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Working from home – the new normal?

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19, like all global pandemics, has triggered and accelerated change. For organisations, the lockdowns have been transformative; employees, managers and educationalists have rapidly upskilled and conducted online meetings, established remote work groups, reconfigured teaching styles, utilised platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Complex organisational structures have been transposed overnight into virtual work spaces within a domestic setting. An estimated 40% or more of New Zealand employees worked from home some of the time during the two Covid-19 lockdowns alert levels 4 and 3 in April and early May, 2020 moving quickly from centralised work locations to full-time working from home.

Working from Home (WFH) has been the focus of academic and market inquiry over the past half-century, with consistent findings of productivity gains and worker preferences in most instances. The COVID-19 WFH response replicated these findings, along with negative impacts of the pandemic: stress and exhaustion, longer working hours, Zoom fatigue, the challenge of maintaining a work-life balance, and a slowing of innovation and ideas generation.

An ongoing, unresolved issue has been the failed response of management to reframe organisational and cultural contexts required by WFH. Traditional management-employee relationships proved inadequate when face-to-face management moved to remote management. Similarly, the WFH environment challenged co-worker collaboration and communication.

This paper explores these COVID-19 developments, reviews initial research and critiques the current response of New Zealand organisations. It concludes that while the practice of WFH is set to become the new normal working environment, managers and HR practitioners are failing to develop a model of best practice that addresses productivity, performance, health and safety, networking and creativity and other continuances that are readily available in the traditional office setting.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

When New Zealand responded to a growing number of Covid 19 cases in March 2020, the Government acted quickly. On 25 March, at 11:59pm, an all-nation Level 4 lockdown went into force, which placed all members of the population into confinement in their homes, aside from limited shopping and exercise opportunities. The New Zealand Covid-19 Alert System has four steps: Alert Level 4 — Lockdown; Alert Level 3 — Restrict; Alert Level 2 — Reduce; Alert Level 1 — Prepare (About the Alert System, n.d.).

Within a week, aside from those organisations providing essential services, businesses, schools, and tertiary instructions began to reconfigure how to keep the nation's economy running from the confines of the bedroom, living room or for a few, the study. Within a matter of days employees, managers and educationalists rapidly upskilled on the technicalities of Skype, Zoom and Microsoft Teams and began conducting meetings, classes and interviews via their computer screens. For many who were accustomed to travelling to a workplace every day, home became the office. Despite competing pressures of family life and work, New Zealanders, joining those around the world in similar circumstances, kept working. Complex organisational structures and practices, which traditionally underpin codes of behaviour, work ethics, managerial authority, organisational climate, culture were overnight transposed and squeezed into a virtual reality housed within a domestic setting.

In a bid to offset the economic gloom and anxiety, international business pages and the New Zealand business media reported employees finding remote working a positive and productive option. Positives included observations that employees were better able to concentrate away from the distractions of office, producing enhanced working outputs, with the time spent travelling repurposed into work projects. Supporting this new mode of working was a wealth of guidelines published in local and international business media sites that offered managers advise on how to manage their teams remotely, communicate effectively, maintain productivity and ensure health and safety of their employees (Gino & Cable, 2020; Reeves et al., 2020). It is questionable how of many these advice and opinion pieces resulted in improved managerial processes, as time pressures for managers to complete their own tasks would have left little time for upskilling. As a result, managers versed in face-to-face management practices found themselves struggling in a remote setting with little training. Added to this, not all jobs were suited to remote working, and their employees' home lives equally were unable to be adapted to fully functioning workspaces (Parker et al., 2020). However, without doubt there was an over-arching expectation that managers and employees alike devote as much time and effort as possible to maintaining productivity and business effectiveness during lockdowns. This ran alongside the expectation that everyone was to gain proficiency in at least one video conferencing platform, such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, and become adept at sharing documents and working in virtual teams.

Working from Home (WFH), telecommuting, telework or remote work as the practice is also known (terms used interchangeably throughout this paper) is not new, and has been the standard convention for gig workers for most of this century. Globally the practice of working from home has been gradually increasing, ranging from 2% to 40% over the last several years depending on the country. So, while Covid-19 has dramatically altered normal working arrangements, the response to the pandemic has merely hastened the steady migration of work to online or into a virtual environment (Kniffin et al., 2020). Before Covid-19, more than one third of New Zealand employees had engaged in WFH in their main job, with an even gender spread (Stats NZ, 2019). Of this number, the ability to work from home was a determining factor. The most common roles were managers, professionals, those employed in the education sector; the least common were those employed in a trade, or in the retail and hospitality sectors (Stats NZ, 2019). The intense two months of the Covid-19 lockdown overturned this pattern and involved a significant number in the workforce. This has given momentum to WFH to be significant development for business operations in the country.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Telecommuting, as WFH was originally known (the term is still in common usage), came out of a national crisis in the United States of America in the 1970s. The Middle Eastern oil suppliers' OPEC oil embargo squeeze in 1973 resulted in an oil crisis and a steep rise in the cost of petroleum for many western economies. This, plus American's love affair with the automobile, had resulted in highways jammed as workers commuted to work, creating a thick exhaust fume haze known as 'smog' that polluted American cities. Jack Nilles, a former NASA engineer, first coined the term 'telecommuting', in a case study advocating a reduction in the length and time of the commute to work. Lead author, Nilles and fellow researchers, published the case study in 1973-1974 (Venkatraman, 1994). In his subsequent

ground-breaking book, *The Telecommunications-Transportation Tradeoff*, published in 1976, Nilles, propositioned telecommuting as a means to combat traffic congestion and conserve non-renewable resources (Gan, 2015; Nilles et al., 1976). Nilles proposed that organisations set up satellite offices or hubs where clerical staff nearby could work rather than travelling to the downtown offices. The main goals were to reduce the length of the commute, reduce energy consumption and ease traffic overload (Gan, 2015). Nilles et al. (1976) stated that in order for this to be successful, job descriptions needed to be redesigned to suit remote working. The authors also suggested that telecommunications and information storage needed to be developed to a sophisticated level so that information could be readily transferred to the head office. It was noted that the reduction of time and travel meant that people would be able to enjoy more family and lifestyle choices such as cycling and walking.

Interestingly, it was not long before dissenters began to oppose the WFH concept. A 1979 Washington Post article suggested that employers would not know that employees were indeed working; predicting there would be a negative flow on if they were removed from their co-workers and other contacts; and that home life would provide too many distractions (Weiler et al., 2017). This criticism of WFH continues to the present day.

The impetus to WFH received another incentive in the aftermath of the San Francisco Bay area earthquake of October 1989, as commuters battled damaged roads, bridges and buildings to get to downtown offices. At the time the governor of California requested employers to adopt telecommuting in the affected areas (Romei, 1992, cited in Venkatraman, 1994). By the mid-1990s advances in technology led to rapid changes in communication and computer capacity and offered increased efficiency and practicality for telecommuting (Venkatraman, 1994). Personal computers with modems, faxes, a phone (perhaps cellular) and a laptop computer if the employee was travelling, all provided the means of working from a home office. In a comparative study Venkatraman (1994) identified advantages of privacy and lack of distractions afforded to those working in a home environment. In 2021 this is still the case, and more so now with the move to open plan office designs and 'hot desking' over the last twenty years. Further advantages identified in a later study included a reduction in travel time to and from work, and the resultant fatigue encountered by commuters. The ability to work within an individual time frame for completion of work was also cited as a positive. However, this advantage applied more to gig workers working independently from organisations

rather than employees working within an organisation, and adhering to normal office hours. Nevertheless, it proved very advantageous for those working internationally who needed to accommodate different time zones. Other advantages included more time for relaxation, family life, reduction in childcare, reduced clothing, meals costs and benefits for the environment (Venkatraman, 1994).

The disadvantages cited were the management's inability to see their staff which could contribute to errors, inefficiencies and the employees missing out on important feedback. For employees, the drawback of extended isolation from fellow workers was also listed among disadvantages. Ford and Butts (1991) suggest the creation of clear and especially tailored job descriptions and training would offset these limitations. Research in the United States by Gajendran and Harrison (2007) concluded that WFH increased job satisfaction and performance and lowered family conflict. A study by Martin and MacDonnell (2012) reinforced these conclusions, identifying positives of increased productivity, commitment, performance and retention, benefitting both workers and organisations. Detracting from these positive outcomes is the frequency and intensity of WFH on home life.

Over the last two decades telecommuting has become a widespread practice. As technology has advanced, so has the number of workers engaged in telecommuting in the United States and abroad (Davis & Polonko, 2001, cited in Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). An estimated 45 million American employees telecommuted in 2006, up from 41 million in 2003 (WorldatWork, 2006, cited in Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

3.0 METHODS

The methodology for this paper is solely qualitative, with secondary research accessing journal and business articles sourced from New Zealand, European and American scholars and business writers. The WFH phenomenon under Covid-19 pandemic restrictions is an emerging scholarly field, with limited primary research available at the time of writing. The researcher accessed research articles from 2020 New Zealand sources: The University of Otago, and AUT University and Stats NZ.

The researcher has chosen to focus on three criteria of productivity, culture, leadership and trust, and organisational and management challenges because these are recurrent themes within the literature and discussion on WFH and are critical to the success or otherwise of the WFH model.

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 Productivity

A major stumbling block to WFH's widespread acceptance in organisations has not come from workers or employees. Rather it has mostly come from senior management and employers concerned that their employees would not be as productive, or capable of producing work of the same quality or amount as they would if situated within the organisation's office. In 2012, American academic Nicholas Bloom and fellow researchers, James Liang, John Roberts, and Zhichun Jenny Ying conducted research in productivity with WFH with Ctrip, a 16,000-employee, NASDAQ-listed Chinese travel agency – the largest online travel agency in China (Bloom et al., 2014). At the time of the research 10% of American employees worked from home, which had created fears of a loss of productivity and that employees were really 'shirking from home'.

Their findings were very positive with the researchers concluding that productivity had increased with WFH. The employees were those who had volunteered to take part in the research, and had been allocated randomly to either work from home or in the office. The results were that those who worked from home recorded a 13% increase in their performance. Researchers attributed this positive result to the fact that employees were taking less breaks and sick leave. The research findings also stated that the employees clocked up a 9% improvement in the actual minutes they were working per shift, and a 4% increase in the number of calls they handled per minute. These were put down to a quieter working environment (Bloom et al., 2014). For their part the employees recorded increased job satisfaction and as a result there was less worker turnover. However, a negative was that employees felt they fell behind on the promotional rank as this was based on onsite performance criteria. Ford and Butts (1991) have also cited this as a drawback from WFH with the suggestion that employees were overlooked for promotion because they are 'out of sight, out of mind'. Nevertheless, the overall success of the experiment prompted CTrip to offer the WFH option to all staff and the first 'experimental' employees the option once again to either choose working from home or at the office. As a result, over half the employees chose the WFH option; an increase of 22%. It is to be noted that Bloom's findings, while encouraging, came with caveats. The participants worked from home only four days a week, had no children, worked in a room that was not their bedroom and had quality broadband internet on equipment the organisation installed for them at home (Bloom et al., 2014). Further critiques such as by Grattan (2020) have stated that Bloom's experiment was easy to carry out because it was essentially a call centre study, and they did not have proper data on the productivity of knowledge workers based at home. Are the results applicable across the board? Grattan noted in the current WFH environment, there was no guarantee that parents working from home or those without access to fast internet would see such productivity boosts.

During the New Zealand Covid-19 lockdowns, maintaining productivity was a major concern as New Zealand businesses struggled to keep functioning in a stressed working environment. Under Level 4, working from home was the only option for employees. As a result, there was a considerable anxiety about whether levels of productivity could be maintained in this restrained environment.

A Swedish comparative study, Thorstensson (2020) examined WFH productivity in 2000 and then in 2019-2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic once again put the topic into major focus. Kazekami (2020, cited in Thorstensson, 2020) stated that the conditions that have an influence on productivity such as the stress of competing work and domestic chores, maintaining a home life/work balance could be offset by the gain of time not spent commuting. Kazekami states that while caring for children and other family members took time away from work, there was nevertheless a positive flow on from WFH on productivity. She suggests that WFH "increases life satisfaction and work satisfaction; however, while life satisfaction improves labor productivity, work satisfaction does not have an influence on productivity of the employees". In normal circumstances, the challenge of dividing the time between work and home/life demands can be challenging with employees finding it hard to maintain boundaries between work and non-work (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). The rapid transition from workplace activity to the home and the forced confinement of workers during Level 4 of New Zealand's COVID 19-pandemic response has further complicated this issue, bringing its own special conditions for productivity.

However, before 2020 there have been a number of studies which have examined the blurred boundary between work and homelife and vice versa (Allen et al., 2015). A re-occurring theme is that some employees find it challenging to maintain boundaries between work and home life (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). While the security of WFH and the lack of time spent commuting was a definite plus, the blurred lines between work and home, and value of making a transition between workplace and home that occurs during the commute counted against this (Kniffin et al., 2020.)

A further incursion into the work/home life boundary has been technology - emails, texts and now Skype, Zoom and Microsoft Teams have heightened the expectation that employees can be available to respond to work demands over and above the normal working hours. Workers may also feel tempted to put in an extra hour or two of work, sometimes utilising the time spent commuting. This may result in stress and also erode the benefits of WFH (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006; Sardeshmukh et al., 2012). Additionally, Noonan and Glass (2012) have indicated WFH can produce a 'work devotion schema' that could lead to an increase in hours worked that was higher than onsite work-based settings. This may have been heightened during the pandemic when there was considerable anxiety for some employees about retaining their jobs during this time of reduced business and trade activity, thus inducing the need to go above and beyond normal commitment and productivity. Another effect of this stress was stated by McGregor and Doshi (2020), who suggested that anxiety about losing jobs, being able to meet economic commitments such as rent or mortgages or health issues impacted negatively on the motivation of employees. The impact of pandemic news items, concerns on how to work safely and fears for family members was very distressing and could manifest itself in inertia. Maurer (2020) stated that many remote workers in the United States were feeling burnout from extended periods of working from home during the coronavirus outbreak. The lack of boundaries between work and home, child care, job insecurity and limited recreational opportunities were among the concerns cited that were affecting stress levels.

4.2 Productivity in New Zealand WFH under Alert Levels 4 & 3

Stats NZ (2020) has reported that over 40% of New Zealand employees worked from home some of the time during the two Covid-19 lockdowns alert levels 4 and 3 in April and early May, 2020. These figures are based on a household labour force survey (HLFS) which discovered that at alert level 4 in April 2020, with the closure of all non-essential businesses, people conducted their work from home rather than in business offices or other workplaces. The trend was short-lived because as the alert levels decreased there was a slow return to work; however, some workers continued to work remotely. By the time the country was on level 1, the majority (83%) had returned to their workplace with just a small number continuing to work from home. The survey found that of those who had remained working at home, a number had made periodic visits to their workplace, so at level 1 the number of actual hours worked at home fell to 10 hours per week from 30 hours per week during alert levels 3 and 4 (Stats NZ, 2020).

Stats NZ stated that for nearly 48%, WFH was a new experience. White-collar jobs and service industries, and people with a higher income such as professionals and managers were more able to work from home. Occupations engaged in WFH included financial and insurance services, information media and telecommunications, professional, scientific, technical, administrative, and support services and rental, hiring, and real estate services. The demographic included women, mostly employees from the age of mid-30s onwards and of European ethnicity. There was a wide range of jobs that could not be undertaken from home such as those requiring machinery or face-to-face roles. These, in the main, were lower-paid jobs such as manual, trades, retailing, health care and hospitality employment (Stats NZ, 2020). In other cases, some business did not have information technology set up for WFH.

These statistics are borne out in The New Zealand Remote Working during COVID-19 New Zealand National Survey conducted by Work Futures Otago in May 2020 during the first few days of Level 3. The majority of the 2,560 responses were received during alert Level 3 with the majority of the respondents coming from Otago (28%), Wellington (22%) and Auckland (20%). They were mostly of New Zealand European descent (79%) and did not receive a reduction in income (81%). Interestingly 92% of the respondents were employees, 54% from public servants, namely from education, public and from civil servants (O'Kane et al., 2020). Although the net for eliciting participants in the survey had been set reasonably wide, with advertising placed for example on social media, LinkedIn, and professional networks such as in the Human Resources and Tourism Industry, the majority of responses received (80%) were from women. This limitation must be taken into account when considering their data.

As mentioned in previous studies the respondents in the Work Futures Otago study indicated that a major issue was the work/home overlap with balancing the responsibilities of family and work. A number (35%) found it difficult to switch off from work and others found motivation a challenge because of home distractions (O'Kane et al., 2020). But many respondents cited increased family time as a bonus. Most respondents lived with partners (72%), and 38% had dependent children. The respondents suggested that a key ingredient for health and well-being and being able to work without distractions was those who had a dedicated workspace. Those that did not have a space struggled. However, it was pointed out that as WFH was available for mostly middle class, professional workers, and although stressful, they were among the privileged few who received

a full salary and technical support while WFH (O'Kane et al., 2020). The researchers stated that productivity was variable and dependent on a number of external factors such as available space, privacy, connectivity, other responsibilities such as child care during the pandemic and running a household. It was an initial trend that in the early stages of the lockdown in New Zealand outputs increased significantly; 35% stated that their productivity was similar to working at the office, 38% stated that they were more productive. Considering the attendant other responsibilities such as childcare this figure was regarded as surprising (O'Kane et al., 2020).

4.3 Culture, Leadership and Trust

Nilles quoted in Gan (2015) stated that technological advances, such as high-speed Internet and affordable and better devices, have enhanced the opportunities for telecommuting in the 21st century. Notwithstanding these considerable gains, managerial and leadership practices and norms have not kept pace with the technology and this slow acceptance by organisations' hierarchy of WFH has proven to be the biggest barrier to a more widespread uptake. This was made evident when the operations of organisations were transferred into the home environment there was a resultant disruption to the traditional hierarchal structures. The culture of organisations, which can be subliminally reinforced for example by a hierarchal physical office layout or the protocols of day to day interactions between the different status levels of staff, was weakened or severed by the sudden break. Also eroded were established patterns, such as networking or relationship building, resulting in more stressful relationships between fellow workers and with their managers (Kniffin et al., 2020). As managers and leaders made the transition from face-to-face managers to remote managers, they struggled to adjust to a new way of relating to staff. A recurring issue of WFH that impacted on managerial and staff relationships and culture during lockdowns was the inability of a manager to 'see' first-hand that their staff were indeed working when and where they said they were. Measuring productivity accurately was a concern of virtual managers who missed the 'walk around' process for ensuring employees were diligently and effectively working. The process of monitoring or measuring outputs and targets could not occur as easily, with managers challenged to ascertain evidence of a work performance. This could result in managers imposing unrealistic expectations, thus producing fatigue. In order to meet these expectations, staff could feel they needed to put in more hours to complete targets and these tensions could spill over into the home life and erode privacy (Parker et al., 2020). Therefore, successful management in

a WFH environment requires relationship-orientated behaviours, with a focus on clear and frequent communication and the goal of establishing/maintaining good faith in the employment relationship, in line with the legislative requirements in the Employment Relations Act 2000 (Green et al., 2020).

It can be argued that those organisations that were reluctant to adopt WFH before the pandemic may have felt this lack of control more keenly and felt the need to monitor employees. As this issue has been prevalent throughout the history of WFH, surveillance of staff has become an option and no doubt will be part of any WFH arrangements for these organisations in the future (Kniffin et al., 2020). Kniffin suggests that before COVID-19, some employers were adopting new methods of recording employees' whereabouts and productivity, such as wearable technology or using videoconferencing to create virtual sight lines when remote working. It has been suggested that these new technologies will give human resource managers information on behavioural and physiological characteristics of their employees, thus keeping the company informed on their wellbeing and other factors. However, while this could potentially improve the company's competitive advantage, it may create a sense that employees are under surveillance, and their privacy invaded. This so-called 'monitoring effect' could damage trust, leading to a lowering of creativity and motivation of employees (Kniffin et al., 2020; Bhave et al., 2020).

Rather than resort to invasive technology to monitor employees, with additional training in leadership, managers can successfully lead virtually (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002). Delivering a mix of affirmative but accurate balance of messages would enable managers to provide a reassuring discourse to keep staff positive and productive. The idea that the time or whereabouts of when work is undertaken is not important, as long as it is completed, can be emancipating or threatening for both managers and employees. However, O'Kane, et al., (2020) discovered that this autonomy leads to higher productivity and improved results, but inadequate managers were fearful of this freedom. Effective leadership is key. It entails clear goal setting, expected work outcomes and guidance and support for staff on how to meet these outcomes. "The challenge to New Zealand employers is to continue this outcomes-based model post-lockdown and trust their staff to do their job." (O'Kane, et al., 2020).

Many New Zealand organisations have shown a reluctance to move into this more flexible model but post-lockdown it expected that more will build

on their positive experiences and trust that employees can be productive. McGregor and Doshi (2020) argue that it is important managers do not become tempted to impose strict procedures, practices, and policies as this can easily lead to a stifling of innovation and demotivated staff. While clear guidelines are important, an emphasis on rules and outcomes may stop staff thinking creatively and problem-solving and they will just complete the minimum requirements.

4.4 Organisational and Management Challenges

4.4.1 Networking and Innovation

An increasing concern of managers is the decreased interaction between staff which leads to a loss of culture, ideas and innovation. This was identified in early research on WFH by Ford and Butts (1991) which stated that a drawback was the loss of informal networking between colleagues. WFH brings together home and work, but when interactions are absent, employees may be distanced from fellow workers, or experience a sense of isolation due to working in separate environments, all of which could erode company goals and values. Levin and Kurtzberg (2020) state that the less staff connect with each other the less they will have a commitment to each other. Cultivating trust and teamwork is vital for the health of an organisation, but online there can be a tendency for employees to have permission to be more negative or self-serving, than they would when face-to-face. While employees can use technology to interact with each other, nevertheless they lose the ability to informally meet and chat in open plan offices or in the lunchroom (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). This can hamper mentoring and interrupt the flow of information of work-related issues which can arise informally with face-to-face meetings. By their very nature, interactions will have to be deliberately arranged and this erodes spontaneous or serendipitous exchanges resulting in the organisation being less connected (Levin & Kurtzberg 2020). This could create a flow on effect between team members, and even result in silo thinking, limit developmental opportunities and impede cooperation (Greer & Payne, 2014). Levin and Kurtzberg (2020) also suggest that the temptations of social media updates and mobile phone notifications provide additional distractions when working virtually. When typing a conversation rather than speaking, less words are used and this limits the information they share, ideas and the depth of questions they might ask. These factors can contribute to a decline in the decision-making outcomes and the culture of teams and networks. People may also miss 'play' which increases motivation

and performance such as meeting targets when WFH. McGregor and Doshi (2020) state that people could miss the satisfaction of problem solving with a fellow employee or the ability to easily come to a decision when everyone is meeting in one room. Also, the lack of visibility could impact negatively on clients or colleagues. Likewise, not meeting up with peers or fellow colleagues could impede informal teaching and exchange of skills.

In somewhat of a U-turn, last year Bloom stated in article by Wong (2020) that he was now unenthusiastic about the outcomes of WFH, citing a slump in innovation and creativity as a bi-product of not meeting face to face. He surmised that employees gained by not having to commute but lost because they missed important social engagement, resulting in considerably less new products and inventions in the past few years. WFH was only going to add to this slump and this he feared could lead to fewer products and contribute to lower economic growth in the near future.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Now that WFH is a standard way of working for many businesses in all parts of the world, it will remain so until the Covid-19 pandemic is under control, and beyond. For a number of organisations the practice of WFH has grown organically with few protocols and procedures put in place, and those mostly on an ad hoc basis. The success rate has been variable and this has undermined some of the advantages of WFH. For this to become a real alternative to commuting to the office every day there has to be a paradigm shift from the entrenched asymmetrical relationship between managers and employees. This would amount to a radical reframing of WFH roles, rights and responsibilities for businesses, management and employees alike. Clear sets of policies and procedures need be put in place such as how best to ensure that productivity is maintained to at least the level of previous office outputs.

As Grattan (2020) suggests the WFH environment should be reimagined so it can be made more human with a workplace free from outside distractions, with essential technology in place and ideally, set aside specifically for work. This would include support with setting up a home office, additional resourcing of hardware, software and equipment, electricity and technical support and the implementation of health and safety protocols and procedures for each staff member. Where more than one person is WFH, and if there are children at home, managers need to show flexibility and empathy as employees struggle with these new circumstances.

Managers need to adjust their leadership and networking skills, thus expanding communication opportunities so that organisational culture, climate and trust can be maintained for employees and employers alike. With these clear guidelines set in motion, invasive monitoring and surveillance that impedes productivity and innovation will not need to be implemented. Grattan (2020) suggests that it is essential that the workspace is recreated to allow more informal 'watercooler' encounters and conversations.

If managers and employers decide to go down the path of surveillance it will produce a monitored and watched workforce. This could well stifle or silence the creation of ideas where there is an element of risk of 'getting it wrong'.

Without doubt increased technological advances will allow for more secure and speedier connections, smoother handling and clearer visuals, sophisticated rooms for team discussion delivering what will be a very real alternative to going into work. Therefore, the managerial protocols need to move with the times, and embrace WFH in a positive and creative manner.

It has to be stated that much of the research is focused on a Western cultural paradigm, with the expectation that most workers are able to complete daily tasks in the home environment, albeit with some issues. More research is needed to fully explore the implications of gender in WFH analysis. In addition, there is a paucity of research on the impact of the WFH model on minorities and migrant communities. This also needs to be addressed.

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