

# **Work-From-Home, It's Adherents and Discontents: An Analysis of Seminal Research**

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## **Abstract**

Employees were reluctant to let go of Work-From-Home when they were called back to offices after the COVID-19 pandemic ended. This is evident in the state of flux organizational policies are since then. Work-From-Home forms an integral part of today's 'hybrid way of working'. Earlier, Work-From-Home has been a 'perk' as well as a 'force majeure decision'. This paper investigated the reasons behind the perceptions of employees about Work-From-Home. These reasons helped explain the underlying theories across the three forms of Work-From-Home. Twenty-four employees of the Indian Information Technology Industry participated in the study by reporting their experiences of Work-From-Home. Qualitative data of voices of employees was analysed by using the Gioia Methodology, which classifies data into categories and themes leading to credible interpretations. The Gioia Methodology is designed, not only to surface new concepts, but also to generate persuasive new theories. Employees consider employment as induction into a 'work community' and seek guidance from organizations to maneuver through these communities. They consider the means by which they work as a 'resource' through which they achieve life-goals. Their 'quality of life' intrinsically includes work and non-work activities. 'Non-productive work', one that does not get paid for, impacts Work-From-Home significantly. The research provides novel information that can be utilised in developing the operations and management of organizations. Though IT organizations have taken significant steps towards a modern hybrid work community, there are still some challenges in terms of providing the best of both worlds to employees when they work out of offices or homes.

## **Keywords**

Work-From-Home, work community, resource, non-productive work, hybrid work.

## **1. Introduction**

There are three distinct types of Work-From-Home (WFH). The first is '*WFH as a perk*'. This was prevalent even before the 1980's when the term 'telecommuting' was first coined. It was offered to a select few and the requisite terms and conditions of doing so were sorted out between the concerned employees and management (Timsal and Awais, 2016). The larger workforce was unaffected by it. The second is '*WFH as a force majeure decision*'. The recent COVID-19 pandemic forced organizations to ask their employees to work from home to prevent the spread of the contagion. WFH was thrust upon employees at an extremely short notice. Organizations did not have WFH protocols

and suitable infrastructure in place (Tuzovic & Kabadayi, 2020). Employees and organizations learnt on the go. At first, WFH held a novelty value for employees after which it transitioned to being a boon and bane for them (Dubey & Tripathi, 2020). Employees and organizations stood divided on whether WFH would work or not (Canibano, 2021). The third type visible now is '*WFH as part of a hybrid way of working*'. WFH is here to stay and will feature in workplace policies of organizations in different forms (Smite et al, 2023). In the three types of WFH, many issues remain unresolved (Agrawal et al, 2023). Work-from-home literature has countless studies that deal with these unresolved issues in specific contexts. The problem is that there is no one solution. Implications provided by a certain study are not easily generalizable.

There is a need, thus, to unearth the underlying theory beneath the results of WFH studies. This supports the recent call for multidisciplinary perspectives by researchers to contrast the 'new' ways of working with the 'old' to tease out tensions that likely exist between organizational strategies, structures and processes and individual feelings, attitudes and wellbeing (Alfes et al, 2022). This paper aims to discuss the latent feelings of employees towards WFH. We believe that these deep-rooted reasons can develop a theory about WFH that would be applicable across the three types. Practical implications emerging out of this theory could have a wide-ranging positive impact on our understanding of WFH. The underlying WFH theory could enhance the relevance of WFH studies done in the past by using their results and proposing hypotheses that could be compared and tested along with newer studies.

Moreover, and specifically, in organizational research, we most often focus on construct elaboration rather than arguably the more important work of concept development (Morgeson & Hofmann, 1999). In line with this, this paper aims to develop a more general, less well -specified notion capturing qualities that explains the WFH phenomenon at the theoretical level. To do so, we base our study on the Gioia Methodology that imbues rigor in studies involving qualitative data. The premise of this paper is advances in knowledge that are too strongly rooted in what we already know delimit what we can know.

We see that extant WFH literature is a rich repository of constructs. It discusses various theoretical and practical implications based on what emerges as prominent factors in the corresponding studies. We go beyond '*what*' factors are important for employees to make WFH a viable option and understand '*why*' they feel that way. Aggregate dimensions are formulated based on first and second order concept analysis, that are not 'desirable' or 'undesirable' but are issues that can be debated prior to formulating workplace policies (Gioia et al, 2013).

The first step was to conduct open-ended interviews of twenty-four employees of the Indian IT industry. They were encouraged to talk about WFH factors that were significant to them in making WFH a viable option for them. The interviews were semi-structured to encourage participants to be able to share their perceptions about varied WFH issues. The responses were then coded to 'First Order Concepts' in which statements pertaining to similar issues were grouped together. Thereafter, 'Second Order Themes' and 'Aggregate Dimensions' were formulated. We focus particular attention on nascent concepts that don't seem to have adequate theoretical referents in the existing literature. Using the Aggregate Dimensions, a theoretical framework was constructed through which WFH can be understood at a concept level.

## **1.1. Objectives**

To unearth the underlying reasons of why do employees perceive WFH in a certain way.

To develop a theory from these underlying reasons that could be applied to the three types of WFH discussed above.

## **2. Literature Review**

WFH literature is a rich repository of micro and macro level pertinent issues concerning employees, organizations and external environment. This literature is deeply rooted in the prevailing socio-economic conditions. Its analysis reveals a typology of WFH that changed forms as per environmental conditions which are discussed below. In the pre-industrialised era, people worked out of their homes, and towns and societies grew around this. During industrialisation working from office became the norm and homes, towns and societies adapted. Since then, the three typologies of WFH that evolved are discussed next.

**Type 1: WFH as a perk:** During the early phase, only a few employees were offered the perk of working from home at certain times. Early WFH literature discussed issues about the types of jobs and individuals suited to WFH (Olson, 1983). WFH was considered by some to be impacted negatively by the home and the 'quality of working life' was discussed so that employees could work in a rewarding, fulfilling way, devoid of stress from personal issues (Shamir,

1985). WFH was a new concept and researchers established the need for a theoretical perspective to understand how the home could function as an office for an employee (Ahrentzen, 1989).

WFH was considered as an innovation that did not become as prevalent as expected (Ruppel & Harrington, 1995; Handy, 1996). Adoption and infusion were studied as the two aspects of innovation wherein infusion of WFH in organizations was impacted negatively when managers were not in favour of it (Handy & Mokhtarian, 1996).

Coping strategies of teleworkers and their families were recognized (Tietze, 2002). Issues like work-family conflict (Nasurdin & Hsia, 2008), relations between employee and employer (Tietze & Nadin, 2011) and WFH-related stress levels in employees (Adkar & Kalkar, 2013) were discussed. Some researchers considered the commute between home and office as a preparation space for the employee where he/she could shift their focus from home to office and vice versa (Molineaux & Fraser, 2011).

In an attempt to predict what will the 'Workplace 2025' be like, few researchers concluded that societal, demographic and carbon forces would play a role (Gratton, 2011). Employees were found to be more productive during WFH and organizations were urged to allow more of it (Berinato, 2014). However, seeing the poor growth of WFH, the question of 'does WFH work' was raised by Nicholas Bloom (Bloom et al, 2015) when a longitudinal experiment of WFH was carried out. This experiment gave conflicting results: organizations felt that productivity increased but the performance rate of employees, conditional on performance fell. A probable reason for this was obtained in a later study where it was found that employees who preferred WFH had low career ambitions (Beauregard et al, 2018).

Moreover, organizations who were offering WFH as a flexibility perk, now found themselves in an ethical dilemma (Timsal & Awais, 2016) in the light of the Yahoo and Facebook incidents. To fulfil organizational mandates, it was felt that employees needed WFH training (Timsal & Awais, 2016; Ramasamy & Reddy, 2018). It was felt that the attitudes of managers also needed to change and they needed to improve their processes too (Silva, 2019).

**Type 2: WFH as force majeure decision:** The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced organisations to ask their employees to work from home. Employees found it abrupt and literature responded to the present and pressing needs of employees and employers. The prolific WFH literature of this period started out by talking about the influence of social-distancing on employee well-being (Tuzovie & Kabadayi, 2020). Reactive and proactive research themes were identified as research agenda. It was felt that WFH affected employees and organizations at macro, meso and micro level through factors that were country related, industry related and employee related respectively (Tuzovie & Kabadayi, 2020). At the micro level, factors like considerations of employee skills with respect to WFH, social and work support for the employee and issues concerning the self, took centre stage.

Much of this literature measured the pandemic-induced WFH experiences of employees (Powers, 2021). We see employee sentiments that ranged from "very excited" to "very hopeless" (Dubey & Tripathi, 2020) and similar opposite ends of the spectrum reactions regarding virtual meetings (Karl et al, 2021) and work-life-balance (Putri & Amran, 2021). The tensions and leaky boundaries between workplaces and family/domestic life that were brought about by WFH were theorized and attempts were made to capture the processes through which the COVID digital home assemblage was continuously configured and the more or less simultaneous presence and absence of people in both domestic and work domains was felt (Watson et al, 2021).

The abruptness of WFH impacted people negatively and using the 'role-strain theory', researchers explained how employees were not ready to quickly expand and swap roles (Dockery & Bawa, 2020). A 'gender gap' in work hours (Collins et al, 2021; Chauhan, 2022) was felt and work-life balance was also found to have a gendered nature (Putri & Amran, 2021) besides issues related to Cybersecurity (Furnell & Shah, 2020) etc.

Despite the shortcomings that were associated with it, WFH was regarded as a new normal (Corpuz, 2021) and as a complement to work-from-office (Morris et al, 2021) wherein the availability of team collaboration was looked at through an 'affordance perspective' in order to make the most out of WFH (Waizenggar et al, 2020). A mutual interdependency between WFH and country level financial and geographical issues (Saltiel, 2020; Mishra & Mishra, 2021), real estate (Gujral et al, 2020) and city planning (Delventhal et al, 2020) was recognized.

Employees experienced flexibility as an inducement that granted them agency to manage work responsibilities autonomously. They also experienced flexibility as a contribution they are expected to provide to their organizations, so that the organizations could adapt to environmental changes and demands (Canibano, 2021). This pandemic WFH

literature acknowledged tensions that were likely to exist between organizational strategies, structures and processes and individual feelings, attitudes and well-being and called for multidisciplinary perspectives (Alfes et al, 2022).

**Type 3: WFH as a hybrid way of working:** At the end of the pandemic, life came back to normal but work did not. A large number of employees continue working from home. The enforced WFH period opened the doors to a hybrid way of working. Post pandemic WFH literature has been largely retrospective. Researchers are looking for answers to why employees' WFH experiences were a certain way, how can organisations develop hybrid work policies, impact of WFH on society and the world and radical questions about the nature of work, how we work and the future of work (Saridakis et al, 2023).

There is the problem of isolation that employees feel, hence if 'relationality' is important for certain individuals or cultures, WFH would not work for them (Ugar, 2023). There is a 'dark side of WFH' where if meaningfulness of work is taken to the extreme by workaholics, it starts having a negative impact on them (Magrizos et al, 2023). On the positive side, there is a considerable saving in GHG emissions during WFH as compared to work from office (Wu et al, 2024).

Organizations are regarding WFH as a corporate strategy (Agarwal et al, 2023) yet there are two perceptions of WFH that organizations and their employees have (Smite et al, 2023). Organizations regard WFH as a perk but employees regard it as a core privilege. Hence, for the success of WFH, both employee skills and employer support are required (Heidt et al, 2023). Another way of looking at this is bridging the gap between employee intentions and employer expectations (Delbose & Kent, 2023).

WFH is also being compared to traditional ways of working in office cubicles/cabins and it is being found better than working in open plan offices which are being considered as causes of disturbances from colleagues and related distractions (Aidla et al., 2023).

At the employee level, issues concerning gender still remain wherein working mothers are opting out of working to fulfil their family responsibilities (Mendonca et al, 2023). Work-home boundary violations continue to get discussed (Ramya et al, 2023). Researchers also discussed how inclusive leadership can have a positive impact on WFH employees (Tsang et al, 2023).

### **3. Methods**

The Gioia Methodology imbues inductive studies with 'qualitative rigor' while still retaining the creative revelatory potential for generating new concepts and ideas (Gioia et al, 2010). It explains how researchers can apply systematic conceptual and analytical discipline that leads to credible interpretations of data. The Gioia Methodology is designed, not only to surface new concepts, but also to generate persuasive new theories.

In organizational studies, theory development work is often designed and executed according to the precepts of the traditional scientific method which often leads to progressive extensions of existing knowledge, leading the way of discovering new knowledge. This venerable orientation refines the existing ideas we use to navigate the theoretical world leading to 'construct elaboration' rather than 'construct development'. Since concepts are precursors to constructs in making sense of organizational worlds, for organizational studies to fulfil its potential for design, explanation and prescription, it is first necessary to discover relevant concepts for the purpose of theory building that can guide the creation and validation of constructs.

The proponents of this methodology feel that something hinders our ability to gain deeper knowledge of organizational dynamics that has to do with understanding the essence of the organizational experience that is actually socially constructed. Studying social construction processes implies that we focus more on the means by which organizational members go about constructing and understanding their experiences and less on the number or frequency of measurable occurrences. As Einstein so famously put it:

*"Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted".*

The Gioia Methodology captures concepts relevant to the human organizational experience in terms that are adequate at the level of meaning of the people living that experience *and* adequate at the level of scientific theorizing about that experience. Thus, this systematic inductive approach to concept development balances the (often) conflicting need to develop new concepts inductively while meeting high standards for rigor.

**Ground Assumptions:** In addition to the basic assumption that the organizational world is socially constructed, another crucial and actionable assumption is employed as well: that the people constructing their organisational realities are “knowledgeable agents,” namely, that people in organizations know what they are trying to do and can explain their thoughts, intentions, and actions. This foregrounds the informants’ interpretations and initially casts researchers in the role of “glorified reporters” whose main role is to give an adequate account of the informants’ experience. This means that extraordinary efforts to give voice to the informants in the early stages of data gathering and analysis are taken. This methodology assumes researchers to be pretty knowledgeable people too, who can figure out patterns in the data, enabling concepts and relationships to surface that might escape the awareness of the informants and who can formulate these concepts in theoretically relevant terms. It encourages the presentation of the research findings in a way that demonstrates the connections among data, the emerging concepts, and the resulting grounded theory.

**Laying the Groundwork:** The Gioia Methodology loosely translates to the concept of ‘sense giving’. It is tandem reporting of both voices- informant and researcher. It allows for systematic presentation of both a “1<sup>st</sup>-order” analysis (i.e., an analysis using informant-centric terms and codes) and a “2<sup>nd</sup>-order” analysis (i.e., one using researcher-centric concepts, themes, and dimensions).

**The Guiding Research Question and the Interview:** The present study is based on a well-specified, if rather general, research question: *How do employees and managers form perceptions about their WFH experience?* Besides using extant literature about this subject, we undertook semi-structured interviews that formed the heart of this study. Through the interviews, we obtained both retrospective and real-time accounts by employees experiencing the phenomenon of theoretical interest, which is WFH. We analysed the interviews, conscientiously trying to use the respondents’ terms, not ours, to help us understand their lived experience. Extraordinary attention was paid to the initial interview protocol, to make sure that it is focused on the research question, that it is thorough (i.e., tries to anticipate related issues about which we should ask), and doesn’t contain leading-the-witness questions (e.g., “Wouldn’t you agree that....?”). The question posed before employees for semi-structured interviews was “*What are the significant factors that make work-from-home a viable option for employees?*”.

The features that enhance qualitative rigour actually begin with the approach to analyses, especially in terms of organising the data into 1<sup>st</sup>-order and 2<sup>nd</sup>-order categories to facilitate their later assembly into a more structured form.

**The Analyses:** It is somewhat artificial to parse the interviewing and the analyses, as they tend to proceed together (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A myriad of informant terms, codes, and categories emerged early in a process called 1<sup>st</sup>-order analysis. Here, we adhered faithfully to informant terms and made little attempt to distil categories, so the number of categories amounted to 150 numbers. As this process progressed, we started seeking similarities and differences among the many categories, a process that eventually reduced the germane categories to a more manageable number of 113. We then gave these categories labels or phrasal descriptors (preferably retaining informant terms).

The array before us was then studied to see the deeper structure embedded in it. We thought and analysed at multiple levels simultaneously, i.e., at the level of the informant terms and codes and at the more abstract 2<sup>nd</sup>-order theoretical level of themes, dimensions, and the larger narrative, answering the important question “What’s going on here?”, theoretically. Rooted in the theoretical realm, we asked questions like whether the emerging themes suggested concepts that might help us describe and explain the WFH phenomenon. We focussed particular attention on nascent concepts that didn’t seem to have adequate theoretical referents in the existing literature or existing concepts that “leapt out” because of their relevance to a new domain.

Once a workable set of themes and concepts was in hand, we distilled the emergent 2<sup>nd</sup>-order themes even further into 2<sup>nd</sup>-order “aggregate dimensions”. On the basis of the 1<sup>st</sup>-order terms and 2<sup>nd</sup>-order themes and aggregate dimensions, we built a data structure (Table 1) and this was the pivotal step in this research approach. The data structure not only allows us to configure our data into a sensible visual aid, it also provides a graphic representation of how we progressed from raw data to terms and themes in conducting the analyses that also demonstrated the inbuilt rigor in this methodology.

We then began thinking about the data theoretically, and not just methodologically. This forced “stepping up” in abstractness laid the foundation for balancing the deep embeddedness of the informant’s view in living the phenomenon with the necessary “30,000-feet” view required to draw forth the theoretical insights. We then began cycling between emergent data, themes, concepts, and dimensions and the relevant literature, not only to see whether what we are finding has precedents, but also whether we have discovered new concepts. We were careful not to let our literature study put blinders on our eyes which could have led to prior hypothesis bias (confirmation bias). We consulted relevant literature and this process could be viewed as transitioning from “inductive” to a form of “abductive” research, in that data and existing theory are now considered in tandem (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). This required a fine balancing act that allows for discovery without reinventing the well-ridden wheels.

**From Data Structure to Grounded Theory:** We kept a front-and-centre focus on our ultimate goal of building a vibrant inductive model that is grounded in the data (as exemplified by the data structure), one that captures the informants’ experience in theoretical terms. The resulting grounded theory model shows the dynamic relationships among the emergent concepts that describe or explain the phenomenon of WFH that makes clear all relevant data-to-theory connections. In the next two sections, the essential 1<sup>st</sup> order concepts, 2<sup>nd</sup> order themes, and aggregate dimensions contained in the data structure are represented and discussed.

#### **4. Data Collection**

The present study involves semi-structured interviews of 24 Indian Information Technology (IT) professionals. Two qualifying parameters were given to the organizations that provided access to these employees and these were: the employee should have experienced WFH for at least nine months and the employee should not belong to the Senior or Middle Management level. The employees we interviewed were, hence, either team members or team leaders. The background information about the respondents is given in Table 2 in Annexure 1.

#### **5. Results**

This section discusses the results of the study. Table 1 contains a summary of the results of the analysis, including data samples from direct quotations (phase 1), categories formed on the basis of the data (phase 2), and larger identified themes (phase 3).

In answer to the interview question about viability of WFH, some employees responded by describing a list of factors and some by detailing a factor at a time prompted by follow up questions. The follow up questions were about anticipated related issues that would help to understand why they felt that way. The interview responses were a manifestation of the employees’ lived experience of WFH.

In the first phase which is like the reporting phase of a reporter, phrases or a group of words were picked from the interviews that said something about WFH. These phrases were a collective voice of the informants and totalled about a 150 in number. After a close check for duplicates and similarity in views, the list was reduced to 113. These are called the ‘First Order Concepts’.

The next step was to cluster similar phrases together and providing them with labels or phrasal descriptors by figuring out patterns and relationships in the responses. The labels are concepts that are underlying in the employees’ responses, formulated in theoretically relevant terms. For example, when employees spoke about being monitored, supervised or feeling pressurized because of the supervision, what they were talking about is the relationship between managers and employees; hence this label was called ‘Manager-Employee Relationship’. In this way, the 113 concepts were given 14 labels which are called ‘Second Order Themes’.

The 14 themes were reviewed following a process of ‘abstraction’ which involved dealing with quality of ideas rather than events. The aim was to identify nascent concepts about WFH or any other concepts that might help us describe and explain the WFH phenomenon. The Second Order Themes, ‘Manager-Employee Relationship’, ‘Socialization in the Office’, ‘Employee Effectiveness’, ‘Training and Protocol’ and ‘Collaborative Work’ imply that employees consider themselves to be part of an organisation that has many other employees and so much of what they do is impacted by others in the organisation, hence the Aggregate Dimension given to this set of themes was ‘Communality at Work’. The next set of themes, ‘Dynamics of Money’, ‘Nature of Work and Opportunity’, ‘Time Management’, ‘Physical Characteristics of Work Space’ and ‘Commute’ were dealt with differently by employees and they had varied opinions about these. Hence these were clubbed under an Aggregate Dimension of ‘Self-Management of Material and

non-Material Resources'. The next Aggregate Dimension that emerged was 'Quality of Life' and comprised of themes like 'Work Life Balance', 'Harmonious Family Relationships' and 'Health and Lifestyle'. 'Domestic Work' and 'Individual Specific Needs' (needs of pregnant women, family with small children etc.) were abstracted as 'Non-Productive Labour'.

Table 1. Development of 1<sup>st</sup>-order Concepts, 2<sup>nd</sup>-order Themes and Aggregate Dimensions.

First order concepts	Second order themes	Aggregate Dimensions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My quality of work/productivity might be questioned when it is WFH.</li> <li>Viable because we will feel less pressurized.</li> <li>In WFH too, we are monitored through meetings, daily tasks and stand-up calls.</li> <li>In WFH, no micro-monitoring and supervision happens.</li> </ul>	Manager-Employee Relationship	Communality at Work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People connect is lost when it is work-from-home.</li> <li>Its good, working out of home but missed the human connect.</li> </ul>	Socialization in the Office	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I was getting things done easily when it was work-from-office instead of WFH.</li> <li>Not viable as I feel I have lack of focus when I work from home.</li> <li>I have better focus at home.</li> <li>I believe I can deliver better productivity during WFH.</li> </ul>	Employee Effectiveness	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training program works well given that I am part of L and D function.</li> <li>Work from home is good when you have ample experience to do work without anyone's help.</li> <li>WFH is bad if you are a fresher in the organisation.</li> </ul>	Training & Protocol	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team co-ordination is difficult.</li> </ul>	Collaborative Work	Self-Management of (material and non-material) Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our expenses have reduced.</li> <li>Able to save more money than before, for example, rent for the paying guest accommodation.</li> <li>Associate saving of money will take place during WFH.</li> <li>From an employer's perspective-Work from home is cost effective.</li> <li>Can avoid traffic, signals, pollution and get fuel saving and travel costs saving. More WFH = More Savings.</li> <li>Some organizations provide cabs to commute. These charges can be avoided. If WFH is followed, some economical gain will be guaranteed to the organization.</li> <li>Office rent/building rent, maintenance cost can be avoided by organizations. The only extra charge to the employees will be internet charge from office.</li> <li>For organizations, the electricity bill &amp; water supply charges can be prevented. It will be an economical gain.</li> </ul>	Dynamics of Money	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I spent a lot of hours at work.</li> <li>There is freedom in work at home.</li> </ul>	Nature of Work & Opportunity	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At home, we are able to develop our skills and work individually without others' support.</li> <li>• WFH opens up a whole new world of opportunities across the globe to utilize our potential.</li> <li>• WFH is like a Business Continuity Plan for employers as well as employees. Even I could work on a pandemic which benefits us both.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I had flexible work time and I could complete my work before deadline.</li> <li>• I could choose when to work - flexible and steady work.</li> <li>• Higher productivity in IT industry. Can work on flexi timings on client requirements.</li> <li>• I could work from anywhere.</li> <li>• We can avoid taking leaves when we plan to go to our hometowns.</li> <li>• I could utilize my time well. I can manage my work and leisure time efficiently. I can spend the day leisurely and work during night.</li> <li>• There was no rush-up.</li> <li>• I can avoid the 9 to 6 boring long sitting time in office.</li> <li>• Work time stretches usually when I work from home.</li> <li>• Can take a break whenever we feel tired.</li> <li>• I could do work for an extra hour, if it needs priority.</li> <li>• There is no need work for continuous 8 hours of working. Can split this time.</li> </ul>	Time Management	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infrastructural challenges are something which needs to be addressed when it is work-from-home.</li> <li>• Faced power cut and network issues.</li> <li>• Home or hostel infrastructure can be limited compared to office resources.</li> <li>• Employer perspective- Cut down on administration &amp; infrastructure.</li> <li>• With provided internet facility and hardware essentials like PC/laptop, WFH is possible.</li> </ul>	Physical Characteristics of Office Space	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employer perspective- Cut down on conveyance or transportation for commuting.</li> <li>• Travel time is cut because of work from home but to be honest I love travelling. It's a kind of break between mundane life.</li> <li>• I save all the travel time.</li> <li>• It is difficult to reach office on time.</li> <li>• WFH is hassle free because of no commute.</li> <li>• Traffic and other commute problems can be avoided.</li> <li>• Viable as I avoid travel time.</li> <li>• Air pollution will be controlled due to less transport.</li> <li>• No need to wake up early because no need to travel.</li> <li>• Can avoid traffic, signals, pollution, fuel saving, cost saving. More WFH = More Savings.</li> </ul>	Commute	



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More working hours if I avoid travel (more productive).</li> <li>• Can avoid traffic during morning travel.</li> <li>• Time could be saved more. Instead of travelling, we could work in that time.</li> <li>• Time saved in getting ready &amp; travel to office.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of boundaries leading to poor work-life balance.</li> <li>• Work-life-balance needs to be addressed in case of work-from-home.</li> <li>• Viable because of better work-life balance.</li> <li>• Can understand and implement productive hours of work effectively. (Finish your work, Enjoy your life).</li> <li>• Work life balance can be achieved effectively.</li> <li>• We will not feel miss the work and life.</li> <li>• Work life balance good.</li> </ul>	Work-life-balance	Quality of Life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chit chat with friends and family.</li> <li>• I was spending more time with family.</li> <li>• Positivity around close ones.</li> <li>• After 9 years of joining my job, I have not stayed at my home. This WFH helped to spend time with my family.</li> <li>• I had a nice time with family and friends.</li> <li>• I could spend valuable time with friends and family.</li> <li>• It is possible to attend relatives' functions in evenings / early mornings.</li> <li>• Meeting childhood friends became possible.</li> <li>• Finally, I could have my presence in functions.</li> <li>• During work-from-home, I spent time with family but that became as if we were in war mode.</li> <li>• I have a mental health perspective: work from home is not supportive when all members of the family are confined to the same space because various health and mental health issues tend to fall out.</li> <li>• I was forced to take the immune drink. This is the worst thing that can happen to you specially in early morning.</li> <li>• The home had such a relaxed work environment.</li> <li>• Home provides a peaceful environment so that work seems stress free.</li> <li>• Sometimes work stress affects family members and we get time to come out of it.</li> <li>• More thoughts come (in a good way) to my head when I work from home.</li> <li>• Also, I can sleep when I get bored.</li> <li>• I feel very comfortable doing WFH. It is a relaxed environment.</li> <li>• We can spend time with our children rather than leaving our children in our parents' home to take care of.</li> <li>• I can take care of my baby when I work from home.</li> <li>• I could celebrate some occasions and the</li> </ul>	Harmonious Family Relationships	

<p>atmosphere was so different at home. Spend so much time with family.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is increased bonding between employees and their families.</li> <li>• I can take care of my family members if anyone feels sick.</li> <li>• No need to travel on weekends to my hometown. I was already living there and working.</li> <li>• Don't want to depend on anyone to take care of my child.</li> <li>• Spend more time with family which make us calmer.</li> <li>• Spending more valuable time with friends and family.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personally, it makes me to have a healthy life.</li> <li>• I could play cricket daily.</li> <li>• Had good home cooked food.</li> <li>• Avoided eating junk foods.</li> <li>• I can have healthy foods and be healthy if we are in home.</li> <li>• I was focusing on physical health and wellness.</li> <li>• I could get proper sleep.</li> <li>• I felt I had good health during WFH.</li> </ul>	Health and Lifestyle	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For men, it is not at all good. They have to do all housework; vessel washing, baby sitting.</li> <li>• For us we worked for home also doing household jobs.</li> <li>• We could support our family with household work.</li> <li>• Easy to do life balance. Work + baby + household work + cooking.</li> </ul>	Domestic Work	Non-Productive Labor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For pregnant women, WFH is good.</li> <li>• More comfortable, can log in from anywhere, good one for married one/mother.</li> <li>• I could take care of my wife during pregnancy, children after birth.</li> <li>• I can take care of infants.</li> <li>• Most of the women are losing their career because of location and travel. WFH is very helpful to them to continue their careers.</li> <li>• For most of the women who have young children, it is very helpful to manage and take care of the family and also, they can continue with their career.</li> <li>• WFH is more flexible for female employees, especially pregnant women.</li> <li>• WFH is a very good policy and most beneficial for women employees.</li> <li>• Work is relaxed and I can manage our baby along with us during feeding time.</li> <li>• Many women employees newly started their career after this WFH policy came into force.</li> </ul>	Individual Specific Needs	

**Analysis of Identified Themes:** Four dimensions or themes at the aggregate level were identified in this study which cover most aspects of WFH as reported by employees based on their personal experiences: (i) Communality at Work, (ii) Self-management of Resources, (iii) Quality of Life and (iv) Non-Productive Labor. These themes imply that employees look for communality at work and they work by utilizing resources available in individualistic ways. An employee considers their 'work' as an intrinsic aspect of their quality of life and at the same time and is willing to engage with the non-productive work.

**(i)Communality at Work:** This aggregate dimension includes 2<sup>nd</sup>-order themes of 'employee-manager relationships', 'socialization in office', 'employee effectiveness', 'training & protocol' and 'collaborative work'. Most employees view work as collaborative involving, either teamwork or connecting with colleagues in seen as well as tacit ways, seeking work-related information or clarifications about individual doubts.

Employees are anxious about the quality of their work being recognized by their managers who can gauge the productivity of employees easily in offices. During WFH, the "quality of work or productivity might be questioned". There seems to be a stress generated in employees as they feel that they are being watched while they work in offices or homes. An employee said, "WFH is viable because I will feel less pressurized". Some employees, however, felt monitored even during WFH through meetings, daily tasks and stand-up calls.

Respondents felt that WFH is good but almost all of them "missed the human connect". Some employees felt that they could work at home with "better focus" and "better productivity" but some also said, "I get things done easily when it is work from office instead of WFH. WFH is not viable as I feel I have lack of focus when I work from home".

Employees who had a few years of work experience could manage WFH better than the others. "We could do their work without anyone's help", as they said. "It was bad if you are a fresher". Some employees working in the 'Learning and Development Function' felt that training works well during WFH and it is a good time to set protocols in place.

Most employees felt that group and collaborative work did not work well during WFH. It was difficult to gather the team together virtually and co-ordination was difficult impacting work deadlines and quality of work.

**(ii)Self-Management of (material and non-material) resources:** Employees talk about certain related aspects of work like 'saving of money', 'flexibility in work-scheduling', 'time-management', 'physical characteristics of office' and 'commute' as resources they use in their own ways to achieve work goals.

The 'dynamics of money' is different for different employees. With respect to WFH, most respondents felt that expenses are reduced. Some said that "I will save my expenses that I am paying for paying guest accommodation" or will generally "save more money during WFH" as "there is no travel expense". Most employees were aware of the financial impact of WFH on organizations too; "from the employer perspective- WFH is cost effective".

Employees worked in different ways depending on whether their work was task based or result oriented. They were aware of the opportunities thrown their way. Some employees noticed that they are spending a lot of hours in getting their work done, more than what they spent when they were working at office. For some, the freedom to carry out their work from home at times chosen by them and in an environment free from surveillance was more joyous. Many respondents felt during WFH, they could upskill themselves as "WFH opens up a whole new world of opportunities across the globe to utilize our potential".

The flexibility in time that was available to employees during WFH appears to be one of the most significant factors. They felt that they could complete their work before the deadlines given to them even when they worked in a flexible way. They "could work steadily" and deliver "higher productivity in the IT industry. I can work on flexi timings as per client requirements". Employees also felt that WFH gave them the flexibility to work from places other than their homes and it became possible to travel to their hometowns without taking leave. Employees said that they could "avoid 9 to 6 boring long sitting time in office". "No need for continuous 8 hours work. Can split". They felt that "work can be done for an extra hour, if it needs priority". They felt that they could take breaks whenever they felt tired working. Few respondents also felt that "there were no time boundaries for work".

'Physical characteristics of office' is another resource available to WFH employees, integral to their carrying out their work smoothly. Infrastructure available in homes and hostels will always be limited as compared to offices. While

working from home, employees face power cuts and network issues which is a rarity in offices. Employees also take note of the fact that organizations save on reduced costs on administration and infrastructure when they allow or mandate WFH. Difficulty in work due to power and network issues is acknowledged, “Infrastructural challenges is something which needs to be addressed when it is work-from-home”.

Employees commute in different ways but all respondents mentioned that they felt they had extra time on hand due to either none or reduced commute and they consider this as an advantage of WFH. “More working hours if I avoid travel and there is no need to wake up early”. Respondents also mentioned that “Employer perspective-conveyance costs are cut down” and “Air pollution will be controlled due to less transport” and they used these arguments to support their case of “hassle free work from home because of no commute”. From the responses, we see that traffic issues, the time it takes and the unavailability of suitable transport were the pain points. A respondent recognised the value of the commute time and said “Travel time is cut because of WFH but to be honest I love travelling. It’s a kind of break between mundane life”.

**(iii)Quality of Life:** Almost all respondents spoke about the ‘extra time they can spend with their families’ and about ‘work-life-balance’. Opinions were divided, though; almost polarised. Most were in agreement that during WFH, the ‘lifestyle was healthier’. These three 2<sup>nd</sup>-order themes describe the parameters responsible for the quality of life of employees. Relationships between work and personal life and family relationships that are situated in a lifestyle that appears to be healthier.

Many respondents felt that WFH is “viable because of work-life-balance” and that it leads to “better work-life-balance”. Many also felt that “the lack of boundaries between work and home leads to poor work-life-balance” but they also felt that they could solve this issue as one respondent said, “Work-life-balance needs to be addressed in case of WFH”. One employee said, “Can understand and implement productive hours of work effectively. Finish your work, enjoy your life” and also “Work life balance can be achieved effectively”.

One of the immediate things that respondents noticed during WFH is the increased time they could spend with their families. Due to the extended time spent with family, employees felt they had a “relaxed work environment” and could “chit chat with friends and family”, “have a nice time with family” and “felt positivity around loved ones”. One respondent said, “After 9 years of joining my job I have not stayed at my home. This WFH helped in spending time with my family”. They felt that being around family had a positive effect on their work. “Provides a peaceful environment so that work seems stress free”. A contrarian view was expressed by another respondent: “During WFH spent time with family but that has been taken into war mode”. A similar response was, “Mental health perspective: WFH is not supportive when all members of the family are confined to the same space; various health and mental health issues tend to fall out”. Some also feel that their work stress could affect their families in a negative way during WFH. Employees who had children felt that WFH gave them the opportunity to take care of their babies and children themselves without having a care-giver look after them. “We can spend time with our children rather than leaving our children in our parents’ home to be taken care of” and also “I don’t have to depend on anyone to take care of my child”.

Employees generally felt that WFH enabled them to lead healthier lifestyles. They could pursue their hobbies like cricket etc., they could eat home cooked meals and “avoided eating junk foods”. This was especially true for respondents who live in hostels or paying guest accommodation during the WFH period. From the interviews it seems that what was more important to them was the fact that they could do these activities with greater consistency as compared to the time when they were working from office. “We were focussing on physical health and wellness”.

**(iv)Non-Productive Labour:** This aggregate dimension includes domestic chores like cooking, cleaning, laundry and related activities besides activities involving caregiving like looking after babies, children, pregnant and the elderly in the family.

Many unmarried male respondents resented having to be asked to do this non-productive work; “For men, it is not at all good. They have to do all housework-vessel washing, baby sitting” and “For us we worked for home also doing household jobs”. Married respondents felt it was easier to WFH as compared to working from office. “Easy to do life balance. Work + baby + household work + cooking”. Married male respondents also felt they could contribute towards domestic work during WFH which they could not when they worked at office. “We could support our family with household work”.

WFH appeared to help employees in their specific individual needs. For example, employees felt that WFH was good for pregnant women as it provided them flexibility. Employees who were fathers realised that during WFH, they could “Take care of my wife during pregnancy, children after birth” and “Take care of infants”. Many respondents felt that WFH made it possible for women to get employment who could not travel to work, who have young children to look after and who are self-feeding their infants. “WFH is very helpful to them to continue their careers”.

## **6. Discussion**

This study investigated the kind of experiences Indian employees of the IT sector had/are having during WFH. The study was interested in increasing understanding of employees’ subjective experiences and thus forming a view of what kind of themes began to recur in the responses of different informants. The study identified four different main themes through which WFH impacts employees and organisations. These included (1) Communalities at Work, (2) Self-management of (material and non-material) Resources, (3) Quality of Life, and (4) Non-productive Labour.

### **Work is a Communal Activity**

This study revealed that work is not just a collaborative activity but it is a communal activity too. Employees approach job appointments as becoming a part of their ‘office community’ where they rely on organisations to provide the requisite structure, culture and infrastructure to carry out their work smoothly, even during WFH. A new WFH employee seeks a clear protocol. Experienced employees approach WFH with an attitude of “I did not sign up to work alone” and expect their employers to facilitate their work and solve their work-related problems despite the many other benefits of WFH. An organisation’s branding image is built by the structure, culture and infrastructure it provides for hybrid working and it should be attractive for employees.

Self-confidence and competence of employees grows by regular informal interaction with colleagues. Among other things, work-related information flow happens in these interactions that builds resilience in employees towards change and work-related stress. Formal and largely work-related interaction between managers and employees could be the possible reason of employees feeling that they are under surveillance whether they work out of office or home. Informal interactions between them would lead to trust building in both which would enable the generation of a sense of ownership in employees about their work during WFH.

Organisational policymakers should consider that employees will be more effective at work and hence more productive if they do not feel a lack of focus and are able to get things done easily through technology or people interaction as the case may be. They should facilitate clarity about processes and systems. Organisations could have protocols for virtual meetings that make all team members equally responsible for their success. Workplace policies will have to be modified to cater to the idiosyncrasies of WFH.

### **Work is a Resource for the Employee**

Employees self-manage certain aspects of their job as a means to an end. An employee uses these work-related resources in different ways to achieve their personal and job-related goals. A common factor across these resources is that employees have limited control over them. This implies that organisations can create environments within which they allow controlled manipulation of these resources in individualistic ways to achieve the larger goal of effectiveness at work and well-being of employees. For this, organisations have to analyse individualistic sensibilities towards each one of them.

The first such resource available to employees is the money they spend or save on a day-to-day basis. Employees are of the general view that WFH saves them money. Organisations can have a diversified approach towards the dynamics of money by understanding how individuals perceive their earning-saving-expenditure conundrum and facilitating money saving even when they work out of offices.

Work as a task is delegated to employees but how they carry it out can be looked at how an employee is using this resource. Employees approached work with a sense of freedom which comes from the inherent flexibility that WFH offers but sometimes being forced to spend long hours over it. They use this resource to upskill and seek suitable work opportunities outside of their organisation. They are aware that their organisations need them as much as they needed their organisations. In an ideal situation employees would like to work when they want to, take breaks when they feel tired or bored or intersperse other things of life in between. These patterns would be a useful to study in order to create overall structures in which work could be done.

Time is also a resource in the hands of employees and their experience of WFH depends a lot on how they manage it. Organisations could provide suitable training to WFH employees on this front. Ultimately managing time on hand depends a lot on individual characteristics.

The adequacy of physical characteristics of office like adequate lighting, ergonomic furniture, thermal comfort, privacy, network connectivity, electricity, cybersecurity etc. used by employees has to be assessed by organisations for WFH to enable employees to work effectively. Employees, in turn consider such infrastructure to be a resource they use and the responsibility of their employers and acknowledge it to be critical for the success of WFH.

Commute is an important resource available to employees. It consumes time and energy and organisations should strive to facilitate it. They can interact with policymakers of city and town planning to make it convenient for employees in terms of modes of transportation available and planning of road networks. Commute cannot be entirely eradicated and it has the benefit of being a liminal space between home and office – a space that allows employees to transition roles gradually. Organisations could re-look at the geographical planning of their offices.

### **Work and Non-Work Complement Each Other**

Today's employees value their quality of life more than ever. Attending family functions, spending quality time with their families and friends and looking after their children is intrinsic to their lives. They are not positioning their jobs on a pedestal that needs time and energy at the expense of their personal life. They are seeking opportunities where they can achieve work fulfilment along with leading an enriching life with their families.

There is a greater awareness today of mindfulness, holistic living and spiritual-emotional growth and this reflects in the employees' responses. They acknowledge the positivity they feel around their loved ones, want to eat healthy food and pursue their hobbies, trying to lead fulfilling lives. Organisations could use this awareness to enrich work communities and formulate holistic workplace policies.

Few unmarried respondents feel that time with their families during WFH leads to disagreements and stress. We believe that this is a process of growing up. However, organisations can take note of this experience of their unmarried employees who stay with their parents and consider them as potential work from office candidates.

### **Non-Productive Labour is Integral to Work**

Non-productive labour is like non-productive work in business terms and similar to reproductive labour, a term used often in Economics. It can be understood as that work which is required for the reproduction and production of the workforce that is not paid for. Many a times, because of non-productive labour, individuals are not able to either remain employed, find employment or fulfil their work role satisfactorily. Organisations should recognise that non-productive labour is a socio-economic issue and employees cannot do much about it at a personal level. They should consider this work in two aspects – one, domestic work at homes (cooking, cleaning, laundry, childcare etc.) and two, work that is required to meet specific needs of individuals (maternity-paternity issues, infant care, caregiving for someone old or sick etc.).

Male employees are eager to do household work and take care of their wife and children. Acknowledgement and provision are required from the organisations' side to facilitate this. Notably, no married female employee mentioned that WFH would make doing domestic chores easier for her. We believe this is because women taking care of the house is a given and many a times, it goes unnoticed. If organisations take note of non-productive work and open a dialogue about it with their female and male employees, it would go long way in shedding the stigma associated with equality of labour in a family. They could try measures like incentivising non-productive labour by making employees self-declare how much of it they do. Organisations should undertake demographic studies of employees who could work only because the WFH option was there.

## **7. Future Research Avenues and Conclusions**

This study classified WFH into three typologies: a perk, a force majeure decision and as part of a hybrid way of working. We unearthed the underlying reasons of employees feeling a certain way about WFH by identifying themes and categories in which work and family are perceived as interwoven and 'work' itself is treated like a resource by employees.

At the same time, the identified categories also form dimensions that can be measured through quantitative research, which different organisations and researchers can utilise in their own research. Continuing research into remote working and raising awareness of, among other things, good remote working practices and successful management of remote working are currently highly recommended. Today, research of WFH is a critically important topic nationally and internationally for researchers, and this study can expand the current research.

The research provides novel information that can be utilised in developing the operations, management, and work practices of organisations.

In conclusion, it seems that organisations need to undertake a paradigm shift in how they approach workplace policies. The role of organisations in our society seems to have evolved from just a job provider to a creator of work communities within which employees can lead a holistic life.

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## Annexure1

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participant no.	Work Experience in years	Male-married	Female-married	Male-unmarried	Female-unmarried	Total
1	1.0			*		
2	1.0				*	
3	1.4			*		
4	1.5			*		
5	2.0			*		
6	2.0				*	
7	4.2			*		
8	4.6		*			
9	4.8	*				
10	5.0			*		
11	6.0	*				
12	6.5		*			
13	6.6	*				
14	6.8	*				
15	7.0		*			
16	7.1		*			
17	7.1	*				
18	7.1	*				
19	7.1	*				
20	7.5	*				
21	7.6		*			
22	8.2		*			
23	10			*		
24	10	*				
Total		9	6	7	2	24
Percentage		37.5%	25%	29.17%	8.33%	100%

## Biographies

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