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EXPLORING REMOTE WORK ADOPTION AMONG FINANCE PROFESSIONALS IN A SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATE: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY FOR THE POST-COVID-19 ERA

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered traditional work environments, compelling many organizations to adopt remote working models. This conceptual study explores the impact of remote work on the productivity of finance professionals in the post-COVID-19 era, particularly in Mauritius. Drawing on the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA), the research investigates the influence of personal well-being, environmental factors, and resource constraints on work-from-home (WFH) productivity. The study aims to fill a gap in the existing literature by providing theoretical insights into the unique challenges and opportunities associated with remote work in the finance sector. The research intends to adopt a quantitative methodology, utilizing a

systematically sampled survey to collect data from finance professionals. The survey instrument will be adapted from established studies, ensuring reliability and validity through rigorous pretesting and validation using the Rasch Model. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) will be employed to analyze the relationships between the constructs, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing WFH productivity. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights for senior management and policymakers in optimizing remote work strategies, particularly in maintaining productivity and well-being among finance professionals. The study acknowledges its limitations, including the lack of empirical data and the focus on a specific sector and geographic region. Future research should address these limitations by incorporating real-world data and expanding the scope to other industries and regions, thereby enhancing the generalizability and applicability of the findings.

Keywords:

Remote Work, Work-from-Home (WFH), Productivity, Finance Professionals, Post-COVID-19

1. Introduction

The declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, marked a pivotal moment in global health and significantly disrupted organizational operations worldwide. The rapid spread of the virus necessitated an unprecedented shift to remote working, initiating a widespread experiment in telecommuting. Digital technologies have been essential in maintaining social relationships and ensuring organizational continuity during this volatile period (Fana et al., 2020). Consequently, companies globally adopted the WFH model to sustain business operations while prioritizing the health and safety of their employees.

WFH has emerged as a viable alternative to traditional office work, allowing employees to perform tasks remotely using advanced technologies and communication tools (Gajendran et al., 2015). A series of measures have been implemented to facilitate the safe resumption of economic activities. Notably, the Workers' Rights Act 2019 was amended, and the Working from Home Regulations became effective on September 1, 2021 (Government Gazette, 2021). Employees have had to adapt to changing work environments and practices, as outlined in the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) (Dawis et al., 2000). Despite some progress by June 2021 and the gradual easing of lockdown restrictions in various countries, teleworking remains a daily

reality for many, as authorities continue to advocate for remote work wherever practicable (Carillo et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally altered work practices, reshaping employer-employee relationships and highlighting the critical importance of information and communication technologies. Adjusting to new environmental demands involves significant changes in work organization and human interactions. In Mauritius, a hybrid model of WFH and office work on a rotational basis is becoming prevalent. Some firms have adopted a fully remote working policy post-pandemic, recognizing the benefits of flexible work arrangements. Effective and empathetic solutions during the pandemic and post-lockdown phase may also prove valuable in future epidemic scenarios (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

Finance professionals are often subjected to high levels of stress and long working hours, factors that significantly influence their work-life balance and overall well-being. The shift to remote work presents both opportunities and challenges in this regard, making it essential to study how remote work arrangements affect their mental and physical health, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. There is a notable gap in academic research concerning the specific experiences of finance professionals working remotely after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aims to fill this gap by providing theoretical insights into the unique aspects of remote work in the finance sector, contributing to the broader body of knowledge on telework and organizational behaviour. By selecting a sample of finance professionals, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted impacts of remote work in a highly relevant and critical sector, offering valuable insights for both academic research and practical applications in organizational management and policy development.

This study draws on the TWA to examine the effects of remote working on staff productivity among Finance Professionals. It identifies a theoretical gap in existing research concerning remote working as the new norm in the post-COVID-19 era. The theory on telework adjustment is relatively nascent, and this study aims to address this gap by exploring the following research questions: How does personal well-being affect productivity while WFH? How do environmental factors affect productivity while WFH? What is the impact of resource constraints on productivity while WFH?

The research aims to explore the perceived effects of personal well-being, environmental factors, and resource constraints on employee job performance while working from

home post-pandemic. Understanding these relationships will provide senior management and corporate boards with insights to inform WFH strategies. Raghuram et al. (2001) conceptualized and operationalized virtual work adjustment, examining key indicators of employee adaptability to new work arrangements. They viewed adaptation to virtual labour as a comprehensive criterion of flexibility, reflecting individuals' ability to respond to external stressors.

There is a notable difference between voluntary WFH prior to 2019 and the current situation where remote work is mandated by employers. Hammock and Brehm (1966) noted that imposed choices are less attractive to individuals. This distinction highlights the disparity between occasional WFH when convenient and being compelled to work remotely without certainty about returning to normalcy.

This conceptual study provides a framework for understanding the impact of remote working on employee productivity in the post-COVID-19 context. By examining the interplay of personal well-being, environmental factors, and resource constraints, the research aims to offer valuable insights for optimizing remote work practices in the evolving landscape of business and technology.

2. Review of Literature

This study adopts a work adjustment approach to examine how employees respond to changes in the working environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has compelled many to work virtually. According to the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA), the sudden surge in WFH due to lockdown measures represents a significant shift in the work environment, altering the interaction between employees and their surroundings, thereby necessitating adaptation to this challenging scenario. Specifically, this research defines mandatory telework adjustment during the COVID-19 pandemic, as conceptualized by Raghuram et al. (2001), to be the level of adaptation employees exhibit in response to new environmental demands arising from a global epidemic crisis (Carillo et al., 2021; Caranto et al., 2020; Lott, 2020).

2.1 Personal Well-Being

The shift to remote working has sparked a debate on its impact on employees' well-being. Huppert (2009) and Song and Gao (2020) define well-being as the "combination of feeling good and functioning effectively," positing that WFH can enhance well-being by reducing commuting time, thereby allowing more time for family and personal activities (Anderson et al., 2015).

2.1.1 Autonomy

WFH provides employees with greater autonomy to organize their work schedules according to individual needs. Hackman and Oldham (1976) describe autonomy as "the extent to which employees have control and discretion over how to conduct their tasks." According to the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), autonomy is a vital job characteristic that enhances job satisfaction and productivity. Employees feel more motivated and satisfied when they can make decisions at their discretion, leading to increased productivity (Anderson et al., 2015; Waizenegger et al., 2020). Enhanced autonomy promotes a healthier work-life balance, positively affecting well-being and productivity (Wong et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2021).

2.1.2 Job Satisfaction

Employees report higher job satisfaction and lower stress due to fewer in-office distractions and better concentration on their work (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Locke (1976) defines job satisfaction as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences." Higher job satisfaction is associated with better job performance and productivity, as well as improved health and well-being.

2.1.3 Flexibility

WFH offers employees the flexibility to combine work and non-work activities, such as household chores or childcare. However, this flexibility can blur the lines between work and home, potentially negatively impacting personal well-being.

2.1.4 Mental and Physical Health

While WFH can positively affect mental and physical health by freeing up commuting time for exercise and family activities, it can also lead to social isolation and increased work hours, which negatively impact well-being (Eurofound and ILO, 2017). Bouziri et al. (2020) note that management was often unprepared for the mental health challenges posed by the sudden shift to remote work during the pandemic.

2.1.5 Work-Life Balance

Greenhaus et al., (2003) define work-life balance as "the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in and satisfied with his or her work and family role." Flexible work arrangements have been shown to improve work-life balance, enhancing productivity and job satisfaction (Virick, DaSilva, & Arrington, 2010).

2.1.6 Management Trust and Effort Recognition

Employees feel more satisfied and motivated when they are valued and trusted by management. This trust fosters increased productivity.

2.2 Environmental Factors

Previous studies have shown that WFH positively affects the work environment, allowing employees to organize their schedules and workplaces to suit personal needs (Baltes et al., 1999; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

2.2.1 Dedicated Workspace

Having a dedicated workspace at home can enhance focus, reduce distractions, and help maintain work-life balance. A survey by Sheehan et al., (2021) found that less than half (45%) of respondents WFH had a dedicated work area, while Beck and Hensher (2021) reported that nearly 75% of survey respondents worked from their wn rooms.

2.2.2 Communication

Effective communication is crucial in a remote work environment. WFH necessitates new forms of organizational communication, including virtual meetings and interactions. Strong connections and trust-building among co-workers are essential for maximizing productivity and minimizing frustration (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015).

2.2.3 Social Isolation

Social isolation is a significant disadvantage of WFH, leading to decreased work satisfaction, productivity, and increased stress (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020; Bentley et al., 2016).

2.2.4 Distractions

Employees working from home may face distractions from household members, noise, and other environmental factors, which can reduce concentration and productivity (Lee & Brand, 2010; Xiao et al., 2021).

2.3 Resource Constraints

2.3.1 Tools, Equipment, and Technology: Access to appropriate tools, equipment, and technology is essential for maintaining productivity while working from home. Lack of these resources can negatively impact performance.

2.3.2 Internet Connection: Reliable internet connectivity is crucial for remote work. Poor internet connections can cause frustration and hinder productivity.

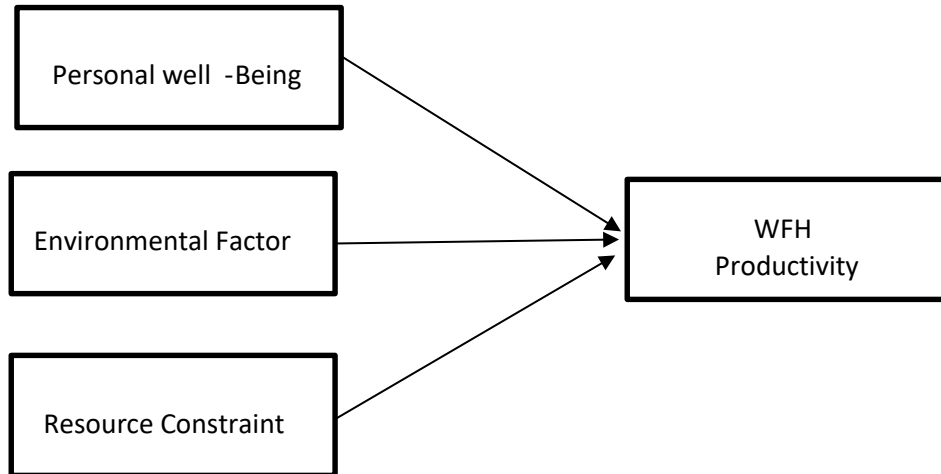
Hypotheses

Based on the preceding discussion, this study addresses the following research propositions:

- **P1:** Personal well-being is positively related to work-from-home productivity.
- **P2:** Environmental factors are positively related to work-from-home productivity.
- **P:** Resource constraints are negatively related to work-from-home productivity.

This paper proposed a conceptual framework to evaluate the factors affecting the level of productivity of Finance professionals post COVID 19 era. (Figure 1)

Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework with Factors that Influence WFH Productivity*



This paper proposes a conceptual framework to evaluate the factors affecting the productivity Finance professionals in the post-COVID-19 era. The framework aims to provide insights into how personal well-being, environmental factors, and resource constraints influence work-from-home productivity, guiding senior management in developing effective remote work strategies.

3. Proposed Research Methodology

This study will adopt a quantitative research design, utilizing a systematic sampling technique to ensure representativeness among accounting and finance professionals. The survey design is chosen to comprehensively assess the factors influencing optimal work-from-home (WFH) practices in the post-pandemic era. The survey instrument will be adapted from established

instruments used in previous studies to ensure reliability and validity. To accommodate the local context, the research instrument will be translated into Mauritian Creole, facilitating better understanding and accurate responses from the Mauritian respondents.

The research questionnaire will be meticulously designed, developed, pretested, and validated using the Rasch Model. This rigorous approach will ensure the reliability and validity of the measurement scales. The pretesting phase will help identify and rectify any potential issues, ensuring that the final instrument accurately captures the constructs of interest.

To ensure the quality of the results and the robustness of the inferences made, the study will focus on achieving convergent and discriminant validity of the data. Convergent validity will be assessed to confirm that the measures are indeed capturing the intended constructs. Discriminant validity will be evaluated to ensure that the constructs are distinct and not unduly correlated with each other.

The data analysis will employ descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the sample characteristics and the initial patterns in the data. For a more sophisticated analysis, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) will be utilized. SEM will facilitate the examination of the relationships among the constructs and will help in obtaining a good fit for the full-fledged structural model. This approach will enable a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting WFH productivity and well-being among accounting and finance professionals in the post-pandemic era.

By employing these robust methodologies, the study aims to provide reliable and valid insights into the best practices for WFH, contributing to both academic knowledge and practical applications in organizational management.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, given the growing importance of WFH practices in the lives and operations of businesses, this research will provide valuable insights for practitioners to re-examine the concept of organizational boundaries and the nature of labor. The empowerment of WFH practices among finance professionals necessitates a rethinking of both physical and virtual boundaries within organizations.

Additionally, the findings from this study must be generalized with caution, as different crises have unique health, social, and economic effects, each with its distinctive characteristics. Health pandemics, for instance, leave the physical and technological infrastructures of

organizations intact, differentiating them from other types of crises, such as natural disasters or conflicts, where infrastructure may be compromised.

This research, therefore, highlights the necessity of considering the specific nature of crises when developing strategies for ensuring business continuity through WFH. By addressing these nuances, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in remote working and its implications for organizational management in the post-COVID-19 era.

Despite the valuable insights anticipated from this conceptual study, several limitations should be acknowledged: As a conceptual study, this research does not incorporate empirical data collection and analysis. The absence of real-world data limits the ability to test and validate the proposed hypotheses and conceptual framework. The study focuses specifically on finance professionals, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other industries. Different sectors may experience unique challenges and benefits related to WFH, which are not captured in this study. Also, this research is set within the context of Mauritius, and cultural, economic, and regulatory differences may influence the applicability of the findings to other geographical regions. Addressing these limitations in future empirical research can enhance the robustness and applicability of the insights derived from this conceptual study.

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