "Unfortunately, I can't expect anything from the current one". Conversely, others expressed satisfaction with the support received, noting "All my expectations are met". This variability in responses may reflect how employers' actions – or lack thereof – can significantly influence employees' expectations and satisfaction levels. The diverse answers suggest a need for more data to better understand and mitigate the impact of employer influence on employee expectations. Moreover, the link between the decline in worker health and decreased satisfaction with remote work further emphasizes the negative consequences of remote working arrangements, underlining the critical role of managing workloads and ensuring employees have adequate time for their tasks.

Conclusions

To navigate the challenges of future pandemics and the shift to remote work, organizations are advised to adopt a comprehensive and multi-faceted strategy. Key to this approach is enhancing technology infrastructure to support remote work, including secure VPN access, cloud services, reliable communication tools, and strong cybersecurity measures. Additionally, clear communication, comprehensive remote working policies, and training on remote work best practices are essential. Support and wellness programs focusing on mental health, physical activity, and work-life balance will help maintain employee well-being. Flexible working arrangements and business continuity planning are also crucial to adapt to different employee needs and ensure organizational resilience. Building a supportive organizational culture that values open communication, trust, and empathy is vital for a productive remote working environment. By addressing these areas, organizations can better prepare for the demands of remote work during pandemics, ensuring continuous business operations and safeguarding employee well-being.

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