

Managing from Home: The Future of Work, Workers, and Organisations

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Managing from Home: The Future of Work, Workers and Organisations

Introduction

Nowadays, due to the advances in technology which has become an integral part of modern organisations, there has been an increasing acceptance of working from home (WFH), especially in sectors where WFH is practicable (Nakrošienė et al., 2019). Consequently, there is a rising challenge for managers assuming the new role as distance managers, increasing the occurrence of managing workers away from the traditional fixed work location (i.e. office) and resultantly has implications for the future of work. Against this backdrop, this study conducts a systematic review to answer the main research question: what are the implications of managing from home for the future of work, workers and organisations?. Moreover, the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a rapid transition to WFH, with millions of workers transforming their homes into both home and office (Allen et al., 2021), makes this research timely and important for projecting what the future of work holds for workers and their organisations.

Although often used interchangeably with remote working, WFH is a form of remote working (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Prior studies assert that WFH offers flexible working arrangements and has both positive and negative outcomes. For example, studies demonstrate positive outcomes of WFH, such as increasing workers autonomy over their work, enhancing work-life balance, convenience and reducing operational costs for organisations (van der Lippe and Lippényi, 2020). However, the negative outcomes include a disengaged workforce, employment insecurity, loss of social interactions and isolation, work intensification and e-presenteeism (Nakrošienė et al., 2019; Adisa et al., 2021). On the contrary, Boell et al. (2016) suggest that findings from prior studies have often yielded contradictory results because WFH is highly contextual and sector-specific, particularly given the varying nature and diversity of

work activities performed, as well as individual preferences regarding the suitability of WFH and organisational attitudes thereof.

Moreover, despite the increasing acceptance of WFH, it presents managers with different challenges for managing a remote workforce, such as sustaining or enhancing remote employees' productivity and well-being, as well as identifying alternative control mechanisms that enable them [managers] to manage workers while working from home to ensure that employees' actions align with the organisation's interests (Groen et al., 2018). Therefore, this study hopes to offer insights that may provide practical guidance regarding how best to solve the current organisational issues of managing from home. Thus, following this introduction, the next section describes the methodology adopted and then presents the findings and discussion. We conclude with some practical implications.

Methodology

To address the research question, a systematic literature review was conducted to identify studies relevant to working and managing from home. Thus, the review emphasises the implications of managing from home and presents some projections for the future of work, workers and organisations. The study was guided by using Hallinger's (2014) conceptual framework for 'reviewing reviews of research'. Hallinger (2014) suggested five key questions to conduct a systematic literature review [see Table 1]. By addressing these questions, it facilitated clarity in setting up the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the relevant literature to be reviewed. We included only full-length peer-reviewed academic articles published in academic journals because they are regarded as sources of valid and high-quality data (Negahdary, 2017). Thus, we concentrated on journals included in the Academic Journal Guide (AJG) – a journal ranking system that lists quality journals broadly within business and management. We excluded non-English language journals.

Table 1: Hallinger's guiding five questions for conducting a systematic review

Hallinger's Questions	Our Approach to the Questions
What are the central topics of interest, guiding questions, and goals?	Our study interests centred on issues associated with managing from home and distance management.
What conceptual perspective guides the review's selection, evaluation, and interpretation of the studies?	The review is guided by identifying and synthesising the empirical studies on managing workers from home, working from home, remote working, leading workers from home, and leading remote workers.
What are the sources and types of data employed in the review?	We searched several databases for peer-reviewed articles and publications on working and managing from home. This led to a review of 26 empirical studies.
What is the nature of the data evaluation and analysis employed in the review?	For an article to be included in our review, it must be an empirical and peer-reviewed study published between 2011 and 2021. It must focus on managing from home as a <u>key</u> variable or subject area. From the evaluation and analysis of the data, we account for unified findings regarding the research phenomenon.
What are the major results of the review?	The review highlights four main themes related to managing from home. These include rapid digital transformation, changing communication behaviour, reorganisation of work and distance management and leadership.

We searched several databases, including EBSCOhost, Emerald, Google Scholar, Science Direct, and ProQuest, using keywords such as managing workers from home, working from home, remote working, leading workers from home, and leading remote workers. Thus, for an article to be included in our review, it must focus on managing from home as a key variable or subject area. We went further to conduct a targeted search for selected peer-reviewed journals, especially those with high impact factors and ranked as high quality (see Table 2). More specifically, the review spans 10 years (from 2011 to 2021) to capture a decade of research on managing or working from home, because we aimed to examine the current trends rather than a dated historical trend of managing or working from home practices and experiences. Within this timeframe, 26 empirical studies related to the topic and inquiry were reviewed, most of which were from the selected peer-reviewed journals (see Table 2). Afterwards, the authors each carefully read the selected articles and coded the variables. This was followed by iterative

analysis of the articles and detailed discussion among the authors to decide on the relevant themes gathered from the common codes.

Table 2: Selected Peer-Reviewed Journals

Journals	Number of Articles	5-year Impact Factor	AJG Ranking
Human Resource Management Review	1	7.497	3
British Journal of Management	2	6.052	4
Journal of Management	1	16.662	4*
Group & Organization Management	2	5.681	3
Leadership Quarterly	2	10.52	4
New Technology, Work and Employment	7	4.852	3
Human Resource Management Journal	2	8.693	4*
Journal of Vocational Behavior	1	6.202	4
Human Relations	2	7.110	4
Journal of Applied Psychology	2	11.605	4*
Human Resource Management	2	4.975	4
European Journal of Information Systems	1	7.143	4
Information Technology & People	1	4.238	3

Results

Based on our systematic literature review, the implications of managing workers while working from home can be categorised into four themes, which we briefly discuss given the nature of this new category of submissions to Group & Organization Management.

Rapid digital transformation

The use of technology and the digitalisation of work is dominant in the WFH literature. The digitalisation of work is not a new agenda, but the debates have been heightened with the increasing acceptance of WFH, leading to rapid digital transformation. Based on our review, all studies acknowledged technology as a key facilitator of WFH, given its role in connecting workers (including managers) irrespective of their locations. Larson & DeChurch (2020) is among the notable studies that discuss the importance of technology while leading home-based

workers based on four perspectives, including technology as a context, sociomaterial, creation medium and teammate. These perspectives align with other studies that have shown that technology helps distance managers to remain fully connected to their employees and reduce dependencies; provides collaborative tools for getting work done; supports managers with working systems to dispense real-time information; improve workflow processes, and enhance decision-making (Groen et al., 2018; Aroles et al., 2019; Nakrošienė et al., 2019). Other interesting studies refer to digital transformation's impact in helping managers promote inclusion and diversity through artificial intelligence, digital aids, and applications adapted to different individuals (Lauring & Jonasson, 2018; Maynard et al., 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2021).

Existing studies have also examined the drawbacks of modern technology. One dominant concern is the use of technology to create insidious forms of control and surveillance and the adverse effect on organisational trust and employment relations. For instance, studies have examined how using GPS systems, biometric technology and other software, enables managers to monitor their subordinates' work activities, productivity and their location, which sometimes invades privacy and leads to mistrust (Collins et al., 2013; Aroles et al., 2019; Hodder, 2020). Moreover, while the future of work is expected to witness more and more innovative software and digital technologies to enhance WFH, managers and their employees are likely to be faced with technostress and other health issues in the effort to acquire new skills needed to learn these new technologies (Waizenegger et al., 2020; Adisa et al., 2021).

Changing communication behaviour

Most studies have found that WFH leads to changes in communication behaviour due to communication mediated by digital technology and the lack of face-to-face interactions (Gilson et al., 2015). Despite the advantages of advanced technology in fostering communication, as previously highlighted, the lack of close physical proximity between managers and their

subordinates poses significant threats for the future of the workplace. For instance, studies reveal that WFH affects managers ability to build rapport and reduces informal communication; it challenges distance managers to develop new forms of interaction for managing organisational socialisation (Golden & Fromen, 2011; Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015). Similarly, there are concerns regarding effective exchanges involving feedback from distance managers to their subordinates in that they are likely to experience less or low-quality feedback (Golden & Fromen, 2011). Moreover, even though improved technology such as advanced video conferencing allows some form of communication cues, there are limitations compared to face-to-face communication, including constraining the spontaneous flow of information, misinterpreting nonverbal cues due to digital or network hitches or absence of body language, especially when virtual participants refuse to switch on cameras (Richardson & McKenna, 2014; Brodsky, 2021). Consequently, the future of work will likely feature persistent changes in communication behaviour; for example, managing workers from home may encourage shorter meetings but more emails, and more effective meetings but less informal conversations (van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2020; Waizenegger et al., 2020).

Reorganisation of work

Based on our review, we found that distance managers are often faced with the reorganisation of work. Moving work away from the traditional office leads to seeking new ways of organising and managing work from home (Fogarty et al., 2011; Langfred & Rockmann, 2016; Aroles et al., 2019). Studies have shown that changes in the workplace are transforming and challenging the way distance managers exercise their authority and control over their subordinates compared to when operating from the traditional office. For instance, Leclercq-Vandelannoitte (2021) asserts an increasing concern regarding the ‘visibility’ of distance managers and how managing from a distance affects their traditional authority and identity both symbolically and

physically. She suggests that to restore their visibility without altering the flexibility associated with WFH, distance managers must present themselves as enablers, re-materialise themselves as controllers, and restore their ability as chiefs, with a certain authority and power to evaluate subordinates' work, performance and engagement, as well as guaranteeing progression. More recent WFH studies are beginning to move away from flexibility and control, and place more emphasis on equity and fair treatment (Fogarty et al., 2011; Collins et al., 2013), especially how managers deal with employees seeking flexible work arrangements. More so, greater emphasis is placed on how managers deal fairly and equitably with their subordinates while working away from the traditional office, and if their [managers] personal experiences of WFH fosters better understanding and produces greater empathy towards subordinates WFH (Golden & Fromen, 2011; Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015).

Moreover, due to the reorganisation of work, studies have examined distance managers' evaluation of subordinates' performance and work effort and suggest that WFH may deter accuracy in gauging and assigning appropriate tasks to subordinates (Golden & Fromen, 2011; Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Consequently, this has led to trust issues between managers and their subordinates. Thus, while subordinates are working harder to demonstrate their trustworthiness and prove to their managers that they are indeed working, distance managers are also striving to trust their subordinates (Collins et al., 2013; Breuer et al., 2019). The future of work might witness an increase in the pressure to maintain trustworthiness and fulfil the psychological contract between distance managers and their employees.

Distance management and leadership

Our literature review revealed that organisations must rethink their leadership styles for managing remote workers and lead through learning and adapting to the new ways of working. The future of work seeks to create opportunities to learn and develop dynamic leadership

capabilities suitable for leading and managing at a distance. We found that most studies that examined leadership when working from home advocate shared and distributed leadership (Muethel et al., 2012; Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). This is because technology is likely to engender more transactional than relational forms of the employment relationship and thus, the need for relational attributes in leadership such as shared and distributed leadership for managing a remote workforce (Avolio et al., 2014; Larson & DeChurch, 2020). With these leadership styles, organisations can deploy strategies for ensuring that individual employees' circumstances and needs are considered where leadership is decentralised, allowing for more people to assume leadership roles and responsibilities in catering to individual needs (Hoch & Dulebohn, 2017). Therefore, the future of work could feature a significant increase in shared and distributed leadership to enhance knowledge sharing, as well as the ability of workers to stay motivated, committed and productive while working from home (Marescaux et al., 2021).

Practical Implications

There are a few suggestions that might be beneficial for distance managers in dealing with working and managing from home. First, considering that trust is an issue associated with WFH and the rising fears of relinquishing control as distance managers, as well as the need to reaffirm managers' visibility, we recommend that managers leverage emergent ground-breaking digital technologies that can help in this regard. For example, some organisations are beginning to use virtual reality (VR) to engage with their employees and customers. Thus, distance managers might want to exploit VR to increase collaborations side-by-side with their subordinates in ways that are not only innovative but also enjoyable. However, this also calls for equipping distance managers and employees with the required collaborative technologies, as well as training them on their usage.

Second, distance managers require leadership styles suitable for managing from home. Therefore, organisations and managers must be open to implementing shared and distributed leadership. Essentially, the implication is that managers must make their subordinates understand the implications of WFH. For instance, employees must be aware that WFH increases their accountability compared to traditional office work. Therefore, implementing shared and distributed leadership increases employees' ability to take ownership not just of their work, but also associated costs of WFH. Nevertheless, it is imperative that managers designate leadership responsibility to those who are willing to accept and technically competent for such responsibilities (Muethel et al., 2012), even if it requires organising training and development programmes in this regard.

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